

Straight talk: conceptions of sincerity in speech

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Abstract What is it for a speech act to be sincere? The most common answer amongst philosophers is that a speech act is sincere if and only if the speaker is in the state of mind that the speech act functions to express. However, a number of philosophers have advanced counterexamples purporting to demonstrate that having the expressed state of mind is neither necessary nor sufficient for speaking sincerely. One may nevertheless doubt whether these considerations refute the orthodox conception. Instead, it may be argued, they expose other ways of elucidating sincerity in speech. “Sincerity in speech” is ambivalent between a number of different conceptions. Against this background this paper presents two alternative conceptions, viz., Sincerity as Spontaneity and Sincerity as Presenting Oneself as one takes Oneself to be and develops a third conception which we may call Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue. This conception emphasizes the speaker’s intention in communicating her attitudes and the need to be properly justified in saying what one does.

Keywords Sincerity · Insincerity · Speech · Speech acts · Notion of expression · Green · Davis · Williams · Mellor · Ridge · Moran

1 Introduction

We value sincerity in speech. It seems plausible to think that there are a number of different explanations for this. We want words to reflect what is in the speaker’s heart and mind; we often find the risk of being deceived (especially by those we love) petrifying; we think sincerity is fundamental for trust, which is considered

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essential to intimate relationships, human cooperative enterprises and so on. “Sincerity” is consequently very often used as a term of praise. “Insincerity,” on the other hand, is a term used to criticize. However, someone who speaks insincerely not only risks being criticized, but also getting his credibility diminished and damaging his reputation. This paper is primarily devoted to examining what it is to speak sincerely, but we will on a number of occasions have reason also to examine what it is to speak insincerely. We begin by outlining a conception widely endorsed by philosophers which we may call Sincerity as Showing. To speak sincerely is to utter words that function to express a state of mind that one has. In other words, my sincere assertion that it is raining shows my belief that it is raining.¹ This conception is elaborated in Sect. 2. The notion of expression is central to a proper understanding of sincerity in speech and the subject of Sect. 3. In Sect. 4 we consider a number of arguments that question the idea that the sincerity of a speech act requires that the speaker actually has the state of mind that the relevant speech act functions to express. Although these arguments cast doubt on Sincerity as Showing, it may be argued that they do not refute it. After all, any suggestion about what conditions are logically both necessary and sufficient for a speech act to be sincere is bound to be somewhat arbitrary. Indeed, maybe we should not expect any general analysis to be forthcoming due to the fact that “sincerity” is ambivalent between a couple (or more) conceptions. This is the theme of Sect. 5. Against this background this paper examines a couple of alternative conceptions that can be found in the literature, conceptions we may call Sincerity as Spontaneity and Sincerity as Presenting Oneself as one Takes Oneself to be. This paper also develops yet another conception which we may call Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue. This conception emphasizes the speaker’s intention in communicating her state of mind and the need to be properly justified in communicating the state of mind in question. Finally, given that the conception of “sincerity” is ambiguous a warranted question is what we should do about it. In the last section we consider some different responses.

2 Sincerity as showing

For better or worse, we are not transparent to each other. My beliefs, desires, feelings and other states of mind are usually not directly accessible to public scrutiny. Although our bodies and behaviors sometimes betray our beliefs, desires and emotions, e.g., my tone of voice may give away my anger or my red face may make my embarrassment manifest, we are usually very good at hiding such things from view. This opens up the door for deliberate attempts of misrepresenting oneself and the rest of the world. Suppose, for instance, that someone stole your car and you ask me who did it. Since I was at the scene of the crime I know that Jane stole the car, but assert that John stole it. In this example I am misrepresenting the facts. However, I am also, in the jargon of philosophers, giving expression to a

¹ The connection between expressing and showing will be developed in what follows.

belief, viz., the belief that John stole the car. Depending on what kind of speech act we perform we express different psychological states. In the words of John Searle:

... to assert, affirm, or state that p counts as *an expression of belief* (that p). To require, ask, order, entreat, enjoin, pray, or command (that A be done) counts as *an expression of a wish or desire* (that A be done). To promise, vow, threaten, or pledge (that A) counts as *an expression of intention* (to do A). To thank, welcome, or congratulate counts as an *expression of gratitude, pleasure* (at H 's arrival), or *pleasure* (at H 's good fortune) (Searle 1969, p. 65).

However, the belief my speech act functions to express, is not a belief that I have. This may seem to make it reasonable to think that I am speaking insincerely. At least insofar as it is plausible to think that speaking insincerely simply is “to express what is not one’s actual opinion, attitude, or feeling” (Davis 2008, p. 428).² Hence, the example above seems to provide a good illustration of someone whose assertion is insincere. On the other hand, if I would have expressed a belief that I actually have it may seem intuitively right to call my assertion *sincere*.

