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## REALIST-EXPRESSIVISM: A NEGLECTED OPTION FOR MORAL REALISM\*

BY DAVID COPP

### I. INTRODUCTION

*Moral realism* and *antirealist-expressivism* are of course incompatible positions. They disagree fundamentally about the nature of moral states of mind, the existence of moral states of affairs and properties, and the nature and role of moral discourse. The central realist view is that a person who has or expresses a moral thought is thereby in, or thereby expresses, a *cognitive* state of mind; she has or expresses a *belief* that represents a moral state of affairs in a way that might be accurate or inaccurate. The view of antirealist-expressivism is that such a person is in, or expresses, a *conative* state of mind, one that consists in a certain kind of attitude or motivational stance toward something, such as an action or a person. Realism holds that moral thoughts have truth conditions and that in some cases these truth conditions are satisfied so that our moral thoughts are true.<sup>1</sup> Antirealist-expressivism holds, to a first approximation, that the distinctive moral content of a moral thought does not have truth conditions.

Given these contrasts between realism and antirealist-expressivism, the view I shall propose in this essay might seem surprising, for it combines moral realism with a chief positive doctrine of moral expressivism. I call the view *realist-expressivism*. It holds that our moral beliefs and judgments represent moral states of affairs and can be accurate or inaccurate to these states of affairs, which is the central realist thesis, but it *also* holds that, in making moral assertions, we express certain characteristic conative attitudes or motivational stances, which is a central positive view of expressivism.

The possibility of a view that combines realism with expressivism in this way has not been widely noticed, despite its many theoretical advantages. One explanation for this is presumably that expressivism is characteristically antirealist, so the idea of combining realism and expressivism might seem untenable. A second explanation is that the differences between realist-expressivism and certain familiar, but distinct, realist and

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<sup>1</sup> Compare Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, "The Many Moral Realisms," in Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, ed., *Essays on Moral Realism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 5.

antirealist views are rather subtle. Because of this, it can be easy to confuse realist-expressivism with other views that are quite different. There are at least two possible sources of such confusion. On the one hand, realist-expressivism might be confused with a realist version of a standard kind of *internalism*, which is a doctrine or family of doctrines that I will discuss shortly. But it is not a kind of internalism. On the other hand, realist-expressivism might be confused with a position that combines antirealist-expressivism with *deflationism* about the meaning of “true,” where deflationism is another doctrine or family of doctrines that I will discuss shortly. But realist-expressivism is not any kind of antirealism; it is fully realist, and it does not presuppose deflationism. Let me try to clarify both of these areas of potential confusion here; I will return to them at the end of the essay, after I have developed my own version of realist-expressivism.

First, it is important not to confuse realist-expressivism with familiar versions of internalism. In the sense I have in mind, internalism is the doctrine that a person who believes or judges that she ought to perform some action must be motivated to some degree to do so.<sup>2</sup> The internalist idea is that there is a necessary connection, or an internal logical connection—even if it is a defeasible one—between the state of accepting a relevant moral claim and being motivated to act or respond appropriately. Internalism can be combined with moral realism, and the resulting view could be described in terms similar to those I used to describe realist-expressivism. That is, an internalist moral realism could be described as the view that, first, our moral beliefs represent moral states of affairs and can be accurate or inaccurate to these states of affairs, and second, our moral beliefs entail certain characteristic conative motivational states. Realist-expressivism, however, is not committed to the second half of this view.<sup>3</sup> The expressivism in realist-expressivism is basically the thesis that, in making a moral *assertion*, we typically *express* certain characteristic conative psychological states or motivational stances. This is a thesis about the *pragmatics* of moral assertion, a thesis that, I will argue, is explained in central cases by the *semantics* of moral terms.<sup>4</sup> It is

<sup>2</sup> Stephen Darwall calls this doctrine “judgment internalism” to distinguish it from other internalist doctrines. See Stephen Darwall, *Impartial Reason* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983), 54–55. Philosophers sometimes propose weakened versions of internalism by specifying that, for instance, any *rational* person who believed she ought to do something would be relevantly motivated. For an example of this sort of account, see Michael Smith, *The Moral Problem* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 61.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, it is committed to the first half. One subtlety that I need to ignore in this essay is that typical versions of antirealist-expressivism are committed to the second half of the view. Of course, no version is committed to the first (realist) half. Typical forms of antirealist-expressivism are internalist, but realist-expressivism is not (or need not be).

