

# EXPRESSIVISM AND MOORE'S PARADOX

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EXPRESSIVISM is not a view about how we should talk about moral matters.<sup>1</sup> It is a view about how we *do* talk when we so engage. It is the view that we do not use moral talk to represent or, at least, not only to represent; we use moral talk to express affective or conative attitudes. Moreover, this expression of affective or conative attitudes is, in some sense, a primary function of moral talk. Thus construed, expressivism is a hermeneutic as opposed to a revolutionary theory.<sup>2</sup>

Hermeneutic expressivists must say that when we make moral assertions, we thereby express affective or conative attitudes, and that some sort of recognition of this tight connection between moral assertion and expression of affective or conative attitudes is part of being competent with moral language. In what follows, I give some reasons to doubt this. I discuss a principle linking expression in the case of non-moral assertion to expression in the case of moral assertion. I then use this principle to formulate a prediction about the incoherence of a moral analogue of Moore-paradoxical assertions. I argue that this prediction is disconfirmed and that this disconfirmation makes it implausible that recognition of the expression of affective or conative attitudes is part of the competence conditions of moral assertion. Expressivist views which employ a version of this principle are thus incorrect as a hermeneutic account of moral talk.<sup>3</sup>

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1. It is difficult to use some of the more natural vocabulary for thought and judgment when discussing expressivist views since 'thinking' and 'judging' sound rather cognitive. I will occasionally use 'judgment' below, but I mean this to be taken in as neutral a sense as possible, representing the sort of judgment we might also make in matters aesthetic and other domains which might admit of a non-cognitivist treatment.

2. See (Burgess 1983) for the distinction between hermeneutic and revolutionary theories.

3. The prediction extends outside of ethics to expressivist views about, say, logic and epistemic modals. For some cases, such as epistemic modals, it seems that expressivist accounts pass my formulated prediction with flying colors (Yalcin 2007). For simplicity, I focus on moral discourse here. I hope to discuss other forms of expressivism elsewhere.

My argument leaves unscathed strongly revolutionary versions of expressivism which concede that ordinary moral discourse is cognitive and that moral assertions do not primarily function to express conative or affective attitudes, but which demand of ordinary speakers that they stop speaking in this way.<sup>4</sup> Such views are beyond the scope of this paper. I will show that hermeneutic expressivism is problematic, but I cannot show that we cannot adopt linguistic contentions for directly expressing certain of our conative and affective states of mind and drop the rest of moral discourse entirely. We might be able to do this. The important question for revolutionary expressivism is whether we *ought* to do this.<sup>5</sup> I suspect that there are no real advantages to an expressivistic reform over the alternative of directly asserting our states of mind using our existing linguistic resources for doing so, but this debate should take place once a revolutionary expressivist view has been formulated.<sup>6</sup>

Turning to the argument against hermeneutic expressivism, we note that it is generally agreed that there is a tight connection between

4. Of course, hermeneutic expressivists have a choice in exactly how hermeneutic they want to be. The correct account of the meaning of logical expressions, for example, has to account for our actual use of logical expressions. But slight deviance from ordinary usage is not that distressing. We can reasonably give a mostly hermeneutic theory of logical vocabulary while still not accommodating the distressing tendency of ordinary reasoners to not draw conclusions by *modus tollens* (Wason 1960). We're allowed to jettison small portions of our ordinary talk when doing so gives a sensible overall account of the linguistic practice we're engaged in. Expressivists are entitled to adopt this sort of perspective about their accounts of moral discourse. If expressivist views are on the whole more satisfying than cognitivist views as an account of our ordinary moral discourse, then it does not matter so much if some peripheral aspects of ordinary moral discourse are abandoned. However, for expressivism to have any plausibility as a hermeneutic theory, expressivists must be correct that moral discourse is primarily a vehicle for expressing our conative and affective attitudes.

5. And, of course, it is difficult to maintain that we ought to do so when this 'ought' is a moral ought. It would be even more difficult to express that we *ought* to revise all normative discourse. These sorts of worries go beyond the scope of this paper, but see (McCloskey 1969, pp. 155–157) for a nice discussion.