This is in line with Searle’s own proposal. An assertion, he argued, is sincere if and only if the speaker who asserts, e.g., that it is raining, believes that it is raining. More generally, he argued “whenever 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, p. 65) and the speech act is sincere insofar as the speaker is in the state of mind that is mentioned in the sincerity condition. According to this conception, sincerity thus acts as a guarantee that the speaker is in the state of mind that his or her utterance functions to express. It will, in other words, grant access to the speaker’s actual beliefs, feelings or mood. “As a result,” in Mitchell Green’s words “a sincere speech act shows the state of mind that is in its sincerity conditions” (Green 2007b, p. 268).³ Let us therefore call this conception Sincerity as Showing.

Sincerity as Showing: A speech act is sincere if and only if it expresses a state of mind (associated with the sort of speech act performed) that the speaker has.

² Whether simply expressing a state of mind that one does not have is either necessary or sufficient for speaking insincerely is a question that we will return to below.

³ It may be argued that whether a sincere speech act shows the speaker’s state of mind is not orthodox. What is orthodox is the idea that a sincere speech act expresses the speaker’s actual state of mind. However, the relevant notion of showing is not meant to be very controversial. For instance, “showing that” is not meant to imply making something perceptible. Rather, it is meant to capture the sense in which a sincere assertion may enable propositional knowledge, at least in appropriately situated thinkers. It is in this sense that a sincere assertion that p may show the speaker’s belief that p . See Green (2007a). Nothing important, however, depends on this. If it is denied, then “Sincerity as Showing” should simply be conceived of as a label denoting the orthodox view. It is primarily meant to capture the sense in which sincerity guarantees that the speaker has the state of mind that the speech act in question functions to express, i.e., the sense in which one cannot, e.g., sincerely assert that p without actually believing that p . An anonymous reviewer raised this matter.

This conception is the orthodox conception amongst philosophers.⁴ Indeed, it is a conception that has great intuitive power. To speak sincerely, it seems reasonable to think, is to give voice to what is in our minds. A sincere assertion that p shows that the speaker believes that p . In Sect. 4 we will consider a number of considerations that may lead us to doubt that Sincerity as Showing is adequate. However, since the notion of expression is integral to understanding sincerity in speech we must first examine what it is to express a state of mind more carefully.

3 Expressing states of mind

We express states of mind through words, tone of voice, gestures, music, paint, dancing and other forms of art. Saying “Thanks,” for instance, is a way of expressing gratitude, a scream may express pain, Edvard Munch’s *The Scream* expresses anguish and a yawn may express boredom. Expression is as such an integral part of almost every human activity, but how should we understand the expression relation? In particular, how does our use of words function to express states of mind? Below we will consider two recent conceptions advanced by Mitchell Green and Wayne Davis respectively.

3.1 Expression as signaling and showing

Green (2007a) characterizes *self-expression* as a way of signaling and showing what is within. Green writes:

Where A is an agent and B 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 state B, and some action or behavior of A’s both shows and signals her B (Green 2007a, pp. 43, 212).

In order to better understand Green’s conception of self-expression we must understand his use of “signaling” and “showing.” A signal is defined “as any feature of an entity that conveys information (including misinformation) that was designed for its ability to convey that information” (Green 2007a, p. 212). As such it can be involuntary, voluntary but not willed, willed, and willed and overt. Upon smelling rotten eggs, for instance, we sometimes cannot help making a disgusted face. At other times we have the ability to refrain from making a disgusted face, but nevertheless acquiesce in allowing ourselves to exhibit it. At still other times we intentionally make a face of disgust in order to convey disgust. Sometimes we make this intention overt, i.e., we make it clear that we have that very intention. These examples correspond to the four different ways of signaling introduced above. Moreover, in order for something to be a signal counting as conveying information, in Green’s technical sense, it must also have been designed (e.g., by evolution or

⁴ Some examples include Hare (1952, pp. 13, 19–20, 168–199); Searle (1969, pp. 60, 64–68); and Wright (1992, p. 14); Davis (2003, p. 25) and Green (2007a, pp. 70, 83).

more artificially) to convey the information. For instance, unless a smile was designed to convey happiness it does not count as a signal.

In order for an act or piece of behavior to count as an instance of self-expression it must also *show* what is within. To show what is within is to somehow make it manifest. Green distinguishes three different forms of showing. Achilles may show his courage by acting bravely. He may show his bruise and thereby enable perceptual knowledge. He may show how beautiful Helen of Troy is by drawing a picture of her which enables experiential knowledge. These forms of showing Green calls showing-that, showing- α and showing-how respectively. This gives us a rough grasp of self-expression as a way of showing and signaling a state of mind.