<sup>4</sup> The precise location of the line between semantics and pragmatics is controversial. The basic idea, however, is that semantics is concerned with the literal meanings of terms, expressions, sentences, and the like, insofar as their meanings can be determined independently of the contexts in which they are used. Pragmatics is concerned with properties of

not a thesis about the intrinsic nature of moral belief or thought; it does not imply that the state of accepting a moral judgment *consists* in part in a motivational state, or that it *entails* the existence of a motivational state. Hence, realist-expressivism is entirely compatible with *externalism*, which is the denial of internalism. Even so, as I will explain, it can do justice to many of the intuitions that fuel internalism.

Second, it is important not to confuse realist-expressivism with a sophisticated combination of antirealism and a deflationist account of the meaning of “true.” An example of deflationism is the doctrine that to call a sentence “true” is simply to affirm it. This doctrine would permit an antirealist-expressivist to affirm, consistently with his antirealism, that, for example, it is true that capital punishment is wrong. For, according to the deflationist view, to affirm this is simply to affirm that capital punishment is wrong, which obviously is something that an antirealist-expressivist can do. In addition to this deflationist account of “true,” there are also deflationist accounts of the meanings of the terms “property” and “belief.” Simon Blackburn has used the central ideas of deflationism to stake out a position he calls “quasi-realism,” a position that he intends to be antirealist and expressivist.<sup>5</sup> Deflationism permits Blackburn to combine antirealist-expressivism with the thesis that there are indeed moral “truths,” moral “properties,” and moral “beliefs.”<sup>6</sup> Given that Blackburn’s is an antirealist view, my own thesis that we can combine expressivism with the idea that there are moral “truths,” moral “properties,” and moral “beliefs” might also be viewed as antirealist. But even though realist-expressivism does justice to the expressive characteristics of moral

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expressions and the like that are determined by their use, or by the contexts in which they are used. For example, the fact that the sentence “I promise to meet you” *can* be used to make a promise is a feature of its semantics. However, the question of whether a person *has* made a promise in uttering the sentence in a given context is a question in pragmatics. General questions about what a context must be like in order for a person to make a promise in uttering the sentence, and questions about what is required in order to use the sentence sincerely to make a promise, are also questions in pragmatics. I am grateful to Steven Davis for help with this distinction.

<sup>5</sup> See Simon Blackburn, “How to Be an Ethical Antirealist,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 12 (1988): 361–75. All subsequent references to this essay are to the version reprinted in Stephen Darwall, Allan Gibbard, and Peter Railton, eds., *Moral Discourse and Practice: Some Philosophical Approaches* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 167–78. See also Simon Blackburn, *Essays in Quasi-Realism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993). Allan Gibbard exhibits a temptation toward quasi-realism as well; see Allan Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990). For more on Gibbard’s views, see Paul Horwich, “Gibbard’s Theory of Norms,” *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 22, no. 1 (1993): 61–78.

<sup>6</sup> A deflationist about the term “property” might hold that to say there is a property of rightness is simply to affirm that some things are right. A deflationist about “belief” might hold that to say that a person believes that some things are right is simply to say that the person is disposed to affirm sentences to the effect that some things are right. On views of this kind, an antirealist-expressivist obviously can affirm, consistently, that there is a property of moral rightness and that there are beliefs about the rightness of actions; to affirm these claims would simply be to affirm that some things are right and that some people are disposed to affirm sentences to the effect that some actions are right.

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discourse, it is fully realist. Any version of moral realism could, in principle, be incorporated into a version of realist-expressivism. Realist-expressivism can be as realist as one would like.

Given the existence of deflationist positions of the kind I have described, however, the distinction between realism and antirealist-expressivism can seem to disappear. Realism holds that moral thoughts have truth conditions, but an antirealist-expressivist who is also a deflationist about “true” would concede that moral claims have truth conditions. It is trivial that, for example, “Capital punishment is wrong” is true just under the condition that capital punishment is wrong. The distinction between moral realism and antirealist-expressivism is subtle, but it is crucial to our understanding of the cognitive status of moral discourse. The best way to characterize the distinction, I think, is in terms of a difference between the semantics of moral predicates and the semantics of familiar garden-variety descriptive predicates, and in terms of a difference between the metaphysics of the “properties” referred to by predicates of these kinds.

