Wittgenstein on "I believe"

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Abstract. The paper deals with an apparent tension in Wittgenstein's Philosophical Investigations*: Wittgenstein holds an expressivist position with regard to avowals, but also claims that the* doxastic *avowal "I believe that p" is a "hesitant assertion" of p. It is argued that the tension is apparent only and that Wittgenstein's expressivism in fact justifies and explains his views on "I believe": Avowals typically are* explicit expressives *and usually implicate (in the Gricean sense) the corresponding illocutionary acts. The hesitant assertion of p is the result of an implicature of the explicit expressive "I believe that p". The paper also addresses the ambiguity of avowals and the possibility of thereby undermining the Frege–Geach objection to psychological expressivism.*

Keywords: Wittgenstein, psychological expressivism, doxastic avowals, Moore's paradox, Frege-Geach problem

In a famous passage from *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein observes that doxastic avowals are not self-reports, as their surface grammar would suggest, but hedged assertions of the embedded proposition itself:[1] while "*He* believes that *p*" and "I believ*ed* that *p*" are reports about another person's present doxastic state and the speaker's past one, respectively, their grammatical

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[1] In my use of the word, *avowals* are first-person present-tense indicative active ascriptions of psychological states. The term is therefore neutral with regard to the linguistic classification and the analysis of the respective utterances. In particular, it does not prejudge that avowals are explicit expressives in the sense explained below. *Doxastic* avowals are self-ascriptions of doxastic states, i.e., states of belief and their ilk.

synthesis "*I* believ*e* that *p*" is *not* a report about any person at all, but a "hesitant assertion" of *p* itself (1953, part II x, 190–192[2]). The matrix clause "I believe that" does not contribute to the propositional content of the speech act, but appears only to weaken antecedent assertoric force.

Many subsequent thinkers accept the view that self-ascriptions of belief are weakened assertions of the propositions embedded, but there is as yet no systematic account of the phenomenon.[3] Wittgenstein himself does not provide anything close to a satisfactory explanation, at least not obviously so. On the contrary, his description in the mentioned passage, made in response to Moore's paradox, seems to be in conflict with his general expressivist outlook, according to which avowals, self-ascriptions of mental states, are not illocutionary acts at all, but *expressions* of the psychological states they describe. If his psychological expressivism extends to doxastic avowals – and there is no plausible reason why it shouldn't – then "I believe that *p*" is the expression of belief, and not a report at all.

My aim in this paper is to provide a systematic explanation of Wittgenstein's view on doxastic avowals which shows, first, that it is essentially correct, and, second, that it is not at odds with, but a consequence of, his psychological expressivism: affirmatively uttering "I believe that *p*" *is* to express the belief that *p* and *therefore* to make a hedged assertion of the embedded proposition *p*. Where there appears to be a conflict in Wittgenstein's position, there is in fact an intimate explanatory relation. In the course of my argument I will draw on a close parallel between avowals and explicit performatives, utterances like "I request that …" and "I assert that …", and thus frame Wittgenstein's expressivism in the wider context of speech act theory. Note therefore that, although I consider myself to be drawing a picture which incorporates many of Wittgenstein's sketches, I am aiming not so much at an exegesis of his writings, but rather at a systematic reconstruction of his views.

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[2] See also Wittgenstein 1980a, §§471–478; 1980b, §§279–283.
[3] See, for example, Urmson 1952, 483–484; Benveniste 1974, 228; Giorgi and Pianesi 2005, 112; Krifka 2014, 81–82.

Section 1 starts with some general remarks on the relation between illocutionary and expressive acts, and then differentiates between *explicit* and *non-explicit* expressives, in parallel to the well-known distinction between explicit and non-explicit illocutions (usually referred to as explicit and non-explicit "performatives"). Avowals are then classified as explicit expressives: they manifest the psychological state referred to in the utterance. For example, "I intend to come" is the articulation of an intention, and "I wish that you close the window" the expression of a wish. It will also be suggested that an explicit expressive implicates, in the Gricean sense, the corresponding illocutionary act, which then explains both the presence and the weakening of illocutionary force. Section 2 transfers those findings to the specific case of doxastic avowals: "I believe that *p*" is the *expression* of the belief that *p*, not its description. Its illocutionary role will then be explained as an implicature of the explicit expressive act, resulting in the fact that doxastic avowals are hesitant assertions. Section 3, finally, introduces an important *proviso* on the preceding account by showing that avowals are ambiguous between the (usual) explicit expressive and the (abnormal) non-explicit expressive: there are situations in which self-ascriptions of mental states function as ordinary autobiographical reports. I will resolve the Frege–Geach objection to psychological expressivism by reference to this ambiguity.