As a characterization of *self-expression*, Green's characterization makes intuitive sense. My smile, for instance, is not a form of *self-expression* unless I experience happiness. The reason is, of course, that "self-expression" is a "success notion." I cannot be said to have expressed, e.g., my anger, unless I am angry. But given the orthodox conception of sincerity, it is essential that one can express a state of mind that one does not have. For instance, it seems rather plausible to think that "Thanks" can express gratitude even if the speaker is not feeling any gratitude.⁵ Green suggests that saying "Thanks" without the corresponding experience of gratitude would be *expressive* of (rather than *express*) gratitude, but the relation between self-expression and expressiveness is left much in the dark. As a result Green fails to properly distinguish between possessive and non-possessive notions of expression, which is important to a proper understanding of sincerity.⁶

3.2 Expressing as indication

Davis distinguishes between evidential, word and speaker expression. For instance, my smile is evidence for, and expresses, (my) happiness. Words, at least given that certain conditions are satisfied, express ideas. By yawning I express (my) boredom. These examples correspond to the different forms of expression respectively. Central to Davis' conception of expression is his use of "indication" which Davis characterizes as follows.

"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 (Davis 2003, p. 47).

However, simply indicating something does not seem to be sufficient for something to express a state of mind. For instance, a person who reaches for her overcoat in the closet may indicate that she thinks it is raining outside, but in

⁵ It may be objected that this would be an example of a person who only pretends to express *his* gratitude. In this connection it is important to distinguish "S is expressing gratitude" from "S is expressing his gratitude." The possessive formulation presupposes that S is experiencing gratitude, the non-possessive formulation does not. Still, it may be further objected that "Thanks" did not express any gratitude at all, but just purported to express it. That, I would respond, simply fails to acknowledge that there is a weaker notion of expression according to which it is quite possible to express a state of mind that one does not have.

⁶ See Eriksson ([forthcoming](#)) for discussion.

reaching for the coat her act does not, it seems plausible to think, express the belief that it is raining. In order for such an act to express a belief that it is raining, on Davis' account, it needs to be done with the *intention* of indicating the belief that it is raining.⁷

According to this characterization of "expression" it is possible to indicate, in the sense outlined, that one has a particular state of mind without actually having it, i.e., one can express, e.g., the belief that *p* without having the belief that *p*. Expression as Indication is, in other words, a weaker notion than Expression as Signaling and Showing. It is an "evidential notion" rather than a "success notion." Asserting that *p* gives us reason, albeit not conclusive reason, to think that the speaker believes that *p*.

An evidential characterization of expression allows for the possibility of expressing a state of mind that one does not have. As we saw above, this is essential to the orthodox conception of sincerity. It therefore seems more adequate in relation to understanding sincerity. An assertion that *p* functions to express the belief that *p*. However, by asserting something sincerely you perform an act that, because of the sincerity of what is said, shows your belief. Here "sincerity" has an important theoretical role to play.⁸

Given the conception of expression outlined above, expressing, e.g., the belief that *p* requires intentionally indicating the belief that *p*. However, it seems at least questionable to think that a speech act like asserting that *p* really requires that the speaker *intentionally* indicates having a belief that *p*. It may seem as if (at least some) speech acts are convention-governed.⁹ For instance, it may be argued that the use of subject-predicate sentences conventionally function to indicate that the speaker has a particular belief regardless of whether the speaker intends to indicate having the belief (where a convention is a "regularity that is socially useful, self-perpetuating, and arbitrary" (Davis 2005, p. 103)). First, speaking is a rule governed activity. The rules may well be the result of the intentions of previous speakers of subject-predicate sentences to intentionally indicate believing that what they say is true, but such a practice may have become conventionalized and thus achieved a kind of autonomy. Moreover, it is plausible to think that the practice of making assertions is governed by something like a Gricean Maxim of Quality, i.e., say only what you believe is true. In virtue of having internalized Grice's maxim, we

⁷ A similar idea is defended by Bach and Harnish (1979). To express a state of mind, according to Bach and Harnish, is roughly for the speaker to intend the interlocutor to take the speaker's utterance as a reason for thinking that the speaker has the attitude.

⁸ It may be argued that we should understand Green's use of "expressive" as closely related to an evidential notion of expression. This is suggested by Green (2007b, p. 281, n. 8) where he seems to find the differences to be a question of nomenclature. However, Green's treatment of Davis (2003) and Bach and Harnish (1979) in Green (2007a) as rival self-expression conceptions speaks against this. Again, see Eriksson (forthcoming) for a more thorough discussion.