Put in these terms, moral realism holds that moral predicates have the same basic semantic characteristics as at least some typical nonmoral “descriptive” predicates. Let us say, for convenience, that the central semantic role of the latter is to “refer” to “properties,” but let us do so without committing ourselves to any particular metaphysical account either of reference or of the nature of properties. Given this manner of speaking, we say that the predicate “perennial” refers to the property of being a perennial. Similarly, moral realism holds, moral predicates, such as “wrong,” refer to moral “properties,” such as wrongness. In the first place, then, moral realism holds that the chief semantic role of the moral predicates is to refer to moral properties, such as rightness, wrongness, virtuousness, viciousness, and so on. Second, it holds that these properties have the same basic metaphysical status as ordinary nonmoral properties, whatever that is. Simply for convenience, let me speak of properties that have this status as metaphysically “robust.”<sup>7</sup> Third, moral realism

<sup>7</sup> As noted in the text, the problem I am addressing is how to distinguish between moral realism and antirealist-expressivism, given a deflationist account of the meaning of “true.” Hartry Field has proposed that the distinction is best drawn in terms of the idea of an “objectively correct” norm. See Hartry Field, “Disquotational Truth and Factually Defective Discourse,” *Philosophical Review* 103, no. 3 (1994): 440–41. I am proposing that the distinction can be drawn in terms of the semantic role of ordinary nonmoral predicates and the idea of a “robust property,” which is in turn explained in terms of the metaphysical status of the referents of ordinary predicate terms. The issues raised by questions about this metaphysical status go beyond the scope of this essay. The vagueness in what I am proposing is due in part to the fact that, as Michael Devitt has stressed, a formulation of the debate between moral realism and antirealist-expressivism ought to be independent of general metaphysical issues about the nature of properties. Among other things, such a formulation ought to allow for a nominalist understanding of talk of “properties,” even though a nominalist would deny that there are any “properties” at all under some understandings of what this would mean. This is why I speak above of “the metaphysical status of the referents of

holds that “basic” moral propositions are true, just as ordinary descriptive propositions are true, when the relevant things have the relevant properties; it adds that some basic moral propositions are in fact true.<sup>8</sup> Realist-expressivism accepts all three of these core realist claims.

Antirealist-expressivism, however, denies the first two of these claims. Deflationism would allow an antirealist-expressivist to agree that there are moral properties and that moral predicates refer to moral properties. It would also allow her to agree both that basic moral propositions are true when the relevant things have the relevant properties and that some basic moral propositions are true. However, an antirealist-expressivist would deny that the moral properties referred to by the so-called “thin” moral predicates, such as “wrong” and “good,” are robust. That is, she would deny that moral properties have the same metaphysical status as ordinary nonmoral properties, such as the property of being a perennial. She would also deny that reference to moral properties is the chief semantic role of the moral predicates. Under antirealist-expressivism, the distinctive aspect of the meaning of moral predicates, the aspect that distinguishes *moral* predicates from other kinds of predicates, is not that they refer to a special kind of property. Their chief and distinctive semantic role, at least in their paradigmatic use in making moral judgments, is, instead, to express certain characteristic emotive or conative states of mind, such as “prescribing,” “commending,” or “expressing acceptance of a norm.” On such an account, a person who says that something is “wrong” does not primarily assert that the action in question has the property of wrongness; instead, she expresses disapproval of the action, or some other attitude toward it. Hence, according to antirealist-expressivism, the semantics of these moral predicates is quite unlike the semantics of nonmoral descriptive predicates.

To be sure, there are “thick” moral predicates, such as “honest” and “kind,” and an antirealist-expressivist would concede that these predicates refer to properties that are robust in the way that ordinary nonmoral properties are robust. She would insist, however, that this is because the properties they refer to *are* ordinary nonmoral properties—psychological properties, for example—not moral properties. Hence, she might hold that “honest” refers to a disposition to assert only what one takes to be true. Even in the case of thick moral predicates, however, she would argue that the characteristic semantic role of such predicates, at least in

ordinary predicate terms,” and it is why, in the text, I speak of the “semantic role” of such predicate terms. I am attempting to be neutral among various accounts of these matters. See Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 2d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 302–20, esp. 316–18.

<sup>8</sup> A “basic” moral proposition is a proposition that entails, for some moral property M, that something instantiates M. An example is the proposition that capital punishment is wrong. Among nonbasic moral propositions are propositions such as that nothing is morally wrong and that either abortion is wrong or  $2 + 2 = 4$ .

their paradigmatic use in making moral judgments, is to express a characteristic conative or motivational state of mind.