1 Illocutionary and expressive acts – non-explicit and explicit

A linguistic act typically constitutes both an illocutionary and an expressive act. An utterance of "Close the window!" is a request with the purpose of getting the addressee to shut out the cold. Yet it also expresses the speaker's desire regarding the addressee's action. And "I'll come to your party" is both a promise and the expression of an intention to accept the invitation. That illocutionary acts are at the same time expressions of mental states is well known and often explained by reference to the sincerity conditions for

illocutionary acts. As Searle says: "Wherever there is a psychological state specified in the sincerity condition, the performance of the act counts as an *expression* of that psychological state" (Searle 1969, 65; see also Austin 1962, lect. iv).[4] As a consequence, any speech act has, or at least can have, two different communicative functions: to convey something about the "outer" world (give a command or make a promise) and to represent the "inner" world of mental states (express a desire or an intention).

We are familiar with the distinction between *illocutionary force* and propositional *content* and therefore with a functional representation of illocutionary acts.[5] Taking IL_X as a variable over force, $IL_X(p)$ describes the speech act in which the illocutionary force IL_X is applied to the propositional content p. Using IL_Δ for *directive* force, the request "Close the window!" can be represented by IL_Δ(*You close the window*).[6] And if *commissive* force is represented by IL_Γ, the mentioned promise is represented by IL_Γ(*I come to your party*). Observe that in these simple cases the propositional content of the illocutionary act is assumed to be identical with the semantic content of the sentence uttered. As argued below with respect to explicit illocutions, there are systematic exceptions to this rule.

An expressive act can likewise be characterised by *expressive force* and propositional *content*,[7] where expressive force is determined by the psychological state expressed. Using EX_x as a schematic device indicating expressive force in general, $EX_x(p)$ describes the speech act of expressing the relevant propositional attitude indicated by x as applied to the propositional

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[4] "Expressing", as used by Austin and Searle, is not an achievement word in the sense that only obtaining psychological states can be expressed. The quote from Searle continues as follows: "This law holds whether the act is sincere or insincere, that is whether the speaker actually has the specified psychological state or not" (Searle 1969, 65). In this paper, I follow Austin's and Searle's use of "express".

[5] See Searle and Vanderveken 1985 for this way of representing illocutionary acts. The notion of force goes back at least to Frege's *Begriffsschrift* (1879).

[6] I assume here that a command has a propositional content.

[7] Let me mention the obvious *proviso* that only expressions of *propositional* attitudes can be so characterised. Arguably, there are also psychological states with non-propositional content ("I love you") or no representational content at all ("I am in pain").

content p. If δ stands for the specific attitude of desire, the expressive act performed with an utterance of "p!" is hence represented by $EX_\delta(p)$; $EX_\delta(p)$ says that the speaker expresses the desire for p. Using γ for intention, the expressive act performed by promising that p can be represented as $EX_\gamma(p)$.

I will here assume, but not argue for, the thesis that if a single speech act has both illocutionary and expressive force, there is a two-fold interdependence which justifies the following *Correspondence Principle*.[8] First, the expressive force EX_x – determined by the psychological state expressed – must 'match' the illocutionary force IL_X: a commissive act can only be paired with the expression of an intention, not, say, with the expression of a belief; and the expression of a wish can accompany only a directive act; etc. Second, the content of the illocutionary act and that of the expressive act must be the same. If my command is also the expression of a wish, then both command and wish must relate to the same content; and if the expression of an intention is also a promise, it must be a promise of the very same thing.

