

EXPRESSION, INDICATION AND SHOWING WHAT'S WITHIN

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1. INTRODUCTION

The philosophical world is indebted to Wayne Davis for a number of reasons. First of all, we are indebted to his trenchant and insightful criticism of research making uncritical appeal to Grice's theory of implicature (1998; see Saul 2001, and Green 2002 for discussion). Second, we are indebted to the challenge he has formulated over the last decade to the most commonly espoused versions of Grice's account of speaker meaning: Anyone who still thinks that speaker-meaning requires an intention to produce a belief (or other cognitive state) in an audience by means, at least in part, of their recognition of that intention, needs to read Davis 1992a, b, or the book that is the subject of the current symposium. Finally, we are indebted to Davis for his rehabilitation, in his 2003 and then developed further in his 2004, of the Lockean theory that the meaning of a word may be understood in terms of its job of expressing a thought or a part of a thought. Davis' development of this idea is systematic, painstaking, and innovative; it is not about to be refuted by boiler-plated objections that one may raise to traditional ideational theories of meaning, and it revitalizes a philosophical option that has captured imaginations for centuries.

In what follows I shall try to repay a very small part of our debt by offering a constructive criticism of Part I of Davis' large 2003 study. After a brief exposition, in Section 2, of the main points of the theory that will concern us, I raise a challenge in Section 3 for the characterization of

expression that is so central to his program. I argue first of all that an expression of a thought, feeling, or mood *shows* it. Attention to this fact reveals that it does not go without saying that we can show such things as thoughts, feelings or moods; we need an account of how this is possible, and I offer one in Section 4. Davis' program depends on the claim that it is possible to express one's ideas in the absence of conventions, but I argue in Section 5 that the foregoing account of showing raises grave doubts about whether it is possible to do this.

2. DAVIS' ACCOUNT OF EXPRESSION

At the heart of his enterprise is the phenomenon of expression, and Davis devotes the early chapters of his book to its elucidation. To that end he distinguishes among what he describes as three different senses of the word 'express'—what he terms evidential, word, and speaker senses (43).

According to the putative *evidential* sense of that word, an observable event or state of affairs that is evidence for a mental event or state also expresses that event or state: my scowl is evidence for, and expresses, my anger. According to the *word* sense of 'express', under certain conditions a word expresses an idea: 'red' expresses the idea of red. According to the *speaker* sense of 'express,' a person's doing something under certain conditions expresses a mental event or state: My beckoning gesture expresses my desire that you come nearer. I shall not pause over the question whether 'express' is ambiguous or polysemous—like Bar-On (2003: 216), I doubt that it is semantically ambiguous; however, it is enough for Davis' purposes that the word have some significantly different uses, including the above three.

Connected with the evidential sense of 'express', Davis will use the notion of indication. He remarks that an indication of an event is evidence that it has occurred, but may not even be strong enough evidence to render that event probable (45-6):

“A indicates B” says roughly that there is a causal or statistical relation between A and B in virtue of which A would give a suitably placed observer a reason to expect B. (47)

On this usage, then, the microscopic fiber discovered at the crime scene indicates that George is the culprit if his pants contain fibers of that sort, even if thousands of other people have fibers in their pants just like that one, and even if George is not in fact the culprit.

In motivating his positive account of expression, Davis observes that indicating one’s state of mind, even in the course of an intentional action, is not sufficient for expressing it. My purchasing insurance indicates that I believe that driving is risky, but I do not express my belief in the perils of driving by purchasing insurance (47). What is instead needed is that I perform an act with the (or an) intention of indicating that belief—something I might do in the present case if we have lately been quibbling over whether auto insurance is really worth the money. (I now dramatically walk over to the insurance booth, produce my wallet, all the while staring at you significantly...)