Antirealist-expressivists disagree about the details, of course. Nevertheless, it can be seen that antirealist-expressivism combines a negative thesis to the effect that there are no robust moral properties, and that the chief semantic role of the moral predicates is not to refer to properties, with a positive thesis to the effect that the characteristic semantic role of moral predicates is to express a distinctive conative or motivational state of mind. The negative thesis conflicts with realism, but the positive thesis is logically independent of this negative thesis. There is, therefore, room for a kind of expressivist moral realism. As a version of moral realism, this view would hold that moral predicates refer to moral properties that are metaphysically akin to ordinary nonmoral properties. As a version of expressivism, the view would hold that at least one of the semantic roles of moral predicates in their paradigmatic uses is to express a certain characteristic conative or motivational state of mind.

The availability of this sort of view is perhaps obvious, once stated. The difficulty is to develop the specifics in a plausible way. If we can do this, we can defuse many of the familiar arguments for antirealist forms of expressivism. It should already be obvious that an argument for the positive thesis of expressivism is not an argument for the negative antirealist thesis. As I will explain, realist-expressivism aims to do justice to many of the intuitions that fuel the familiar arguments for antirealist-expressivism. For example, realist-expressivism captures the intuition that to call capital punishment “wrong” is to express disapproval of it, a disapproval that does not consist simply in believing that capital punishment is wrong. Yet realist-expressivism is entirely compatible with the realist thesis that the wrongness of capital punishment would consist simply in capital punishment’s having the robust property of wrongness. Once both of these things are understood, I think it will be clear that realist-expressivism is a genuinely interesting view. It can be accepted by moral realists even though it captures intuitions that can seem to ground antirealism.

In order fully to develop a version of realist-expressivism, one must develop both the realist side of it and the expressivist side. There are two chief issues on the expressivist side. First, what kind of conative or motivational state of mind is expressed in making a moral judgment? In principle, any answer to this question that is given by an antirealist-expressivist can also be given by a realist-expressivist. In the next section of this essay, I briefly discuss the views of a number of prominent antirealist-expressivists. The view that I propose later in the essay, near the end of Section VI, is similar to Allan Gibbard’s, according to which, as I will explain, the relevant state of mind is a state of norm acceptance. In Sections III through V of the essay, I focus on the second chief issue: in what sense are the relevant conative or motivational states of mind “expressed”? It turns out that answering this question leads to surprising

complexities. In Section VI, I propose the form of realist-expressivism that I think is most plausible, developing both the realist and the expressivist sides of the view. I specify what kind of conative state of mind is, I think, expressed in making a moral judgment. In Section VII, I provide arguments for my proposal, at least for the expressivist side of it. In Section VIII, I briefly return to the task of exhibiting the differences between realist-expressivism and both internalist moral realism, on the one hand, and the combination of deflationism with antirealist-expressivism, on the other hand. I want to stress that my main task in this essay is simply to propose a plausible formulation of realist-expressivism and to illustrate its theoretical advantages. The arguments for realist-expressivism are not conclusive, but I believe it is a position that deserves attention.

## II. SOME EXPRESSIVIST DOCTRINES

In order to discuss these issues, it will be useful to adopt a uniform terminology. I will use the expression “moral judgment” to refer to the kind of speech-act we perform in making a moral claim.<sup>9</sup> Making a moral judgment consists in uttering a sentence with a relevant meaning with relevant intentions in a relevant context. I will use the expression “moral thought” to refer to the state of mind expressed by a person in making a moral judgment, leaving open whether such thoughts are, or involve, beliefs. For example, a person typically would be making a moral judgment in telling a man that he morally ought not to steal. But we do not need to use moral terms, such as “wrong” and “virtuous,” in order to make moral judgments. I might intend to make a moral judgment, and might succeed in doing so, if I say “I would have thought twice before X-ing!” In saying this, I might succeed in expressing the thought that it was wrong to X, even though the sentence I use obviously does not mean that it was wrong to X. This example shows that a distinction needs to be drawn between what a *sentence* (literally) means or implies and what a *person* means or implies in using a sentence. In speaking of the “meaning” of *sentences*, I will talk of their “content.” I will use the term “proposition” in speaking of contents that have a truth value. When the content of a sentence is (or includes) a proposition, the sentence would standardly be said to “express” the proposition, but this way of talking would invite confusion since I will be talking of assertions as “expressing” states of mind, which is a different matter. To avoid confusion, then, when the content of a sentence is (or includes) a proposition, I will say that the

<sup>9</sup> The classic sources of speech-act theory are J. L. Austin, *How to Do Things with Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); and John Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969). For helpful discussion, see Kent Bach and Robert M. Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1979); and Steven Davis, *Philosophy and Language* (Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1976), 16–27.