"I'll come to your party" and "Close the window!" function as *non-explicit* illocutionary acts in that they constitute a promise and a request, respectively, without verbalizing that they are such acts. Yet, as Austin (1962) has famously shown, there are utterances which state the type of illocutionary act to which they belong. "I promise to come to your party" and "I order you to close the window" are utterances of indicative sentences that bear all the grammatical characteristics of autobiographical reports, that is, non-explicit speech acts of an assertive character, yet to consider them as such would be to commit a "descriptive" fallacy.[9] Instead, Austin claims, such utterances constitute *explicit* illocutionary acts in which the illocutionary formula "I promise/order" is a force-indicating device: it mentions the speech act performed and does not

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[8] Searle (1983, 9–10), Sadock (1994), and Rosenthal (1995, 317) come close to formulating such a principle. It should be noted that the principle must be suitably hedged in order to exclude linguistic mishaps, e.g., imperfect mastery of the public language, slips of the tongue, and malapropisms (compare also Kripke 1979, 248–249).

[9] See Austin 1962, 3.

signify any part of its propositional content.[10] The job of an explicit illocution is that of "*making explicit* (which is not the same as stating or describing) what precise action it is that is being performed by the issuing of the utterance" (Austin 1962, 61). An explicit illocution is hence not the result of some distant, theoretical observation of another illocutionary act performed by the speaker at the same time, but constitutes that very linguistic act itself. Given the exclusively force-determining role of the first-person prefix, the speech-act-theoretical form of an utterance "I Φ that p" (where "Φ" is an illocutionary verb) is of the type $IL_X(p)$ and not that of the assertion $IL_A(I\ \Phi\ that\ p)$, as its grammatical surface suggests. "I command that p" has the form $IL_\Delta(p)$ and "I promise that p" is of the form $IL_\Gamma(p)$. As the restriction to the linguistic form (I-Φ) makes clear, explicit illocutions are typically bound to the first-person present-tense indicative active.[11]

This type of first-person asymmetry arguably extends also to avowals, i.e., self-ascriptions of *psychological* states. While "I intended to come to your party" and "He wishes that you close the window" are clear cases of non-explicit speech acts – reports about one's own past intentions and another person's present desires, respectively – "I intend to come to your party" and "I wish that you close the window" seem to have other functions. As Wittgenstein famously holds, avowals are linguistic expressions of the mental states named in the speech act: "I hope he'll come" is an expression of hope (Wittgenstein 1953, §585; see also 1967, §78); "I am in pain" is the expression of pain (Wittgenstein 1953, §§244, 404)[12]; and "I expect a bang" is the expression of an expectation (Wittgenstein 1967, §53). By extension, "I intend to come to your

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[10] The distinction between *explicit* and *non-explicit* or *implicit* illocutionary acts is due to Austin 1962, 32. In later passages, e.g., 1962, 69, Austin prefers the term "primary" to "implicit". Note also that, where the tradition speaks of non-explicit and explicit *performatives*, I speak of non-explicit and explicit *illocutions* to emphasise the exclusive focus on the illocutionary dimension in contradistinction to the expressive dimension.

[11] Explicit illocutions can also have a different form, e.g., the first-person plural ("We give up") or the passive ("It is hereby announced that …") form. For more examples, see Austin 1962, 57.

[12] See also Wittgenstein 1958, 68.

party" is the expression of an intention, and "I wish that you close the window" the expression of a desire. Without using this terminology, of course, Wittgenstein classifies avowals as *explicit expressives*.[13] The mental state named in the utterance is expressed by the utterance itself.

Although many more psychological states can be linguistically expressed, in what follows I will concentrate on the expression of propositional attitudes. Explicit expressives, so restricted, are typically of the form

(I-ψ)   I ψ that *p*,

where the dominant verb ψ refers to a psychological state and is in the first-person (non-progressive) present-tense indicative active. That is, explicit expressives typically have the form of explicit illocutions – safe for the main verb, which here stands for a mental state, not an illocutionary act. As in explicit illocutions, the first-person prefix of the form "I ψ that" – call it the *expressive formula* – does not contribute to the content of the speech act, but it determines that it *is* an expressive speech act, and indicates the particular mental state expressed. The expressive formula is an expressive-force-indicating device with the consequence that the speech-act-theoretical form of the explicit expressive "I ψ that *p*" is of the type $EX_x(p)$.