⁹ Austin (1962), for instance, seems to suggest that different illocutionary acts depend, in some sense, on convention. See Strawson (1964) for a critical discussion of Austin's claim.

automatically (we do not consider any hypotheses about the speaker's intention in speaking) infer that someone who says "It is raining" asserts what he or she believes is true, i.e., that it is raining. Similarly, it seems rather plausible that many words function to express states of mind in virtue of being governed by conventions. For instance, uttering "Sorry" seems to be a conventional way of expressing regret. It indicates, or gives us reason to think, that the speaker is experiencing regret regardless of whether or not the speaker is intentionally indicating that he is experiencing regret. This picture is far from complete and needs to be elaborated. First, it is possible to use a subject-predicate sentence non-assertorically. For instance, we can use "It is raining" to ask a question or merely to test one's voice. The claim that subject-predicate sentences conventionally indicate beliefs need to be qualified in the light of such cases. We could, for instance, add certain provisos, e.g., a speaker who utters a subject-predicate sentence is taken to have asserted the sentence given that we have no reason not to think that the speaker is not speaking literally or merely performing acts of speech. For instance, someone who (unbeknownst to us) merely tests his voice (rather than asserting) will not be committed to providing any reasons for what is said upon being prodded and as the conversation unfolds it will presumably become apparent that the speaker did not assert anything. This also explains why someone who utters a subject-predicate sentence against her will (because of, e.g., Tourette's Syndrome) has not made an assertion. Someone who offers reasons for what is said, on the other hand, is plausibly conceived of as having asserted something. However, this does not necessarily make it true that the speaker intended to indicate having a particular belief at the time of speaking. For instance, he may simply have relied on conventions to do the required job. Reasons for doubting that the speaker is speaking literally may be provided by different contextual cues, e.g., tone of voice or intonation. When this is the case we usually start considering the speaker's intention in speaking in order to figure out what they are doing.

Above we have examined some different conceptions of expression. It is impossible to do full justice to the complexities of the respective theories presented by Green and Davis. However, both seem to agree that it is possible to express states of mind that one does not have (using Green's nomenclature we could say that such speech acts are *expressive* of the relevant state of mind). In what follows I will consequently take this for granted. Whether certain words and sentences when used can be said to conventionally express states of mind is, I maintain, plausible, but controversial.¹⁰ Fortunately, I do not think any of the arguments presented below stand or fall with such a presupposition.

¹⁰ However, even if certain words and sentences when used conventionally express states of mind, it may still be possible to express states of mind in virtue of intentionally indicating them. For instance, it seems quite possible to express, e.g., ingratitude by saying "Thanks" but this is not something we can accomplish merely in virtue of conventions. Rather, it requires that the speaker does something that reliably indicates that she is experiencing ingratitude, e.g., saying "Thanks" using a particularly intonation or the like. In other words, it seems as if there are both conventional and non-conventional means of expressing states of mind through the use of words.

4 Against orthodoxy

Asserting “It is raining” functions to express the belief that it is raining; it gives us reason to think that the speaker is in the expressed state of mind, but since we are not transparent we can express a state of mind that we do not have in order to, e.g., mislead others about our attitudes. This seems to be essential to the orthodox conception of sincerity.

However, just as we are not transparent to each other, introspection does not seem to be infallible. We are not immediately aware of our own states of mind. On the one hand, it may happen that we believe that we are in a state of mind that we actually are not in. On the other hand, it may happen that we are in a certain state of mind without being aware of this fact. In other words, we may lack in self-knowledge. This fact raises problems for the orthodox analysis of what it is for a speech act to be sincere.¹¹

Begin by considering the following example. Michael mistakenly believes that he likes cherries. When asked about his preferences he says “Cherries, yummy” and thereby gives expression to a state of mind he believes himself to have, but since he does not have the state of mind that his speech act functions to express his speech act will, according to Sincerity as Showing, fail to be sincere. Indeed, given Davis’ characterization, he will be insincere. However, suppose that Michael’s aim is to try to get his interlocutor to come to believe that he likes cherries, which actually is what he thinks he likes. Although Michael may inadvertently misrepresent himself, it does not seem to be the case that he is deliberately trying to deceive anyone. Rather, he is *trying* to present himself as he takes himself to be. Given that this is the case, it seems rather plausible to think that Michael’s speech act is sincere despite the fact that he does not have the attitude it gives expression to. This suggests that it is not necessary that one has the state of mind that one’s speech act functions to express in order for the speech act to be sincere. However, there are also reasons to doubt that it is sufficient. Consider the following example.

Suppose Sara believes that she does not like vanilla ice-cream, but that she, unbeknownst to herself, actually does like vanilla ice-cream. Now, suppose that Sara wants to infiltrate the factories where ice-cream is made in order to stop production. Her only way of achieving this goal is by gaining access to a special place where only true ice-cream junkies are allowed, a place which is closed off to people whom the guards think dislike vanilla ice-cream. Hence, upon trying to gain entrance she is being asked whether she likes vanilla ice-cream, but in responding she does not voice the preference she thinks she has. Rather, by saying “Vanilla ice-cream, yummy” she gives expression to a desire for vanilla ice-cream. In this example, Sara’s speech act expresses a state of mind she does not think she has. However, since she actually has the state of mind expressed by her speech act it will, according to Sincerity as Showing, count as sincere. But this seems counterintuitive. After all, it seems reasonable to think that she is quite deliberately performing a speech act devised to get her interlocutors to come to think that she

¹¹ The considerations advanced below are very similar to the kind of considerations Ridge (2006) advances. See also Joyce (2002).

likes vanilla ice-cream, which is something that she does not think she likes. In fact, this seems to be a paradigmatic example of a person who speaks insincerely. Consequently, it does not seem to be sufficient that one has the state of mind that one's speech act functions to express for the speech act to be sincere.