6. Such a view would also have to show how expressivistic reform is superior to more traditional fictionalist and conventional alternatives.

sincere assertion and belief. One reason for this arises from cases of incoherent assertions first noticed by Moore. He observed that assertions of the form '*p*, but I don't believe that *p*' are strikingly incoherent, while assertions of the form '*p*, but she doesn't believe that *p*' are perfectly fine. The proper explanation of this is that when I assert *p*, I somehow commit myself to believing that *p*, but not by *asserting* that I believe that *p*.<sup>7</sup> Because I have committed myself to believing that *p*, when I go on to say 'I don't believe that *p*', I have undercut my immediate prior commitment and left my audience in a muddle as to what I was up to in so asserting.<sup>8</sup> So, when I sincerely assert *p*, I commit myself to, though I do not assert, my belief that *p*. It is this feature that gives rise to the incoherence of an utterance of the form '*p*, but I don't believe that *p*'. The incoherence is a result of my incurring a commitment I explicitly deny I meet.

This connection is important for developing expressivist accounts of moral discourse since if we analyze our assertion of 'Murder is wrong' as giving voice to our disapproval of murder, we invite the charge that expressivism is nothing more than a slicked-up version of the subjectivist view that my assertion of 'Murder is wrong' is the same as an assertion of 'I disapprove of murder.' The proper response to this is that an assertion of 'Murder is wrong' is no more the same as an assertion of 'I disapprove of murder' than an assertion of 'Madison is in Wisconsin' is the same as an assertion of 'I believe that Madison is in Wisconsin'. Rather, just as the assertion of 'Madison is in Wisconsin' is an assertion of 'Madison is in Wisconsin' and *expresses* that I believe that Madison is in Wisconsin, the former assertion is an assertion of

7. The murky bit of this explanation is how we get from asserting *p* to the commitment to believing that *p*. Various stories can be told about this connection, but the details of these do not matter for my purposes.

8. This resulting incoherence is similar to the incoherence that is produced if I were to promise to do something, then immediately declare that I have no intention of honoring my promise. A helpful reviewer suggests 'logically odd' or 'pragmatically self-contradictory' are perhaps better descriptions of the phenomenon. None of these three expressions are perfect, so I will continue to follow tradition and use 'incoherence'. No confusion should result.

'Murder is wrong' and expresses that I disapprove of murder. Russell, in his characteristically clear manner, articulates an early version of this response thus:

The matter may perhaps become clearer by contrasting an ethical sentence with one which makes a statement. If I say 'all Chinese are Buddhists,' I can be refuted by the production of a Chinese Christian or Mohammedan. If I say 'I believe that all Chinese are Buddhists,' I cannot be refuted by any evidence from China, but only by evidence that I do not believe what I say; for what I am asserting is only something about my own state of mind. If, now, a philosopher says 'Beauty is good,' I may interpret him as meaning either 'Would that everybody loved the beautiful' (which corresponds to 'all Chinese are Buddhists') or 'I wish that everybody loved the beautiful' (which corresponds to 'I believe that all Chinese are Buddhists'). The first of these makes no assertion, but expresses a wish; since it affirms nothing, it is logically impossible that there should be evidence for or against it, or for it to possess either truth or falsehood. The second sentence, instead of being merely optative, does make a statement, but it is one about the philosopher's state of mind, and it could only be refuted by evidence that he does not have the wish that he says he has. This second sentence does not belong to ethics, but to psychology or biography. The first sentence, which does belong to ethics, expresses a desire for something, but asserts nothing.

Ethics . . . contains no statements, whether true or false, but consists of desires of a certain general kind, namely such as are concerned with the desires of mankind in general — and of gods, angels, and devils, if they exist. (Russell 1997, 237)

Instead of offering a distinct view of how we get from an assertion of 'Murder is wrong' to disapproval of murder, the expressivist borrows the relation that we already accept obtains between my sincere

assertion of 'Madison is in Wisconsin' and my belief that Madison is in Wisconsin or, as Russell observes, between my sincere optative utterance and my expression of a wish. Following (Schroeder 2008), we will call this the "parity thesis": Moral assertions express non-cognitive attitudes like disapproval in exactly the same way that non-moral assertions express cognitive attitudes like belief.<sup>9</sup>

The parity thesis follows naturally from a general picture of language that often undergirds the expressivist account of moral discourse. On this picture, to understand what it is to assert that *p*, we look at what we *do* by asserting that *p*. When *p* is an ordinary tables-and-chairs proposition like 'My red chair is at the oak table', we describe and in so describing give voice to our way of representing the world — our beliefs. When *p* is a moral proposition like 'Murder is wrong', we do not—by expressivist lights—describe, but prescribe, disapprove, and criticize, and in so prescribing, disapproving, and criticizing, we give voice to our conative and affective states.<sup>10</sup> So, in both moral and non-moral cases, something we always do by sincerely asserting is give voice to our possession of some mental state. It is thus natural on this picture to see the expression relationship in the ordinary-assertion-and-belief case as mirrored in the moral-assertion-and-conative-state case. There are other ways to develop such lines of thought, but all of them share the general feature that, however explained, it is a central part of the expressivist story that sincere moral assertion expresses states like approval or disapproval in exactly the same way as sincere non-moral assertion expresses belief.<sup>11</sup>

9. See (Gibbard 1992, p. 84), (Gibbard 2003, p. 64), and (Blackburn 1984, p. 169) for representative examples of this strategy.