Even intentionally producing an indication of my state of mind is not sufficient for expression of that state: According to Davis, if I simulate an unintentional expression of a state of mind—for instance in a practical joke—then I do not express that state:

Suppose John and Mary are trying to fool George. Mary pretends that she has been stricken with pain. John rushes over with a great show of concern, deliberately providing an indication that he believes Mary is in pain. While it is correct to say that John *conveyed the idea* that Mary is in pain, he did not express the belief that she is. He neither meant nor implied that Mary is in pain. (54; italics in original)

Davis' reasoning presupposes that meaning-or-implying is a necessary condition for speaker expression. His later remarks also suggest that on his view, speaker expression requires that the relevant communicative intentions be overt—or at least not covert. That is precisely untrue of John, one of whose intentions is covert. One might still hesitate over Davis' claim that John does not even imply that he thinks Mary is in pain; he does after all act *as if* he thinks so. However, if we remember that Davis is taking speaker expression to be a species of speaker meaning (including implicature), which itself must be overt, we can appreciate the force of his point.

What is expressed must also be occurrent (57). A belief's being occurrent requires that one be thinking the thought that is its content. Likewise for other states or heart or mind: Occurrent anger requires that one be feeling angry, and so forth. In addition, a state of oneself is expressible only if it is also introspectible: that is perhaps why, in spite of its being a state of ourselves, we cannot express our cholesterol level in the speaker-expression sense of 'express'. Nor, indeed, can I express a belief or other mental item under a "mode of presentation" unavailable to me. In light of these constraints, Davis arrives at the following elucidation of speaker-expression. Where Ψ is an introspectibly applicable concept:

S expresses Ψ iff S performs an observable act as an indication of occurrent Ψ without thereby covertly simulating an unintentional indication of Ψ . (59)

I take Davis as construing indication as a concept available to commonsense rather than as a technical one. For this reason, when we say of S that she expresses Ψ , the above definition will imply that S intends that an observable act of hers be capable of giving someone reason to conclude that she is in occurrent state Ψ . I know how to wiggle my ears. I happen also to be thinking that

the Horsehead Nebula is beautiful. No doubt, wiggling my ears increases the probability that I am thinking that the Horsehead Nebula is beautiful. After all, wiggling my ears shows that I am conscious, or at least awake, and I'd have to be awake to think about that Nebula. However, even if I do wiggle my ears for the purpose of indicating my nebular belief, wiggling them does not express that belief. This is not because speaker expression requires that what is expressed be genuine: Davis rightly leaves room for the possibility of insincere speaker-expression (45). Rather, it is because speaker expression requires more than indicating as Davis construes that notion: It requires showing, or doing something apt to show, what's within with the aid of something designed (consciously or not) for the purpose.

3. SHOWING WHAT'S WITHIN

To see why this is so, let's return to Davis' evidential sense of 'expression'. Davis' imputation of that sense mirrors that of Sellars 1969. However, it is simply untrue that evidence, on my face or elsewhere, for the presence of an intentional state expresses that state in any sense or use of 'express'. My increased adrenalin flow and galvanic skin response are evidence of my fear; yet they do not express fear. Why is this, particularly as they may be *more* reliable indicators of fear than what happens on my face? To begin to see why, compare these five cases

- a. My increased adrenalin flow showing my fear
- b. My blushing showing my embarrassment
- c. My tears showing my grief
- d. My scowl showing my rage
- e. My intentional and overt scowl showing my rage

All these cases involve showing, but it is only as we move from (a) to (e) that we start to find it natural to speak of expression as well. Surely (a) is not a case of expression. Further, blushing, while it shows embarrassment, seems less naturally described as expressing embarrassment than tears may be described as expressing grief. Yet both are involuntary, and both are fairly reliable indicators of affective states. I suggest that the reason we hear a difference in these two cases is that it seems more natural to think of tears as having been designed to show emotion than it is to think of blushing as having been designed to indicate embarrassment. The most plausible designer in both these cases would of course be evolution by natural selection. Blushing may in fact have been selected for its ability to indicate embarrassment, but I am suggesting that at least our intuitive thinking about blushing does not suppose this. By contrast, our intuitive thinking about weeping does (rightly or wrongly) construe it as having been designed for its ability to show grief. We take it as uncontroversial that scowling is a behavior designed to show rage, and that is why it is natural to see (d) as a case of expression. Finally, (e) oozes with expressiveness, and the reason is that both the conscious agent and natural selection conspire to show his rage.