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sentence “states” the proposition. I will also speak of imperatival sentences as “stating” imperatives or commands.

Typically, when a person uses a declarative sentence with a relevant intention in a relevant context, she expresses a “belief” that takes a proposition as its object. For example, if I say that stealing is widespread, then in most contexts I would express the belief that stealing is widespread. In such cases, I will say that one makes “assertions.” An assertion, then, is the use of a declarative sentence to express a belief. Since I am leaving it open whether moral thoughts are or involve beliefs, I am also leaving it open whether to make a moral judgment is to “assert” something in this technical sense.

An antirealist-expressivist can agree that some moral thoughts consist, in part, in a belief. For example, the thought that Bill Clinton is honest includes a belief attributing the property of honesty to Bill Clinton. According to the negative thesis of antirealist-expressivism, however, there are no robust moral properties. For the antirealist-expressivist, then, the property of honesty is not a robust *moral* property, and moral thoughts do not involve accepting propositions in which robust *moral* properties are attributed to things. As discussed in Section I, the positive thesis of antirealist-expressivism specifies what expressivists take to be distinctive about moral thoughts; their idea is that moral thoughts consist, at least in part, in a certain characteristic kind of conative or motivational state of mind. The positive thesis also specifies that the chief semantic role of moral predicates, in their paradigmatic use, is to express such a state. The history of expressivism contains a number of proposals about the nature of this state of mind; most notable are the proposals of Charles Stevenson, A. J. Ayer, R. M. Hare, Blackburn, and Gibbard.<sup>10</sup>

Stevenson, Ayer, and Hare accept the positive thesis of expressivism as I stated it. For Stevenson and Ayer, to make a moral judgment is at least in part to express a conative attitude. For Hare, to make a moral judgment is at least in part to state a command; it is to commend something, or to prescribe or enjoin the doing of something. In my terminology, all three would agree that some state of mind other than belief is involved in having a moral thought. For Stevenson and Ayer, to have a moral thought is at least in part to have a certain moral attitude. For Hare, it is to assent to or subscribe to a relevant universal command, which is in part to have an appropriate intention.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Charles Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms,” *Mind* 46, no. 181 (1937): 14–37 (all subsequent references to this essay are to the version reprinted in Darwall, Gibbard, and Railton, eds., *Moral Discourse and Practice*, 71–82); A. J. Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 2d ed. (New York: Dover Publications, 1952), 108; R. M. Hare, *The Language of Morals* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), 1–5; Blackburn, “How to Be an Ethical Antirealist”; Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*.

<sup>11</sup> Stevenson, “The Emotive Meaning of Ethical Terms,” 74, 78, 79; Ayer, *Language, Truth, and Logic*, 108; Hare, *The Language of Morals*, 4, 13, 20, 168–72.



Contemporary expressivists have proposed similar doctrines. Blackburn proposes, for instance, that “the fundamental state of mind of one who has an ethical commitment” is best conceived as a “stance” rather than a belief because of the connection of ethical commitments with reaction, action, and choice, rather than information. To be sure, we do speak of “moral beliefs,” but, given his deflationism, Blackburn holds that this and other features of what he calls “the important surface phenomena of ethics” are compatible with expressivism.<sup>12</sup> Gibbard proposes that to call something rational is not to attribute a property to it, but rather to express a certain state of mind, the state of “thinking something rational.”<sup>13</sup> He then holds that to think something rational is, roughly, to accept norms that permit it, where a “norm” is a content that is “expressible by an imperative.”<sup>14</sup> To “accept” a norm in the relevant sense is to have a distinctive complex of attitudes and dispositions toward the norm and the actions it calls for. Norm acceptance is thus a kind of “motivational state.” Gibbard then explains moral states of mind in terms of norm acceptance. Hence, he says, to think an act wrong is, roughly, “to accept norms for guilt and resentment that, *prima facie*, would sanction guilt and resentment if the act were performed.”<sup>15</sup>

Realist-expressivism accepts the key positive thesis shared by these philosophers. It agrees that, for any basic moral thought that *M*, there is a conative or motivational state *C-M*, a state of some kind similar to a desire, such that a person making the judgment that *M* “expresses” the state *C-M*. It holds, however, that a person who makes a moral judgment *M* expresses *both* the moral belief that *M* *and* a corresponding state *C-M*. Realist-expressivism combines the chief doctrines of moral realism with a central positive view of expressivism. As noted above, both the realist and expressivist sides of it need to be explained, as well as the relation between them. In the next section, I begin to explain the expressivist half of the view: in what sense of “express” could it be that to make a moral judgment is to express a conative state of mind?