It may be objected that the kind of counterexamples advanced are inconclusive. Michael's speech act is, it may be argued, communicatively virtuous, but it does not demonstrate that Michael is sincere. Indeed, the argument rules out the possibility of being inadvertently insincere, which some may think quite possible. However, others are likely to think that this is wrong and insist that insincerity in speech must *aim* at misrepresenting oneself and therefore something that cannot be inadvertent.

It may also be argued that the second example is unpersuasive. Rather, since Sara's speech act accurately shows what is in her mind it should still count as sincere. She may be disingenuous alright, but that does not by itself show that her speech act was not sincere. Indeed, someone may think that there are common ways of being misleading, even intentionally misleading, while being perfectly sincere.¹² However, others are likely to agree with Bernard Williams when he writes that "insincere assertions do have the aim of misinforming the hearer" (Williams 2002, p. 74) and insofar as they aim to misinform we have good reasons to think that what is said is insincere. People seem to have radically different intuitions about these matters and whether people like Sara and Michael are sincere or not in what they say. Indeed, the best explanation of this is probably that there is more than one conception of sincerity in speech.

5 Conceptions of sincerity in speech

When a speaker asserts, e.g., it is raining, what he says (standardly) communicates information about (1) her putative state of mind and (2) about the world. In asserting that it is raining, (1) is accomplished in virtue of the expression relation and (2) is accomplished in virtue of the reporting relation, i.e., saying that something is the case. This allows a speaker to mislead his interlocutor about (1) or (2) or both (1) and (2). The latter is probably most common. I mislead you about my beliefs in order to mislead you about the facts, but it is the more marginal cases that are most interesting. Suppose that it is raining and that our protagonist believes that it is raining. Now, suppose she asserts "It is raining" and thereby aims to inform her interlocutor (who is ignorant about the weather and the speaker's actual beliefs) of her putative belief, but that she counts on her interlocutor to infer that it is not raining because he thinks our protagonist generally unreliable. Or suppose that our protagonist misrepresents her putative beliefs in order to get her interlocutor to acquire a true belief about the world. What should we say about the sincerity or insincerity of the speech acts in the respective examples? I doubt people have uniform intuitions about this.

Nevertheless, what matters to evaluate the sincerity of what is said, it seems, depend on what the speech act in question functions to *express* rather than reports.

¹² These arguments were suggested by an anonymous reviewer.

One reason for thinking this is that speech acts that intuitively express states of mind, but do not report anything, (e.g., an exclamation of “Hurrah”) are capable of being either sincere or insincere. The reporting relation, on the other hand, seems essential to evaluate an utterance as either true or false and, as a consequence, important to determine whether an assertion is truthful or a lie.¹³ This also explains why an exclamation of “Hurrah” intuitively cannot be used to tell a lie. All in all, this seems to suggest that it is the expression relation that matters to the sincerity or insincerity of what is said. This is also supported by the fact that other expressive behaviors, e.g., a smile, may count as sincere or insincere, but since a smile cannot be either true or false, it falls outside the domain of lies and truthfulness.¹⁴

Against this background it seems, in a sense, possible to be intentionally misleading yet speak sincerely. The first example above would be a case in point. Our protagonist expresses a belief she has in order to deceive her interlocutor about the facts. Moreover, as the second example suggests, it also seems possible to be insincere, yet, in a sense, not misleading. However, things are more complicated than this. Consider the following example.

If we read the lives of the Saints, we see how they manage to avoid lying in crises. St Athanasius was rowing on a river when the persecutors came rowing in the opposing direction: “Where is the traitor Athanasius?” “Not far away”, the Saint gaily replied, and rowed past them unsuspected (quoted from Williams 2002, p. 102).

Insofar as lying requires saying something (believed to be) false it seems true that Athanasius did not lie as the Catholic canon, from which this example derives, indeed suggests. But what about the sincerity or insincerity of what he said? Athanasius’ words do not seem to express a belief that he does not have. Rather, it seems very plausible indeed to think that Athanasius believes that Athanasius is not far away. Nevertheless, his utterance seems to imply that he does not know where Athanasius is and it must be obvious to Athanasius that this is the inference his interlocutors will draw. Consequently, he seems to be aiming to misinform the persecutors, which seems to make it reasonable to think that his words are used deceptively in some sense (we will return to this example in Sect. 8).