Folk beliefs are notoriously fallible, and such beliefs about what was designed for what purpose are no exception. Those beliefs that I am appealing to here need not, however, be correct to vouchsafe my point. Instead, I am pointing out a pattern: To the extent that we take an item (behavior, artifact, etc.) as expressive, rather than just as indicative, of a state of affairs, to that extent we also take it as having been designed (consciously or not) for the purpose of showing that state of affairs. Accordingly we can take an item of behavior to be expressive without having any idea of evolution by natural selection. For all that has been said thus far, the designer might be an intelligent, sentient agent, an “intelligent” non-sentient agent (like natural selection), or a more-or-less intelligent corporate entity (like artificial selection).

Expression belies a design, conscious or not, to show something within, and that design must be on the whole successful. More precisely, a behavior that expresses a psychological state of an agent will have been designed, at least in part, for the purpose of showing that state; and that behavior must be the *kind* of thing capable of showing that state. That's why my galvanic skin response doesn't express my fear even if it is a highly reliable indicator of that fear: It shows fear, but there's no reason to think that doing so is one of its functions. On the other hand, the reason the ear-wiggle doesn't express my nebular belief is that in spite of being designed (by me) to do so, it doesn't show that belief. (Matters might be different if we had a convention according to which an ear wiggle means that one believes the Horsehead Nebula is beautiful--more on this in a moment.) To do that it must be more than an indicator in Davis' sense. Rather, at the very least it needs to be a reliable indicator of what it shows.¹

The difference between showing and indicating is one of degree. While the ear-wiggle indicates (in Davis's sense) the nebular thought, it does not show it. That suggests that there must be some sufficiently reliable connection between what does the showing and what it shows. Blushing, being hard to fake, is a reliable if imperfect indicator of embarrassment, and this is why it is natural to speak of blushing as showing embarrassment. (In a clique of actors who can blush at will, it is considerably less natural to speak this way.) We hesitate over intermediate cases in just the way you'd expect: It is not natural to think of my yawn as showing my boredom, since it might just as easily have been caused by exhaustion. Likewise, if the difference between showing and

¹ This reasoning respects Davis's observation that expressing belief does not require manifesting it. I can only manifest a belief that I have, whereas for Davis I can express, when insincere, beliefs that I lack (45). 'Show' is a success verb in just the way that 'manifest' is, yet a behavior can be designed to show something without being invariably paired with what it is designed to show. Further, I do not require that all expression involves showing what's within. Rather I require that the expressive act be of a *kind* that reliably indicates what's within. Given that most of us cannot produce tears at will, tears show grief when caused in the right way by grief; however, even when not caused, or not caused in the right way, by grief, they are still the kind of thing that reliably indicates what's within. (This would not be so in a community of thespians who can produce tears at will.)

indicating is a matter of degree, that suggests that there will be cases of indication in which it is unclear whether they are also cases of expression. Yawning is a case in point.

4. THREE WAYS OF SHOWING SOMETHING

Let us clarify this notion of showing. It comes in at least three forms. First of all, I might show my courage by acting bravely. My brave behavior is good evidence of my courage. Or I might, by means of extensive calculations, show *that* there is a black hole in the center of the Milky Way. In these cases I don't make what I show perceptible; I certainly couldn't make the black hole perceptible, and it is not clear what it could mean to perceive courage. Rather, in these cases I provide compelling evidence for a conclusion that could be grasped even by someone with no capacity for vision. A grammatical tag for this category is *showing-that*. Because my brave behavior (calculations, etc.) is good evidence of my courage (the existence of the black hole, etc.), an appropriately situated thinker aware of that evidence is in a position to know of my courage (of the black hole, etc.). Showing-that thus enables propositional knowledge.