Explicit expressives stand to non-explicit expressives much as explicit illocutions stand to non-explicit ones. What "Close the window!" only *shows* (e.g., by syntactical form), namely that the speaker has a wish concerning the addressee's behaviour, is *explicitly said* by the utterance "I wish that you close the window". The very same expressive act can therefore assume two different linguistic forms – that of a non-explicit and that of an explicit expressive.[14] To illustrate this with a further example: An intention can be expressed by "I'll

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[13] Recent expressivists like Finkelstein (2003) and Bar-On (2004, 2015) articulate similar views.

[14] Wittgenstein describes the intimate relation between non-explicit and explicit expressives with respect to the example of a wish: "The sentence 'I want some wine to drink' has roughly the same sense as 'Wine over here!'" (Wittgenstein 1980a, §469). Compare also Wittgenstein 1980a, §§472 and 477.

come to your party" and by "I intend to come to your party". Either utterance can be used to express the intention to come.[15]

As we have seen before, illocutionary and expressive acts often go together. It is therefore no surprise that explicit expressives typically also function as illocutionary acts. An expression of an intention can be a commissive act, and the avowal of a wish can be understood as a directive act. "I intend to come" and "I want you to close the window" will then be understood as a promise and a request, respectively.[16] As the promise and the request do not concern the speaker's intention or desire, but the embedded proposition itself, the formal description of the *illocutionary* act performed by an explicit expressive utterance of "I ψ that p" is of the type $IL_X(p)$. If that is correct, the same illocutionary act can be performed in three different ways. Take the request that the addressee close the window. It can be articulated with the non-explicit speech act "Close the window!" and with the explicit illocution "I order you to close the window". Yet it can also be formulated, albeit only indirectly, with the help of the explicit expressive "I wish that you close the window".[17]

The resulting illocutionary act is plausibly construed as the result of a conversational implicature of the explicit expressive:[18] Assuming she heeds

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[15] Note that the remarkable analogy between explicit expressives and explicit illocutions is not perfect. While the successful utterance of "I promise to come to your party" *constitutes* the illocutionary act performed, the successful expressive speech act of uttering "I intend to come to your party" does *not* constitute the psychological state expressed: mental states are not illocutionary acts as they are not acts at all. Although the *sincerity conditions* for expressives demand the relevant psychological states to be present if the utterance be sincere, performing the expressive act does not by itself necessitate the relevant psychological state to be present.

[16] Austin (1962, 78–80, 87) and Searle (1975, 59, 79–80) both observe that first-person ascriptions of mental states can also be used as illocutionary acts: "I am sorry" – an example used by both – can be used as an apology. Searle (1975, 59) mentions specifically that "I want you to do it" can be a request and that "I think/believe he is in the next room" (1975, 79) can be used to make an assertion t a person's a person's whereabouts.

[17] Of course it can be performed via an indefinite number of other speech acts – through other forms of Gricean implicature. I restrict myself here to the performance of the illocutionary act via a direct speech act – and via the most salient form of implicature.

[18] More specifically, we are here dealing with what Grice (1989, 37–40) called a "generalised" conversational implicature, as no additional context is necessary to determine the specific speech act implicated. Searle (1975) also construes the illocutionary act as an implicature of the direct speech act performed with the utterance of an avowal. As Searle takes an avowal to be an autobiographical assertion, I do not share his reconstruction of the implicature.

Grice's Cooperative Principle,[19] the best explanation for the fact that a speaker expresses her wish concerning the future action of another person in the presence of this very person usually is that she wants this person to do her bidding. And the best explanation for a person's expressing her intentions is that she formulates some kind of obligation towards the addressee. That we are dealing here with a *conversational* implicature is confirmed by the fact that the implicature to illocutionary act can be cancelled: "I wish that you clean up your room, but I don't command you to do it" might well be the utterance of a liberal parent who intends to articulate her desires without infringing on her offspring's autonomy. And "I intend to come to your party, but I can't promise it" may be the utterance of a person who wants to show her good will, but is careful not to commit herself.