### III. EXPRESSION, SINCERITY, AND THE PRAGMATICS OF ASSERTION

The term “express” can be used to pick out several different relations between utterances and states of mind. For example, there are causal relations of the kind that obtains between a sneer and the contempt that

<sup>12</sup> Blackburn, “How to Be an Ethical Antirealist,” 168–69.

<sup>13</sup> Gibbard, *Wise Choices, Apt Feelings*, 8.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 46, 70. On norm acceptance, see *ibid.*, 55–57.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 47. Gibbard ultimately says that normative “beliefs” are “much like any other beliefs” (*ibid.*, 100). In his fully developed view, the state of thinking an action rational is more complex than that of accepting norms that permit it. It consists, roughly, in *ruling out* all combinations of a normative system with a possible state of the world which are such that the normative system would prohibit the action in the given state of the world.

it expresses. Perhaps the making of a moral judgment that M could be caused in a similar way by the corresponding state C-M. However, the expressivist thesis in realist-expressivism is not simply a causal thesis. It claims that there is a *linguistically* significant relation between moral assertions and relevant conative states of mind, a relation that depends in some essential way on the fact that moral assertions are speech-acts that have moral content.

Even if we restrict attention to relations of this kind, there are more than one candidate. First, there is the relation between the assertion that *p* and the belief that *p*. The assertion “expresses” the belief, and one might propose that a person making a moral assertion that M expresses the corresponding state C-M in exactly the sense of “express” as that in which she expresses the belief that M. Second, there is the relation, which I think is weaker, that obtains generally between speech-acts and their sincerity conditions. This is the sense in which promises “express” intentions and apologies “express” regret. A promise is not sincere unless the promisor intends to carry through, and an apology is not sincere unless accompanied by regret.<sup>16</sup> One might propose, then, that moral assertions express relevant conative states of mind in this sense of “express”; put more formally, the idea of this proposal is that the sincerity of a person making a moral judgment M depends on her being in a corresponding state C-M. I think that neither of these proposals would be adequate by itself, for even if either were true, its truth would need to be explained. If either were true, we would want to find something deeper that would explain its being true.

<sup>16</sup> Similarly, if I assert something, my sincerity depends on my believing what I say. Moore’s paradox reveals that more than just this is involved in the relation between assertion and belief. To see this, consider the Moore-paradoxical sentence, “There is a smokestack in Bowling Green, but I do not believe there is a smokestack in Bowling Green.” If I utter this sentence, my sincerity in saying that there is a smokestack in Bowling Green depends on my believing that there is a smokestack in Bowling Green, which I then say I do not believe. Hence, I undermine my own sincerity. But, more than this, in uttering the Moore-paradoxical sentence, I do not succeed in asserting that there is a smokestack in Bowling Green, because asserting something involves a kind of commitment to belief that I reject in the last half of the utterance. Indeed, it is not clear, other things being equal, what speech-act I perform in uttering this sentence. Compare this case with that of promising. If I promise that *p*, my sincerity depends on my intending that *p*, so it would be odd to say, “I promise to build a smokestack in Bowling Green, but I have no intention of building one.” In saying this, I would undermine the sincerity of my own promise. Despite this, however, I might succeed in promising, for I might obligate myself to build a smokestack even though what I say implies that my promise is insincere. Hence, it seems, the assertion that *p* involves a commitment to believing that *p* that *cannot* be canceled without undermining the assertion. In contrast, although the promise that *p* involves a kind of commitment to intending that *p*, it appears that this commitment *can* be canceled without undermining the promise, even though canceling it does undermine the *sincerity* of the promise. See Paul Grice, *Studies in the Ways of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 42. Kent Bach and Robert Harnish provide an account of assertion that elegantly explains why it is that a person who says that *p*, and then adds that he does not believe that *p*, would fail thereby to assert that *p*. See Bach and Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts*, 15–16.