Secondly, I might show something in such a way as to make it perceptible. I show my bruise, and thereby enable others to see that bruise. Although it is most natural to speak of showing in visual terms, showing is not limited to vision: One can show someone a rough texture (you'd need to feel the texture) or a coyote's howl (you'd have to hear it). What I show you in this sense depends on your perceptual capacities and your position in the environment. If you had electroreception like a hammerhead shark, I could show you the electrical activity in the body of a fish hiding under the sand. In that case you'd not only perceive the fish, you'd "electroreceive" it. Likewise, even if there are a few mice in the field, I don't show you them from an airplane passing two hundred yards above the field. On the other hand if you have the visual acuity of a hawk, I

might well do so. Let us put this perceptual-knowledge enabling form of showing under the rubric of *showing- α* , where ' α ' is a singular term referring to a perceptible object or affair.

Finally, I might also *show how* something looks, feels, sounds, etc. Apply friction to a scratch-and-sniff picture of a skunk. You won't thereby smell any skunk, but if your nose is functioning properly, you will learn how skunks smell. By accurately painting Mary's profile you will show how Mary looks in profile—what she looks like from that angle--thereby enabling me to know how Mary's profile looks. I can then manifest this knowledge by reliably discriminating the Mary-like profiles from the rest. Similarly, the trepidation in my voice might enable you to know how my anxiety feels if you are sufficiently empathetic. If you are sufficiently empathetic, then hearing my voice may enable you to imagine feeling my trepidation. If you can do that, then you know how I feel. Showing-how can provide qualitative knowledge for those with appropriate sensory capacities. It can also enable empathy for those with the capacity for empathy. The above three forms of showing we may label showing-that, showing- α , and showing-how. They enable propositional knowledge, perceptual knowledge, and either experiential knowledge or empathy, respectively.

One thread that unites the above cases is justification: evidence, either from the senses or other forms of knowledge, enables those who are shown the things mentioned above, and who are in the right circumstances (being empathetic, being in the right perceptual location, possessed of the right background knowledge, etc.) to know some fact, some object of perception, or how some emotion, mood or experience feels. Accordingly, one way in which we express ourselves is by providing knowledge-enabling evidence of what is within. When I make an assertion that it is raining, I don't state that I believe that it's raining. I do nevertheless express that belief so long as I am sincere. Given what we have established so far, this also means that I do something designed to show that belief, and (so long as I am sincere) in fact show it by providing sufficient evidence for it.

When I am not sincere, I provide good evidence for a belief that I lack.

Many cases of self-expression employ more than one of the above three ways of showing at once. Remember this passage from Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* in which Hester Prynne first emerges from prison?

Those who had before known her, and had expected to behold her dimmed and obscured by a disastrous cloud, were astonished, and even startled, to perceive how her beauty shone out, and made a halo of the misfortune and ignominy in which she was enveloped. It may be true, that, to a sensitive observer, there was something exquisitely painful in it. Her attire, which, indeed, she had wrought for the occasion, in prison, and had modeled much after her own fancy, seemed to express the attitude of her spirit, the desperate recklessness of her mood, by its wild and picturesque peculiarity.²

Hawthorne construes the wild and picturesque peculiarity of Prynne's attire as expressing her desperate recklessness. It does not do so by making her recklessness perceptible. Instead, I suspect that it does so by a combination of showing-that and showing-how. Prynne's clothing shows her recklessness in part by being evidence of it: Given the gravity of the occasion of her emerging from prison, her dressing this way is a reliable indication of a reckless mood. In addition, her attire enables others to know how her mood feels: They can see, and thereby feel, her desperate recklessness in that attire, and that is why the spectacle is exquisitely painful to the sensitive observer. Showing-that, showing- α , and showing-how, are often intermingled in complex ways, yet

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*, ed. with Introduction by B. Harding (Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 53.

to understand the varieties of expressive behavior we do well to know how to disentangle them.³

5. EXPRESSION AND SHOWING

Expression requires showing, which in turn comes in showing-that, showing- α , and showing-how forms. Davis' definition, in depending on the notion of indication rather than showing, is too weak as a criterion for expression. To achieve an account of expression Davis will need to revise that definition so that it requires that what is expressed be shown—or at least that something occur with the expressing agent that is of a *sort* that shows what is expressed. Let us suppose that he does. He then faces a new challenge. For it is certainly possible to show some introspectible states: A sincere assertion shows my belief in the evidential sense, and my overt and heartfelt scowl shows my anger. What is questionable is whether I can show my ideas in the way or ways that Davis' position, thus refined, would require. Consider this analogy. As Crispin Wright has pointed out, a theory—such as one finds in certain positions concerning privileged access—that implies that we can express such aspects of ourselves as our experiences immediately raises questions. What could it mean to express a smell of vanilla or a sensation of coolness in one's foot? (1998: 37). While I would not go so far as to deny that such experiences can be given physical manifestation, it is no small question what that manifestation could possibly be.