The theory of implicatures explains the illocutionary effects of explicit expressives. At the same time, it explains why the illocutionary act produced is weaker than the corresponding outright illocution. A speaker generates an implicature only by uttering a sentence and thereby exploiting the Cooperative Principle. Implicatures then cannot themselves produce further implicatures. For this reason, indirect speech acts are weaker forms of the corresponding direct speech acts. The expression of a wish, although functioning as a kind of directive, can hence be understood as a polite form of command.[20] Similarly, the expression of an intention may constitute a commissive act, but the obligation thus undertaken is of a very moderate kind. Indirect illocutionary acts are weaker than their direct analogues. This may explain why explicit expressives are used as illocutionary acts at all: to escape some of the normative obligations associated with the direct illocution.

After these explanations of explicit expressives and their illocutionary roles, I will now turn to doxastic avowals.

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[19] Grice 1989, 26.

[20] See again Wittgenstein 1980a, §§469 and 477, where Wittgenstein construes a self-ascription of a wish as a command of the embedded content.

2 Doxastic avowals

Doxastic avowals are first-person present-tense indicative active self-ascriptions of doxastic states, usually of the form "I believe/think that p". "I believe that it is raining" and "I think that Wittgenstein was right" are examples of this sort. Provided that my foregoing analysis of I-ψ-sentences transfers to doxastic avowals – and there is good reason to think that it does – "I believe that p" is the *expression* of the belief that p, not its report. The verb in the formula "I believe that" names the propositional attitude expressed; the doxastic formula does not contribute to the content of that attitude. Therefore, if β stands for belief, the speech act form of the explicit expressive "I believe that p" is not $EX_β(I\ believe\ that\ p)$, but simply $EX_β(p)$. "I believe that it is raining" expresses a belief about the weather, not about the person having that belief.

Doxastic avowals function like other avowals, but due to the nature of belief they are nevertheless special. Since the mental state expressed is that of belief, they express the *same* type of mental state as the corresponding non-explicit speech act. Misconstruing "I believe that p" as a non-explicit expressive does not mean making a mistake with regard to expressive force, but identifying the wrong propositional content: it means to understand the speaker as expressing a belief about her own doxastic states instead of a belief about p itself. Thus "I believe that p" is as special within the class of explicit expressives as "I assert that p" is amongst the explicit illocutionary acts. This peculiarity will be significant below.

There is a lot of circumstantial evidence that Wittgenstein is an expressivist also with respect to doxastic avowals. In the passage immediately preceding the discussion of Moore's paradox, Wittgenstein provides expressivist characterizations of self-ascriptions of fear (1953, part II ix, 187–189), of mourning (ibid., 189), and of pain (ibid., 189). Furthermore, in the famous section on Moore's paradox he says that " 'I believe …' throws light on my

state. … So there is a *similarity* here to expressions of emotion, of mood, etc." (1953, part II x, 191). Although Wittgenstein falls short of articulating an expressivist view for *doxastic* avowals, these remarks strongly suggest that he holds this position.[21] Yet if Wittgenstein understands doxastic avowals as explicit expressives, his observation that "I believe that p" is a hesitant assertion of p can be straightforwardly explained.

Recall that explicit expressives conversationally implicate weakened forms of corresponding illocutionary acts. In many contexts, the utterance of "I wish you to close the window" is (also) a polite way of articulating a command. Similarly, an utterance of "I believe that it is raining" is best explained by the fact that the speaker intends to comment on the weather, without undertaking the communicative obligations that come with the outright assertion of "It is raining".[22] Indeed, in many contexts the weather is the obvious topic of the conversation: if the expressive speech act were not also a statement about the weather, expressing a belief would be violating the Gricean maxim of relevance. If this is correct, the explicit expressive act of form $EX_\beta(p)$, i.e., "I believe that p", implicates an assertion of form $IL_A(p)$. Since conversational implicatures are not subject to conversational norms, the resulting assertion comes with weakened illocutionary force. "I believe that it is raining" conversationally implicates an assertion about the weather; as the speaker thereby escapes the epistemic obligations associated with the outright assertion "It is raining", the assertion comes with weakened assertoric force: "I believe that it is raining" is a hesitant assertion of the proposition *that it is raining*. In this way, Wittgenstein's interpretation of "I believe" is vindicated by his expressivism on avowals.

