

Book Review

Self-Expression, by Mitchell S. Green. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. Pp. viii + 223. £40.00.

I was surprised to read the claim in this book to be ‘the first book-length study of expression since Tormey 1971’ (p. 4), as expression is such an important notion in several areas of philosophy. This book then shoulders quite a burden, which I am happy to say it discharges admirably. The book consists of seven chapters, some of which carry on the central account, others of which take us off to explore a by-way of expression.

The question of why the book is called *Self-Expression*, rather than *Expression* is answered in the first chapter. One can express emotions that are not one’s own (as an artist might by constructing a piece that expresses a melancholy he does not feel), while self-expression is a matter of expressing one’s own emotions. Green situates his own account within four other models of communication, two familiar (the code model and the inferential model) and two less familiar (what he calls the extended senses model and the signalling model). Much of what follows in the book is prefigured in this chapter.

Chapter two eschews systematic a priori theorizing, and instead takes the approach of studying twenty dicta on self-expression, using ten different scenarios in which self-expression might be evident. This ends with a ‘characterisation of self-expression’: ‘Where A is an agent and B is a cognitive, affective or experiential state of a sort to which A can have introspective access, A expresses her B if and only if A is in a state B, and some action of behaviour of A’s both shows and signals her B’. Amongst the many things to note in this chapter are the breadth of states that can be expressed (not only our emotions, but including our beliefs and our perceptions), and also that we *show* our inner states. This turns out to be one of the most complicated and most interesting parts of the book.

Chapter three begins by delineating three sorts of showing: showing that something, showing something (that is, making it perceptually available), and showing how something looks, feels, sounds, and so on. What links these three is, first, that they all make available an item of knowledge, and second, that this knowledge is made available by design. Accounting for this takes Green into an extended discussion of speaker meaning in terms of ‘overtly showing an object, fact or one’s commitment — including both the modality

and content of that commitment' (p. 82). Crucial to this is the idea (taken from the evolutionary biology of communication) of *signalling*: we are able to show our belief by the fact that our speech acts incur liabilities, and our willingness to incur liabilities 'give[s] strong evidence that the assertion is both sincere and justified' (p. 73).

Chapter four looks at those instances of self-expression that are also speaker meanings (which are done or allowed with an intention of overtly manifesting what is within) and those that are not also speaker meanings (behaviours which as a matter of fact manifest what is within, but which are not performed with the intention of doing so) (p. 110). As part of this discussion, Green argues for the claim that emotions are, in some cases, literally perceptible. The argument moves in three steps. The first is to note the naturalness of locutions that claim we are capable of experiencing the feelings, experiences, and moods of others. The second is to argue that we can rightly be said to perceive something when we have only perceived a part of it (I can see the apple on my desk without it being the case that I see every square inch of the skin of the apple). The third is to evoke Ekman's 'basic emotions', one characteristic of which is that they have characteristic perceptual signatures. The claim is that we can explain the linguistic data (the first step) by claiming that (for the right sort of organism in the right sort of environment) perceiving the characteristic perceptual signature for an emotion is sufficient to count as perceiving that emotion. Green rightly points out that this is compatible with the possibility of emotions containing components that are not perceptible. Although it is good to have this spelled out in detail, I am not sure the proposal is as radical as Green takes it to be. Something like it seems present in the later Wittgenstein (who, oddly, who gets only one mention — as an historical figure — in the whole book). Furthermore, it does not seem to me to throw much light on the debate between theory-theorists and simulationists (it would not be denied by at least some members of the latter camp)

The claim that we can see emotions in faces is given some necessary underpinning in chapter five which explores the mechanism underlying facial expression. Green considers three views (which exist in complex relation to each other): Darwin's view, the neuro-cultural view, and the behavioural ecology view. He argues (convincingly, to my mind) that the best elements of each of these can be combined in a way that supports, and hence gives further support to, his overall view. This he calls 'the strategic readout view' (pp. 132–6).

The final two chapters take us on a slightly different turn: away from the natural and towards the cultural expression of emotion (as much self-expression is). Conventionalized self-expression shows what is within in a way that depends on the existence of a system of conventions relating internal states to publically accessible tokens (p. 151). Such conventions are a regularity in behaviour, are arbitrary (in the sense that they could have been

otherwise), and the behaviour is normative (p. 144). Such a convention-bound token cannot (obviously) make an inner state perceptible, but it can show an inner state in the same way as the numeral on a speedometer shows a vehicle's speed. The final part of this chapter delves into technical linguistics (Green advises that those not interested in such things should skip it): it is a case study of the parenthetical construction, a conventionalized means of self-expression in English.

The final chapter focuses on the third and final means of self-expression: showing how some aspect of our experience feels (which incorporates an account of expressive qualities in art). There is much that is in this chapter, the most interesting being a development of Ernst Gombrich's observation that, of an arbitrary pair of objects, there is surprising agreement as to which, in a two-term language, would be called 'ping' and which 'pong'. Green proposes that various aspects of our experience including, on the one hand, sensory qualities and, on the other, our emotions and moods, can be described along a number of dimensions, including 'intense/mild, pleasant/unpleasant, and dynamic/static' (p. 179). Sensory qualities and emotions and moods have roughly congruent three dimensional structures. We can exploit this congruence by presenting (for example,) a sensory quality *S* with the intention of showing how an emotion feels (p. 185). I cannot help feeling that Green is onto something here, although I am not quite sure which question his account is designed to answer. One question might be 'What is it to experience music as expressive?' where what is called for is an enlightening description of our experience of certain pieces of music. Another might be 'What is it about the music that explains our experience of music as expressive?' where what is called upon is some kind of psychological account. Green's focus is on the latter question (see particularly, p. 205), although he sometimes sees his account as a rival to (or rather, an expansion of) answers to the former.

This is a dense book, the discussion in which sits on the intersection of many interesting debates in the philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, ethics, aesthetics, and more. There is much in it of great interest, and much that could be picked up and challenged or developed further. It may well be yet another forty years before something of similar stature on this subject is written.

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