¹³ A problem is that “truthful” sometimes is used pretty much as synonymous with “sincere.” Here I intend “truthful” to be taken as an antonym to “lie” where lying requires saying something false (together with an intention to deceive one’s interlocutor). Of course, not everyone is of the opinion that lies are necessarily false, but merely require that the speaker issues “an intentional deceptive message in the form of a statement” (Bok 1978, p. 15), i.e., saying what he thinks is false (together with an intention to deceive one’s interlocutor). However, a problem with the latter view, is that it is difficult to see what the speaker lies about if what he says is true (although he believes it is false). Suppose Jane believes that Bush still is the American president, but wants to deceive John about the facts. Jane therefore says “Obama is the American president” (which is true) and since Jane is an authority on politics John acquires the belief that Obama is the American president. Did Jane lie to John? If this is your intuition, what did Jane lie about? It seems odd to say that she lied about who is the American president. She tried to lie about this, but failed. My intuition is that Jane is insincere in what she says, but she does not lie—although she tried to.

¹⁴ See Ekman (2009) for an alternative view.

In conveying information about the world we often trust our interlocutors to take the kind of belief we convey having as a reason for acquiring beliefs of their own. When I assert “It is raining” you think I say what I believe is true and trusting me you take my putative belief as a reason to acquire the belief yourself. However, it may also be argued that the speaker’s beliefs do not always play the kind of role attributed to them above. Rather, it may be argued that an interlocutor does not come to believe that p because he thinks that the speaker believes that p . This is how a number of philosophers understand the role of testimony. David Owens, for instance, writes that “learning that p by trusting someone’s assertion is not a matter of learning that p from the fact that they believe that p ” (Owens 2006, p. 119). Thus, when I assert that p , believing that p is false, I may not intend to get you to believe that I believe that p is true which seems to be a prerequisite for intentionally deceiving you about my belief. Rather, I may simply trust that you will come to believe that p simply in virtue of my assertion that p . Since the speaker’s beliefs are not part of what is being communicated or provided as a reason for believing, it may seem as if what is said cannot be either sincere or insincere. One may therefore wonder whether this would qualify as a lie short of being insincere. Again, I doubt that intuitions will be uniform.

But what explains the lack of uniform intuitions about the kinds of cases we have considered above? For instance, how do we best account for our diverse intuitions about whether or not, e.g., Michael exclaiming “Cherries, yummy” is sincere or not? The best explanation, I think, is that there is more than one conception of sincerity in speech at work. For instance, someone who accepts the standard conception will most likely find Sara sincere in what she says despite her deceptive intention since all that sincerity requires is that one is in the state of mind that one’s utterance functions to express. A person who accepts a conception of sincerity that puts more weight on the speaker’s intention not to deceive, however, is bound to have different intuitions. This suggests that our conception of sincerity in speech is ambivalent between a number of different conceptions.¹⁵ Hence, rather than trying to settle which conception is the right one—an issue which one may well suspect there is no fact of the matter—we will examine a couple of conceptions which, for instance, makes sense of the intuition that Michael is sincere despite the fact that he does not have the kind of state of mind his speech act functions to express.

6 Sincerity as spontaneity

Think before you act! This is a common, and often valuable, piece of advice. This advice also applies to *speech acts*. Thinking before speaking may be advisable because it gives us time to censure ourselves and assess the possible consequences of our words. Sometimes giving expression to what one believes or how one really feels may be, e.g., impolite or hurtful. We may therefore choose to adjust what we say to be, e.g., more polite or less hurtful. As should be evident, this kind of

¹⁵ One explanation of this may be due to the alleged fact that our conception of sincerity has changed throughout history. See e.g., Trilling (1972) and Williams (2002).

censorship and adjustment will often prevent us from giving expression to what we really think and feel. This suggests that our true selves are revealed in our spontaneous verbal behavior. If we do not censure ourselves, what we really believe or feel is what we will give voice to. Indeed, for Bernard Williams, “[s]incerity at the most basic level is simply openness, a lack of inhibition” (Williams 2002, p. 75). Call this conception Sincerity as Spontaneity.

Sincerity as Spontaneity: Sincerity at the most basic level is simply openness, a lack of inhibition.