Many authors who share Wittgenstein's view that "I believe that p" is but a weakened assertion of p have drawn the further conclusion that the doxastic

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[21] Compare also Wittgenstein 1980a, §§470–487, where the concern with doxastic avowals (and Moore's paradox) is part of a general discussion of largely expressivist theses.

[22] There are varying views on the nature and strength of these obligations. Grice (1989, 27), for example, makes the suggestion that only belief based on evidence warrants assertion. Others, like Williamson (2000, ch. 11), argue for a knowledge norm of assertion.

expressive formula is virtually redundant, its only function being that of mitigating antecedent assertoric force. According to their views, the word "believe" in the matrix clause of the doxastic avowal does not operate as a psychological verb at all, but rather represents a mode of presentation of the proposition that follows. J. O. Urmson (1952, 484), for example, claims that "I believe that p" is a parenthetical verb construction whose function is "to modify or to weaken the claim to truth which would be implied by a simple assertion p". Émile Benveniste (1974, 294) states that by assertively uttering the doxastic avowal, "I convert into a subjective utterance the fact asserted impersonally". Giorgi and Pianesi (2005, 112), finally, concur with the view that by first-person belief ascriptions, "the speaker asserts the embedded content, providing attenuation, due to the presence of [I believe]". The fact that "I believe that p" constitutes a weakened form of assertion is taken to entail that the matrix clause "I believe that" diminishes assertoric force. I suggest that this understanding turns things upside down.

Of course, *if* the utterings of "p" and of "I believe that p" are compared with respect to their respective *illocutionary* forces, the doxastic formula must be understood as mitigating illocutionary force. Yet, as the present investigation has shown, the purely illocutionary perspective confuses indirect with direct speech acts and thus misrepresents the proper function of the doxastic formula. To determine this function, we must consider its role in the *direct* speech act, i.e., in the explicit expressive. In "I believe that p", the matrix clause determines, first, that the speech act is an explicit expressive act and, second, that it expresses *belief* – in contrast to, say, desire or hope. As a consequence, the doxastic prefix does not weaken prior assertoric force, but creates assertoric force in the first place: only because "I believe that" has its ordinary semantic function – that of denoting the speaker's mental state – is the resulting speech act a *doxastic* avowal and, by way of conversational implicature, an assertion at all. The weakening of assertoric force is not due to the matrix

clause "I believe that", but results from the fact that the assertive act is only an indirect speech act, i.e., an implicature.

This alternative perspective has important consequences, as I will briefly illustrate. Recall that Wittgenstein identifies the assertive function of doxastic avowals in reaction to Moore's paradox, i.e., the observation that it is "absurd" to affirmatively utter sentences like "It's raining, but I believe that it is not raining". Moore's observation gives rise to a veritable puzzle since the sentence can even be true given the standard semantics for "I" and "believe".[23] Taking his remarks on "I believe that …" at face value, interpreters usually attribute to Wittgenstein the following solution (although Wittgenstein never, to my knowledge, expressly endorses this view). "I believe that it is not raining" is the (hesitant) assertion of "It is not raining", whence the second conjunct of the Moorean utterance contradicts the first: by affirming the Moorean sentence, the speaker asserts plainly that it is raining and hesitatingly that it is not raining. That the contradiction is hidden beneath the linguistic surface then creates the air of paradox.