10. The actual development of the expressivist view requires that we allow that what appears to be part of the proposition asserted can have an effect on the attitude expressed since the mere fact that we have sincerely asserted 'Murder is wrong' or 'Murder is right' is not sufficient to nail down the precise attitude expressed. It is only in conjunction with the bit appearing to the right of the copula that we can see that the former expresses disapproval and the latter approval. This issue gets murky very quickly and goes beyond the scope of this paper, so I'm going to bracket it here.

11. A slight asymmetry between moral and non-moral assertion emerges here.

The fact that non-moral assertions express beliefs requires, on this picture, that it is generally—if tacitly—recognized that asserting is something that commits us to believing what we have asserted. This is crucial if we are to explain how Moore-paradoxical assertions provoke judgments of incoherence even in those who have no explicit views about the connection between assertion and belief. This much is relatively uncontroversial. What is more controversial, but nonetheless true, is that if the parity thesis is true, then there is a general—if tacit—recognition of the fact that moral assertions express conative or affective states. Of course, this is not a surprising commitment for an expressivist. Consider Simon Blackburn on the point of making moral assertions:

So what at last is said when we say that something is good or right? Following Moore, we do not expect to identify the content in other terms. We can now say, however, what is *done* when we say such things. We avow a practical state. 'Avowal' here means that we express this state, make it public, or communicate it. We intend coordination with similar avowals or potential avowals from others, and this is the *point* of the communication. When this coordination is achieved, an intended direction is given to our joint practical lives and choices. (Blackburn 1998, 68–69, emphasis mine)

Even without the parity thesis, it is difficult to imagine how this coordination of expressions and avowals could proceed if the expressing or avowing character of moral assertion were not at least tacitly recognized by ordinary moralizers. Since expressivists like Blackburn hold that expression of practical states is what we *do* with moral assertion and that coordination of practical states is the *point* of moral discourse,

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In both the moral and the non-moral case, what I assert is or at least appears to be a proposition. The corresponding attitude for non-moral assertion is a propositional attitude. This is not true of the moral case. Consider an assertion of 'Murder is wrong'. The expressed attitude of disapproval takes as its object the action of murdering, not the proposition that murder is wrong.

they must hold that ordinary moralizers are in some position to recognize that moral assertions express practical states. If not, then there remains no sense in which expressivism is a hermeneutic theory.<sup>12</sup>

The importance of the parity thesis for our purposes is that it allows us to use features of the connection between assertion and belief to test the putative connection between moral assertion and disapproval. If, as the parity thesis has it, the relation of expression is the same in the two cases, we ought to expect that well-known features of the connection between assertion and belief reappear in the connection between moral assertion and disapproval. We have already discussed one such feature above. It is a feature of the connection between assertion and belief that Moore-paradoxical assertions are incoherent. Given the above explanation of the incoherence of Moore-paradoxical utterances and that expressivism is a hermeneutic theory, we can use the parity thesis to formulate a prediction about moral assertions. If, as the parity thesis has it, moral assertions express non-cognitive attitudes like disapproval in exactly the same way that non-moral assertions express cognitive attitudes like belief and if, as the correct explanation of Moore's paradox has it, it is the expression relation that gives rise to cases of Moore's paradox, we should expect moral versions of Moore's paradox. The presence of such cases increases the plausibility of the expressivist's story; the lack of such decreases its plausibility. In what follows, I show that we do not find moral versions of Moore's paradox where we would expect, given the expressivist story about expression.

We have noted that non-moral assertions like 'Grass is green, but I don't believe it' are incoherent.<sup>13</sup> We're interested in seeing if the analogous constructions with moral content display analogous incoherence. Before considering this directly, we will work through a few warm-up cases. First, consider the conventionalized locutions for expressing pro

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12. See objection 7 below for more on the sense of recognition I have in mind.