Likewise, what could it mean to show one's ideas, in the way that Davis would need for his general approach to word meaning? Ideas are not perceptible, and ideas do not *in general* have a qualitative character (though of course some do). Davis is at pains to deny that my idea of a horse is to be identified with any image or congeries thereof (35). Accordingly, given the above tripartition of showing into three forms, it looks as if, at least for many of our ideas, we can only show them by

³ These themes are pursued at greater length in Green forthcoming a and forthcoming b.

providing reliable indications of their occurrence in us. Davis, however, gives us no guidance as to how we might do that. On his view we can express our ideas either by conventional or non-conventional means, and it is a large part of Davis' enterprise to show how conventional word meaning arises out of patterns of behavior in which we (non-conventionally) express our ideas. However, absent an account of how an idea can be expressed in non-conventional ways, it is hard to see how any meaning-convention could possibly get off the ground. Davis tells us how word meaning flows from conventions in such analyses as the following: Where e is an expression, μ_i is a word expressing an idea i ,

e means μ_i iff it is conventional for people to use e to directly express idea or other mental state i . (193)

Davis takes a convention to be an arbitrary, self-perpetuating social practice or custom (206). The custom is a regularity in behavior that does not itself require a convention. The needed regularity would be something like this:

People to use e to directly express idea or other mental state i .

That is, on Davis' approach there must be a non-conventional way for people directly to express their ideas. However, he gives us no guidance as to how one might show an idea in the absence of a convention. Are ideas even the *kinds* of things that can be thus shown? In lieu of an answer it will remain unclear how his definition of expression may be refined to overcome the problem that I have raised for it: If he is to relate, as he must, the notion of expression to that of showing, it will

then be incumbent on him to explain how we can show our ideas; if he depends upon the weaker notion of indication, it will no longer be possible to found a theory of linguistic meaning on that of speaker expression.

This is not for a moment to deny that a bit of behavior can be imbued with a conventional capacity to express something within. In parts of the Mediterranean, for example, using a finger to pull down one's lower eyelid is an expression of suspicion. In Tibet, sticking out one's tongue at someone is a conventional expression of humility. In parts of North America, sticking one's finger into one's widely opened mouth is a conventional expression of disgust (as in, "gag me with a spoon!"). Davis' account of convention suggests that he would hold that these facts presuppose that it be possible to show one's humility, suspicion or disgust non-conventionally. And so it is. Disgust, for instance, has characteristic behavioral manifestations such as expulsion of objects from the facial cavities, including retching. We even have good empirical evidence that when displayed non-conventionally, disgust's characteristic behavioral manifestations are for the most part pan-cultural. Disgust can be shown either conventionally or non-conventionally, and the latter is possible because disgust has characteristic behavioral manifestations.

What, by contrast, might be the characteristic behavioral manifestations of my idea of a horse, particularly if we do not presuppose any conventions for expressing this idea? Neither that idea nor its occurrence in my thought have characteristic behavioral manifestations in the absence of conventions. This problem is especially acute because according to what he terms his Neo-Gricean analysis of word meaning, Davis focuses on what he calls "cogitative" rather than "cognitive" states. Whereas a cognitive state involves a commitment, and is exemplified by belief and desire, a cogitative mental state can be had just by entertaining an idea, thought, or proposition in the absence of any belief or desire whose content that idea, thought, or proposition might be.

Accordingly, while a horse-belief (a belief whose content refers, *inter alia*, to things equine) might, in conjunction with other beliefs and desires, have characteristic behavioral manifestations, it is very difficult to see how a horse-thought could. Without an answer to this question, however, it is difficult to see how the wheels of Davis' large and fascinating project begin to turn.

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