The wider expressivist perspective suggests a very different interpretation, according to which Wittgenstein provides a response based on the distinction between non-explicit and explicit (doxastic) avowals: In uttering the Moorean sentence, the speaker (non-explicitly) expresses a belief (that it is raining) and (explicitly) expresses the contradictory belief (that it is not raining). The absurdity of the Moorean sentence is then not due to a logical inconsistency in the propositions asserted, but created by the fact that the speaker expresses belief in contradictory propositions: belief, in possible contrast to other mental states like, e.g., doubt, does not tolerate contradictory propositions.[24]

I cannot here extensively discuss the merits of such an alternative strategy, but will briefly note only two things. First, an expressivist approach is not

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[23] "It is a paradox that it should be perfectly absurd to *utter assertively words* of which the *meaning* is something which may quite well be true – is not a contradiction" (Moore 1993, 209).
[24] In Mark Schroeder's words (Schroeder 2008), belief is an "inconsistency-transmitting" attitude.

restricted to "I believe" but extends to avowals with propositional contents generally and thus allows for analogous solutions to non-doxastic versions of Moore's paradox. For example, an utterance of the sentence "Close the window!, though I want you to leave it open" can then be shown to be absurd by reference to the fact that it expresses conflicting desires. Secondly, expressivism may also be able to account for *omissive* versions of Moore's paradox, referring to the absurdity of "It is raining, but I don't believe so", if only the theory of explicit expressives extends to negated avowals, i.e., utterances of the form "I don't ψ that *p*".[25] If we bring his expressivism to bear on Moore's paradox, Wittgenstein is able to account for variations for which the standard interpretation obviously fails.

3 The ambiguity of avowals

So far I have attributed to Wittgenstein a *dogmatic* form of expressivism, according to which *any* utterance of a doxastic avowal is an explicit expressive. Yet, in making this attribution I have ignored so far that Wittgenstein contrasts two uses of avowals, the affirmative and the hypothetical use, and associates the explicitly expressive use only with the former: "the expression 'I believe that this is the case' is used like the assertion 'This is the case'; and yet the *hypothesis* that I believe this is the case is not used like the hypothesis that this is the case. So it *looks* as if the assertion 'I believe' were not the assertion of what is supposed in the hypothesis 'I believe'!" (1953, part II x, 190).[26] Indeed, it is this contrast between the two contexts that appears to have been Wittgenstein's main concern with doxastic avowals: if what is an assertion outside of a conditional is stripped of its force within the context of a

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[25] Extending the theory of explicit expressives to negated avowals is not a trivial matter. I think, however, that it can be done largely in parallel to the theory of illocutionary denegation. For the notion of illocutionary denegation, see Searle and Vanderveken 1985; Hare 1970.

[26] Compare also 1980a, §§473–478, §493; 1980b, §283: "If we were to have an obligatory 'I believe' at the beginning of every assertion, 'I believe it is so' would mean the same thing as 'It is so'. But 'Suppose I believe it is so' would *not* mean the same thing as 'Suppose it is so'."

conditional, its content, roughly the Fregean thought expressed, should, contrary to actual findings, not be altered.[27]

Wittgenstein's discussion of doxastic avowals in the context of conditionals anticipates an aspect of a problem which is nowadays known as the Frege–Geach objection.[28] "If I believe that it will be raining, then I'll take an umbrella" is a straightforward, and straightforwardly true, sentence in which the antecedent is true if and only if the speaker has a certain belief about the weather.[29] Furthermore, that the speaker will take an umbrella can be concluded from the conditional only if the speaker additionally *asserts* its antecedent. Yet if the antecedent "I believe that it will be raining" is the *expression* of the belief that it will be raining, it cannot be the *assertion* of that belief. Analogous observations show that the problem generalises to non-doxastic avowals. The simple theory of explicit expressives therefore seems in conflict with some basic observations about the role of avowals in the context of ordinary arguments.

In response to this problem, I suggest abandoning dogmatic expressivism in favour of what might be called *hybrid expressivism*: Avowals are ambiguous between explicit and non-explicit expressives.[30] They can be used either as the expression of ψ-ing the embedded proposition *p* or as the expression of the belief with the content *I ψ that p*.[31] Let me briefly argue for this position. An

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[27] For this understanding of Wittgenstein's concern with Moore's observations, see McGinn 2011.

[28] The *locus classicus* is Geach 1965, which formulates the argument primarily for moral non-cognitivism.