13. Note also that constructions like 'I believe grass is green, but it ain't' are likewise incoherent. Theorists call the second construction "commissive" as opposed to "omissive" versions of Moore's paradox. I focus on the omissive versions of Moore's paradox in this paper. Nothing turns on this.

or con attitudes at sporting events. We say 'Go Red Sox!' or 'Boo Yankees!' I haven't asserted anything when I utter 'Go Red Sox!', but I have surely given voice to my support of the Red Sox in some fashion. So, let's consider:

- (1) Go Red Sox! I don't support the Red Sox.

This seems incoherent. Likewise, consider:

- (2) Boo Yankees! I don't have any negative attitude towards the Yankees.

or, better:

- (3) Fuck the Yankees! I have no negative attitude towards the Yankees.  
 (4) Yankees suck! I have no negative attitude towards the Yankees.

Likewise incoherent.<sup>14</sup> These examples indicate that we can reproduce cases of the incoherence present in the standard Moore-paradoxical constructions without using sentences in the indicative. Ejaculations like 'Go Red Sox!' are not usually considered assertions, but they give rise to the same incoherence when paired with a denial of possessing the relevant backing attitude of approval. Sincere utterance of 'Go Red Sox!' thus plausibly requires the possession of some degree of enthusiasm and approval for the team. We can also use such expressions to voice our attitudes towards certain courses of action:

- (5) Yay for drinking a lot of beer tonight! I don't approve of drinking a lot of beer tonight.

Just as sincere utterance of 'Go Red Sox!' requires that I, in some sense,

14. Of course, to work, these expressions have to be uttered with a certain amount of oomph. Note that the second sentence in each example indicates the attitudes directly without the emphatic language. This is important because in (7–10) below, the word 'wrong' does not appear after the conjunction.

approve of the Red Sox, sincere utterance of 'Yay for drinking a lot of beer tonight' requires that I approve of that plan of action. Likewise for other non-assertoric utterances. Consider Russell's case from above conjoined with a denial of the wish expressed:

- (6) Would that everyone loved the beautiful, but I don't wish that everyone loved the beautiful.

Incoherent. Now, let's consider our target case:

- (7) Murder is wrong, but I don't disapprove of it.

This does not reproduce the same sort of incoherence at all. Likewise with:

- (8) Murder is wrong, but I'm not against it.

- (9) Murder is wrong, but I'm in favor of doing it.

- (10) Murder is wrong, but I like doing it, and I don't feel bad about it.

Though we wouldn't trust the utterer of (7–10) to watch our children, we do not find their utterances defective in the way we find (1–6) and standard cases of Moore's paradox defective. We know what the utterer of (7–10) is saying; we just do not approve of it.<sup>15</sup> Note, as a bit of contrast, how strongly incoherent the following is:

- (11) Murder is wrong, but I don't believe it is wrong.<sup>16</sup>

15. I do not mean to claim that any of the above, including standard cases of Moore's paradox, cannot be situated in examples that make sense of them. Of course they can. But such cases require significant aberration before they become coherent. Galileo's "*Eppur si muove*" didn't produce incoherence only because we know that his recantation was forced. Likewise, if we know that we're under the influence of some drug, we might say, in wonderment, "The walls are closing in. Of course, I don't (really) believe that they are", but here we're recording how the world seems to us and then slightly backing off our commitment to it being that way in awareness of the influence of the drug.

16. Richard Joyce notes the incoherence of (11) in (Joyce 2009), but does not

Have I clinched my case that we do not find Moore-paradoxical moral assertions? Not exactly. I have only explored one type of moral utterance and that involving only a single moral term. I have also only canvassed the most straightforward attitudes to insert on the right-hand side of the conjunction. However, it is easy to see from my examples how to construct similar cases with other, less central, moral vocabulary and with other, less plausible, accounts of the conative or affective attitude expressed by moral assertions. The cases I have checked also fail to display the incoherence we might reasonably expect. We can formulate the problem for hermeneutic expressivism as the following three jointly-inconsistent claims:

- (C1) Moral assertions express non-cognitive mental states in *exactly the same way* that non-moral assertions express beliefs.
- (C2) When an assertion expresses that the utterer is in a mental state *p*, then (contrastively) conjoining this assertion with the denial of being in *p* yields a certain kind of infelicitous utterance.
- (C3) Moral assertions conjoined with the denial of being in the mental state expressed by such utterances by expressivist lights aren't infelicitous in this way.