Does this conception require that the speaker is in the state of mind his or her words function to express? First, a spontaneous assertion, as Williams understands it, “does not typically involve a special exercise of Accuracy, namely, Accuracy in discovering what it is that I believe” (Williams 2002, p. 76). But if spontaneity does not involve any attempt of discovering what it is that we believe or feel, it seems possible that what we spontaneously assert may not be what we actually believe or feel. For instance, my asserting “There is milk in the refrigerator” may not reflect my belief that there is milk in the refrigerator. I may actually believe that there is no milk in the refrigerator. Sometimes when we spontaneously assert something we are quick to correct what we assert as not giving voice to our actual belief. At other times, this is not so easy. Consider a case of self-deception. Although I spontaneously assert that my girlfriend is not having an affair it may be possible that I know that it is false. Moreover, it may be suggested that e.g., mythomaniacs spontaneously assert what they *do not* believe. This suggests that, e.g., a spontaneous assertion that p will not guarantee that the speaker believes that p .¹⁶ Nevertheless, it may be true that the basic spontaneity of asserting something explains why “we are disposed to come out with what we believe” (Williams 2002, p. 75) more often than not. This may, in turn, explain why there is a conception of sincerity where spontaneity is central.

By contrast, Williams writes, “insincerity requires me to adjust the content of what I say” (Williams 2002, p. 75). This takes us back to the point made at the beginning of this section. It is true that speaking insincerely often requires that we adjust the content of what we say and that spontaneity often mirrors what is in the heart or mind of the speaker. However, sincerity in speech is clearly not always the result of spontaneity. For instance, in exclaiming “Cherries, yummy,” Michael is trying to present himself as he takes himself to be. This is quite consistent with him doing his best to find out what he likes. What gives us reason to think that he is sincere in saying what he does is that he is trying to present himself as he takes himself to be. Hence, it seems plausible to think that there must be a conception where this idea is central.

¹⁶ It may be argued that Williams does not think that it is possible to spontaneously assert a belief that is not one’s actual belief. On the other hand, there are passages which suggests that he is open to the possibility that a spontaneous assertion that p may be caused by, e.g., a desire that p rather than a belief that p (83). However, unless the speaker has the belief, Williams would presumably deny that the assertion is sincere (71, 73).

7 Sincerity as presenting oneself as one takes oneself to be

One of the intuitions that may lead one to think that Michael in exclaiming “Cherries, yummy” is speaking sincerely despite the fact that he actually dislikes cherries is that he is expressing a state of mind which he thinks he has. This is what may lead one to doubt that actually having the state of mind one’s speech act express is necessary for speaking sincerely. Rather, what seems to matter is whether the speaker believes he has the state of mind he expresses. In relation to assertion, D. H. Mellor, for instance, has suggested such an idea. “Sincere assertion,” Mellor writes, “is saying what one assents to, that is what one believes one believes, not just what one believes” (Mellor 1978, p. 97). Generalizing this idea, the sincerity of a speech act depends on whether or not the speaker believes that he is in the state of mind his speech act functions to express. The central idea, according to this conception, is that the speaker is trying to present himself as he takes himself to be. However, in trying to present ourselves as we take ourselves to be, we may for different reasons, e.g., because we lack in self-knowledge, miss the mark yet this does not, intuitively, rule out the possibility of speaking sincerely.

However, not only do we sometimes lack in self-knowledge and therefore sometimes express states of mind which we mistakenly believe we have, but it also seems possible to be mistaken about what kind of state of mind a particular speech act functions to express. Of course, this possibility is most obvious given that words are governed by some kind of expressive conventions, e.g., saying “Thanks” is a conventional means of expressing gratitude. However, it also seems possible given that expression depends on intention—at least insofar as we can be mistaken about what kind of state of mind we intend to make manifest. Consider the following example (using conventional expression for sake of simplicity).

Elvis does not think that “Sorry” functions to express regret, but shame. These two emotions often travel in pair, but not always. When Elvis realized that he had offended Priscilla he felt no regret. He did, however, experience shame. He therefore thought it apt to say “Sorry.” In the situation at hand Elvis did not have the emotion that is conventionally expressed by his speech act, but he thinks he has the emotion that he thinks his speech act functions to express. Again, what matters to speaking sincerely, it may be argued, is not merely that the speaker believes that she has the attitude that her speech act actually functions to express, but that she believes that she has the attitude she believes that her speech act functions to express. Considerations along these lines lead Michael Ridge (2006) to advance the following conception which we may call Sincerity as Presenting Oneself as one Takes Oneself to be:

Sincerity as Presenting Oneself as one Takes Oneself to be: A speech act is sincere if and only if the speaker believes that he is in the state of mind that he believes the speech act functions to express.

I think both Mellor and Ridge’s respective conceptions capture something intuitively correct. The reason why someone like Michael is speaking sincerely when he exclaims “Cherries, yummy” despite the fact that he does not like cherries

at all is that he tries to present himself as he takes himself to be. It is an example of a person who does his best not to mislead his audience.¹⁷

However, it may nevertheless be doubted that the conception just outlined does total justice to the sense in which Michael is *trying* to present himself as he takes himself to be and thereby not to mislead his audience. After all, in ordinary communication we do more than just present ourselves as we take ourselves to be; we also *intend* to inform our interlocutors about our states of mind. In the next section we consider a conception of sincerity in speech which emphasizes the relevance of the speaker's intention in communicating her states of mind. We will also see that it seems plausible to think that sincerity in speech sometimes requires being properly justified in expressing the state of mind one thinks one's words function to express.