[29] I here assume a truth-functional analysis of the indicative conditional and ignore expressivist accounts.

[30] A number of recent expressivists (e.g., Finkelstein 2003; Bar-On 2004, 2015; Brandl 2014) propose yet another version of the theory and claim that avowals are explicit expressives *and* reflective speech acts. An utterance of "I ψ that *p*" is not only expressive of the psychological state of ψ-ing that *p*, but also an assertion or an expression of the belief with the content *that I ψ that p*. I cannot here discuss such 'dual expressivist' views.

[31] Wittgenstein (1980a, §§486, 487, 495, 503, and 708) also discusses the possibility of a *non-absurd* assertion of a Moorean sentence, i.e., a case where a doxastic avowal is used as an autobiographical assertion. These and other passages indicate that the attribution of hybrid expressivism to Wittgenstein is warranted, although to my knowledge he never explicitly endorses this view.

affirmative utterance of "I ψ that *p*" *typically* is an explicit expression of ψ-ing that *p*, but there are occasions when it is a non-explicit speech act and hence an autobiographical self-ascription. If grandfather talks about his *past* desires, and employs, for the sake of liveliness, the present tense, he does, of course, not express his *present* wishes, but a present belief about his past desires. Furthermore, it is overwhelmingly plausible that we can talk about our *occurrent* mental states using avowals, and that there are occasions on which we actually do so. On the psychologist's couch or in the philosophy seminar, i.e., in contexts of self-reflection, we often do *speak about* our own wishes by saying "I wish that *p*". Or if a physicalist looks at his own present EEG and observes a brain-state pattern that strikes him to be indicative of a desire, the affirmative utterance "I wish …" may be a – possibly false – autobiographical report about the existence of his wish rather than the expression of the wish itself.

Under certain conditions, an utterance of the form (I-ψ) is a *non-explicit* speech act in which the utterer describes her own present state of ψ-ing and hence expresses a belief about this mental state. In such cases, there is no first-person asymmetry, and the speech-act description of the utterance of the form (I-ψ) has the expressive form $EX_\beta(I\ \psi\ that\ p)$.[32] First-person ascriptions of psychological states, including doxastic avowals, are therefore systematically ambiguous between a non-explicit and an explicit expressive understanding, but the ambiguity is not of a semantic kind. The *sentence* "I ψ that *p*" has the propositional content *I ψ that p* no matter what, and is thus semantically continuous with third-person or past-tense variations of the same sentence. Semantic meaning is invariant while expressive force is not.[33]

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[32] Observe that the ambiguity of avowals constitutes another parallel to the case of explicit illocutions. As already Austin (1962, 64) recognised, there are uses of first-person ascriptions of illocutionary acts – e.g., the historical or habitual present, situations of self-reflection, etc. – in which an utterance like "I promise to come to your party" is straightforwardly an autobiographical assertion.

[33] Bar-On distinguishes the a-expression, the intentional expression of the psychological state, from the s-expression, the proposition expressed by the sentence used to make the utterance (Bar-On 2015; see already Bar-On 2004, 254–256). If this distinction is feasible (and I think it is), I claim that a sentence of form (I-ψ) is ambiguous with respect to its a-expression,

Hybrid expressivism of the sort described holds that avowals are ambiguous, with respect to their speech-act-theoretical classification, between an explicit expressive and the non-explicit speech act of an autobiographical assertion. This accounts for the fact that the hypothetical and the affirmative uses of "I believe" fall apart, as Wittgenstein observes. Moreover, if, as seems plausible, the context of an argument always resolves the ambiguity in favor of a *non-explicit*-speech-act construal of the avowal, the two sentences "If I believe that it will be raining, then I'll take an umbrella" and "I believe that it will be raining" allow us to infer the conclusion that the speaker will take an umbrella by simple *modus ponens*. Hybrid expressivism provides the conceptual resources for undermining the Frege–Geach objection. I therefore believe that hybrid doxastic expressivism does not only represent Wittgenstein's position: it may even turn out to be true.

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but unambiguous with respect to its s-expression (unless of course there is an unrelated type of semantic ambiguity).

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