We will not fuss about (C2) here since it is a generalized account of the explanation of Moore's paradox for non-moral assertion. Nothing about that explanation requires that the assertion be non-moral. All that is required is that in asserting *p* we commit ourselves to having

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draw the same lesson I do. He instead claims that an example like (7–10) above *is* Moore-paradoxical. However, he uses as the attitude expressed Gibbard's notion of subscription to a normative standard which rules it (murder) out, which is difficult to distinguish in the vernacular from 'believing that murder is wrong'. I thus do not think that the putative incoherence of 'Murder is wrong, but I do not subscribe to a normative standard which rules it out' would be a problem for my argument even if it does sound incoherent. When it seems incoherent, it may be being understood cognitively. See also objection and response 6 below.

some particular attitude towards *p*. The reasonable options for avoiding this problem are thus to reject the parity thesis (C1) or to reject the data (C3). I think the right thing to do is to reject (C1). If the expressivist does this, they're absent the standard response to the charge that expressivism is subjectivism natively attired. They would now need to give some sort of plausible story about the relation between moral assertion and the non-cognitive attitude expressed that also explains the above data without retreating to subjectivism. Most stories that have so far been told are vulnerable to my objection.<sup>17</sup> I thus think rejecting (C1) makes serious, perhaps deadly, worries for expressivism as a hermeneutic program. I will thus ignore it as an option for the expressivist. So my focus in the rest of the paper will be on objections to (C3).

**Objection 1:** Many expressivists and some cognitivists find the examples above to have a whiff of paradox.

**Response:** This is really grist for my mill. Just about everyone finds Moore-paradoxical assertions *strongly* incoherent. This is why it is so plausible that sincere assertions express beliefs. That a few folks find my examples *slightly* paradoxical shows that the incoherence, if there is any, of (7–10), is *at best* different from the incoherence of typical Moore-paradoxical assertions. But, absent an explanation of why this is, and given the parity thesis, the incoherence should be the same. Moreover, there are very plausible ways to explain this whiff of paradox. Theorists should not deny that sincere moral assertions are often accompanied by conative or affective attitudes. Since we often *use* moral language to prescribe, disapprove, and criticize, it is not surprising that a seemingly sincere assertion of this type suggests that we possess various conative states. The connection between sincere moral assertion and possession of various conative

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17. See (Schroeder 2008) for an exploration of these stories and independent arguments against most. On Schroeder's favored approach possession of non-cognitive attitudes play the role of sincerity conditions on moral assertions. His approach is vulnerable to the above objection.

or affective states would then be something like a reasonably strong conversational implicature.<sup>18</sup> Most people who make such assertions have the relevant conative or affective states, but this does not mean that these assertions express these conative or affective states in the sense in which sincere non-moral assertions express beliefs.<sup>19</sup>

An anonymous reviewer helpfully worries that though everyone in the debate can accept that 'Murder is wrong' expresses the belief that murder is wrong in some minimalist sense of belief, nevertheless it might be an informative and surprising fact that sometimes beliefs are really conative states like desires. If so, the coherence of (7–10) for non-expressivists might be explained by the fact that they are not aware of the fact that moral assertions express conative or affective states. Unfortunately, this suggestion is in tension with what the hermeneutic expressivist claims—that the primary function of moral assertions is to express conative or affective states.<sup>20</sup> It is unclear to me how the expressivist could maintain that our moral assertions express conative or affective states and that the purpose of such expression is coordination of these states while denying that ordinary moralizers are

18. Note that it cannot be something analogous to a conventional implicature since (7–10) are coherent in the way that 'Scrooge is rich, but he cares about the impoverished. I don't mean to imply that there's any contrast between being rich and caring about the impoverished' is not. See (Finlay 2005) for a development and defense of a conversational-implicature account of the connection between moral assertion and possession of conative or affective states.

19. An anonymous reviewer worries that my point here conflicts with Mark Schroeder's hypotheticalism about reasons (Schroeder 2007). This is simply a mistake. Hypotheticalism and like views hold that facts about reasons are *explained* by our desires. They do not have to—and should not—hold that assertions such as 'I have decisive reason not to murder' *mean* or *express* that we have certain desires. The fact that getting struck by lightning is typically damaging is explained by the fact that lightning is electrical discharge and various physiological facts about typical human beings. However, it would be madness to hold that 'Getting struck by lightning is typically damaging, but lightning is not electrical discharge' is incoherent. Of course, views which do hold that claims about reasons express desires must face my objection head-on.

20. See objection 6 below for more on the claim that there is a minimalist sense of 'belief' in which moral assertions express beliefs, and objection 7 for discussion of whether or not our beliefs about what is expressed by moral assertions should matter for my examples.

able to recognize that their moral "beliefs" function differently than ordinary beliefs. Minimalists about moral beliefs have typically gone to great lengths to argue that we are, in fact, capable of recognizing the distinction between moral and non-moral beliefs. If it is merely those with a research interest in expressivism who find examples like (7–10) problematic, then it seems to me that the burden is clearly on the expressivist to explain how we ordinary moralizers can be taken to be engaging in a public practice of communicating our affective or conative states, that the purpose of such a practice is coordination, but that this practice cannot be indicated to an ordinary moralizer by the use of quite general expressions for what is expressed, such as 'being against', 'disapprove', and 'being in favor'.<sup>21</sup> Note also that in cases such as (1-6) we were able to produce incoherence by describing the state not possessed in similarly general language. It would be a surprising fact demanding explanation if hermeneutic expressivism were true but we couldn't elicit similar judgments of incoherence in this way.

**Objection 2:** The relative felicity of the examples above is due to an inverted-commas use of 'wrong'. When so used, 'Murder is wrong' means something like 'Murder is wrong (by the moral standards of the prevailing society)'.

**Response:** This suggestion is implausible for many reasons. The most obvious reason is that such an aberrant interpretation of the meaning of 'Murder is wrong' is implausible without conditions suggesting such an interpretation. Our examples have no such accompanying conditions. Of course, the objector might think that it is the mere availability of an inverted-commas reading that renders

21. This objection and response raises the specter of the moral-attitudes problem for expressivism (Sturgeon 1986). Since this is a further objection to the hermeneutic expressivist program, I will not discuss it here other than to note that the more difficult it is to recognize the relevant conative and affective attitudes, the more implausible it is that we can be taken to be engaged in a public practice of coordination of such attitudes.

the examples coherent. However, this would be a mistake. Inverted comma readings are often indicated by stress, but the above examples do not require stress to be felicitous. Further, the mere existence of an inverted comma reading of a sentence is not sufficient for the coherence of such examples. Predicates of personal taste, for example, clearly have an inverted-commas reading, but 'Broccoli is delicious, but I don't like it' is still strikingly incoherent without some indication that such a reading is intended. So inverted-commas readings aren't sufficient to defuse the incoherence of similar Moore-paradoxical utterances. Finally, if the mere availability of an inverted commas reading sufficed, then standard cases of Moore's paradox would sound coherent. But they do not.

**Objection 3:** The felicity of such examples is due to our perception of the utterers as slightly irrational; they violate a condition of rationality that requires that we are somewhat motivated by our moral judgments.

**Response:** Judgment internalism—the view that sincere judgment that something is wrong motivates us insofar as we are rational—is common in metaethics, especially among expressivists.<sup>22</sup> However, though it may be true that we see sincere utterers of (7–10) as at least slightly irrational, this is irrelevant to the argument. If the agent is perceived as being weak-willed or irrational and makes the moral assertion 'Murder is wrong', we take them to likely be unmotivated by the attitude they typically possess, not to fail to possess the relevant attitude. If, as the expressivists have it, moral assertion is to be understood in terms of the expression of a conative or affective attitude, then we must hold that even the irrational or weak-willed agent who asserts a moral proposition expresses that attitude. Actually, this helps to explain the "whiff" of paradox some feel when confronted with

22. Note that the strong version of judgment internalism—that judging something is wrong motivates, regardless of whether or not we are rational—is directly threatened by my argument. So much the worse for strong judgment internalism.

the examples. If judgment internalism is true, someone who sincerely uttered (7–10) would be irrational. And it is odd to be confronted with someone so flagrantly displaying their irrationality. So the examples are strange for that reason, but they are not strange in the same way that (11) is. The seemingly sincere utterer of (11) displays linguistic incompetence rather than mere irrationality.

This objection also seems to get a typical motivation for judgment internalism back to front. One standard reason for accepting expressivism involves believing that there is some reliable connection between moral judgment and motivation. If the primary function of our use of moral terminology is to express such attitudes, then the seeming fact that our moral judgments often co-travel with inclination is to be expected. Expressivists like Gibbard hold that the best explanation of judgment internalism is that moral assertions express conative or affective attitudes and these attitudes are directly tied into our motivational systems. However, we can't then explain away the coherence of the above examples by appeal to judgment internalism since this was to be explained by the putative incoherence of holding that murder is wrong without disapproving of it. In any case, judgment internalism cuts across the cognitivist/non-cognitivist divide.<sup>23</sup>

**Objection 4:** The felicity of such examples is due to our not expressing a first-order conative or affective state. Sometimes our moral judgments express higher-order conative or affective states.

**Response:** A moment's consideration reveals the reason this does not work. There's nothing incoherent about 'Murder is wrong, but I don't disapprove of it, and I don't disapprove of my failure to disapprove of it.'

23. See (Smith 1994) for a cognitivist account of moral discourse on which the judgment-internalist thesis is true.



**Objection 5:** We could distinguish between cold and impersonal moral judgments issued in the course of theorizing and heated moral judgments issued in the course of criticizing others' actions or guiding our own. We could then say that it is only in the former sort of case where the examples above are felicitous. In heated contexts, such utterances are straightforwardly bizarre.

**Response:** This is not really a rejection of (C<sub>3</sub>), but a rejection of (C<sub>1</sub>), since it admits that it is not always the case that affective or conative attitudes are expressed by moral assertions. If non-cognitive mental states are only sometimes expressed by moral assertions, then the claim that what we're really up to with our moral talk is expressing our attitudes towards various actions, persons, and such has to be seriously tempered. In addition, we need an explanation of when such attitudes are expressed and when they are not. It is implausible to think that such an explanation will not go by way of some account of the meaning of moral terms like 'wrong'. For example, my disapproving of murder might be conveyed as a type of implicature of my assertion that 'Murder is wrong'. This strikes me as the correct account of how asserting that murder is wrong triggers the reasonable expectation that I disapprove of murder. Since uses of terms like 'wrong' do not always yield expression of various affective or conative attitudes, it is unlikely that such attitudes will play a serious role in the account of their meaning.

**Objection 6:** There are two sorts of beliefs: small-b beliefs which are the mental correlate of all assertions and big-B Beliefs which are representational states with mind-to-world direction of fit. Our assertions express beliefs, but on this view, some beliefs are actually conative or affective states.<sup>24</sup>

24. Thanks to Hannah Altehenger and Tristram McPherson for pushing me to address this point.

**Response:** Minimalism about belief is a popular commitment of many contemporary expressivists—especially those also claiming quasi-realism.<sup>25</sup> But, even if we grant this point, all this shows is that the incoherence of (11) does not give us reason to accept Cognitivism, but only cognitivism, where the latter is the view that moral judgments are small-b beliefs. It also doesn't show that my examples should be coherent; far from it. Gibbard, Blackburn, and even the cognitive expressivists Horgan and Timmons accept that there is a sense in which we can divide up minimal beliefs into, say, "ordinary" beliefs and "normative" beliefs. Since expressivism requires that we be able to publicly communicate the normative beliefs we express by making moral assertions, there has to be a way that we recognize this attitude other than in its role as a special type of small-b belief.<sup>26</sup> Given this, we should expect that when we plug in *other* names of the attitude — say, 'disapproval' — we get incoherence. But we do not. We may worry whether we have a name for this subclass of small-b beliefs, but if the expression of these beliefs really is the central part of the story of moral assertion, we would expect there to be a common name for this sort of state. And, for every extant plausible expressivist story, there is.

**Objection 7:** People fail to judge examples like (7–10) as infelicitous because they do not know that expressivism is the correct account of

25. See (Gibbard 2003), (Blackburn 1984), and especially (Horgan and Timmons 2006a) for discussion. Each distinguishes a natural subclass of beliefs expressed by moral assertions like Gibbard's plan-laden beliefs. See (Dreier 2004) for the plausible claim that rampant minimalism threatens to undermine the distinctiveness of the expressivist program and (Dunaway 2010) for serious worries about whether minimalism is a coherent addition to the expressivist program.

26. Note that we also cannot simply analyze a non-cognitive attitude like disapproval of  $\phi$ -ing in terms of the believing that  $\phi$ -ing is wrong and then go on to say that what it is to have a normative belief is to possess an attitude of disapproval. This would be flatly circular. Any expressivist view worthy of the name needs to hold that states like disapproval are specifiable independently of the notion of belief. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting this point.

our moral discourse.<sup>27</sup>

**Response:** This is a surprisingly common objection. While it is true that the relation between belief and non-moral assertion is more widely acknowledged than the purported relation between moral assertion and attitudes like disapproval, it is not at all clear why this should matter. Judgments of felicity and infelicity of various utterances are supposed to reveal underlying facts about our linguistic competence. We take ordinary speakers' judgments about what is communicated to be informative about what is pragmatically implicated by various utterances even though they are largely unaware of the mechanisms by which pragmatic implication works. Explicit knowledge—that of how various linguistic mechanisms like assertion work is simply not needed for competent usage.

In any case, if some modicum of knowledge were required, it is not clear that ordinary people lack it. Ordinary people are as aware that moral assertions are commonly used to condemn and give vent to attitudes as they are that non-moral assertions about mid-sized dry goods are used to describe and represent. However, they get the infelicity with the ordinary cases of Moore's paradox and fail to get it with cases like (7–10). If the connection between asserting 'Murder is wrong' and giving vent to an attitude of disapproval were the same as the connection between asserting 'Weebles wobble' and expressing belief in the wobbling of Weebles, we would expect no such disparity in the reactions. Yet we find disparity. Committed expressivists (including a former version of myself) also have disparate reactions, but they surely believe that moral assertions express various non-cognitive attitudes like disapproval. This is difficult to explain if the parity thesis is true since there is no such disparity in the case of belief and assertion.

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<sup>27</sup>. Thanks to Barry Maguire and Cory Nichols for convincing me to take this objection seriously.

**Objection 8:** There's a single attitude (belief) expressed by non-moral assertion, but a diffuse set of attitudes expressed by a moral assertion (disapproval, moralized disgust, regret, etc). (7–10) are not incoherent because we're able to find readings where the attitude expressed is not the same as the attitude denied.

**Response:** Most of the cases given above used very generic language for the attitudes involved. If we run the ordinary version of Moore's paradox with an expression for a more generic attitude (say, 'think') we continue to get incoherence. Since disapproval and being against encompass a number of possible negative affective and conative attitudes just like thinking encompasses a number of cognitive attitudes, we should expect incoherence with 'disapprove' and 'being against' just like we find incoherence with 'think'. We do not find such incoherence. This objection also conflicts with a desideratum of a successful expressivist account of moral discourse. A successful expressivist account should give a compositional account of the attitudes expressed by moral assertions. The more diverse the attitudes expressed by moral assertions, the weaker the prospects for a straightforward compositional account of the attitudes expressed.

**Objection 9:** Hybrid expressivist views can explain the coherence of the above examples by allowing that the cognitive state expressed is not undercut when we deny possessing the relevant conative or affective attitude.

**Response:** The plausibility of this objection depends on the type of hybrid expressivism under consideration. If the correctness conditions of moral assertion in any way depend on the expression of some other conative or affective attitude, then the coherence of the above examples is problematic. If they do not, then it is hard to see how these theories are truly expressivist accounts since it is not part of the competence conditions of moral assertion that it expresses conative or affective attitudes. Moreover, we cannot coherently undercut the cognitive state expressed, leaving the conative or

affective untouched. Cognitivist accounts, of course, can and plausibly should accommodate the fact that moral assertions often give strong evidence that the asserter possesses some conative or affective attitude.

I have argued that the parity thesis generates the prediction that moral assertions like 'Murder is wrong, but I don't disapprove of it' are incoherent. I then argued that such examples are not incoherent, whereas assertions like 'Murder is wrong, but I don't believe murder is wrong' are incoherent. There are two lessons here: one major, one minor. The minor one was briefly mentioned above, but it is worth noting again. The incoherence of (11) coupled with the above explanation of Moore-paradoxicality shows that expression of belief needs to be involved in some way in an account of moral assertion.<sup>28</sup> The major lesson is that the expressivist cannot simply borrow the expression relation as it holds between assertion and belief to explain the expression relation as it holds (if it does) between non-cognitive attitudes like disapproval and moral assertion. Since assertions like (7–10) are not incoherent, expressivists have to reject the parity thesis (C1) and provide an independent account of the relation between sincere assertions like 'Murder is wrong' and whatever non-cognitive attitude they believe is expressed thereby without routing through a realist account of the meaning of moral terms like 'wrong'. Given the ubiquity of the parity thesis in expressivist accounts, it seems unlikely that such an account will be forthcoming. And if there is no such account, hermeneutic expressivism is simply incorrect.<sup>29</sup>

28. This lesson is minor only in the context of this paper—that is, in the context of an argument that hermeneutic expressivist views which employ a version of the parity thesis are incorrect. As a lesson for any hermeneutic view of moral assertion, it is quite important. It shows that belief, in some sense, needs to be accounted for by a theory of moral assertion. Of course, a minimalist account of belief would be sufficient for this purpose.

29. Thanks are due to Hannah Altehenger, Paul Benacerraf, John Burgess, Shane Gronholz, Errol Lord, Barry Maguire, Corey Maley, Jimmy Martin, Tristram McPherson, Angela Mendelovici, Cory Nichols, Giulia Pravato, Peter Railton, Michael Smith, a couple of very helpful referees, and audiences at the Princeton Workshop in Normative Philosophy, the Rocky Mountain Philoso-

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