8 Sincerity as a communicative virtue

One of the most salient features of ordinary communication is that we intend to inform each other about our states of mind and about the world. When I assert that John stole the car I want to get you to think that I believe that John stole the car and on basis of this acquire the belief that John stole the car. Even if it is true that the speaker's beliefs play little role in testimony (see Sect. 5), the speaker's states of mind do seem to play an important role in paradigmatic examples of communication. For instance, if you assert that *p*, I may see no reason to acquire the belief that *p* unless I have some reason to think that you believe that *p* and that you are a reliable source of information. Even if there are cases where forming a belief about, e.g., Johnny's whereabouts "on basis of being told where he is, is just as direct a process (and just as indirect) as forming a belief about where Johnny is on the basis of seeing him there" (Millikan 2004, p. 120), they seems to be exceptions rather than the rule.¹⁸

Although the speaker's intention to deceive his interlocutors seems to be of great significance in understanding what it is to speak insincerely, very little has been said about the relevance of the intention to (as accurately as possible) inform one's interlocutors in relation to understanding what it is to speak sincerely. In this section we outline a conception of sincerity in communication which emphasizes the speaker's intention to inform his hearer about his states of mind. Begin by considering the following passage from Richard Moran.

[A] teacher is examining a student and asks him to describe the chief causes of the American Civil War, and the student dutifully outlines the causes as they

¹⁷ It may be argued that this conception implies that young children, who are known not to have a theory of mind, including of their own, cannot be sincere when they perform speech acts. According to this conception, this may well be right. My own intuitions are divided, but I tend to find it quite difficult to see that very young children are, in the relevant sense, truthful or deceitful. Indeed, part of the reason why may well be that they lack an adequate conception of other minds. See Breheny (2006) for a thorough discussion of the kind of role that a theory of mind plays in different accounts of communication.

¹⁸ See also Green (2007a, p. 11).

were presented in the lectures, which let us assume, downplayed the role of slavery in the origins of the conflict (Moran 2005, p. 330).

In dutifully outlining the causes as presented in the lectures Moran sees “no reason to deny that the student is engaged in making assertions when he says things like ‘The issue of the scope of the and authority of the federal government divided North and South for reasons quite independent of the extensions of slavery to the new territories’” (Moran 2005, p. 330). However, suppose that the student was unconvinced by the origins of the conflict as the teacher outlined them in the lectures. Should this lead us to conclude that the student’s assertions are insincere? Consider the following passage pertinent to this question.

[I]n such a situation I don’t see why it should be the aim of the student to be misinforming the teacher about his beliefs on the matter [...]. In situations like these the beliefs of the speaker need not enter in as an object of concern at all. The teacher may simply want to know that the student has understood the lectures and can discourse on them (Moran 2005, p. 330).

Moran seems to draw two conclusions from this. First, “not all assertions aim to be informative or mis-informative at all, either about the facts themselves or about the beliefs of the speaker” (Moran 2005, p. 330). Second, he seems to think that the student “speaks insincerely” (Moran 2005, p. 330) due to the fact that the student is unconvinced by the lectures—despite the fact that he is not aiming to misinform the teacher about anything.

This is part of a larger criticism of Williams’ view that there is a significant asymmetry between sincere and insincere speech acts in the sense that “sincere assertions do not necessarily have the aim of informing the hearer; but insincere assertions do have the aim of misinforming the hearer” (Williams 2002, p. 74). Moran seems to think that *neither* sincerity nor insincerity requires the aim of informing or misinforming the hearer.

I am not convinced by Moran’s reasoning. In fact, it seems to me that given the presupposition that the purpose of communicating beliefs is suspended questions about the sincerity or insincerity of what is said are likely to not arise at all. Moran’s reason for thinking that the student’s beliefs “need not enter in as an object of concern” is because the “teacher may simply want to know that the student has understood the lectures and can discourse on them.”¹⁹ Should we really expect questions about either the sincerity or insincerity of what is said to arise under such circumstances? Suppose the teacher accuses the student of speaking insincere. That would, given the purpose of the conversation, be very strange. Consider another

¹⁹ It may be argued that Moran’s example does not plausibly demonstrate that the student’s beliefs do not enter in as an object of concern at all. If the teacher wants to know whether the student has understood, then he will be concerned with the student’s beliefs. What else could understanding be? Well, it could be used to mean that the student is capable of explaining the causes and effects of certain events, drawing certain inferences and so on given what was said in the lectures. In some sense, it may nevertheless be argued, the student’s beliefs will enter in as objects of concern. Be that as it may, given the student’s communicative aim I still see no reason to think that sincerity or insincerity (in the relevant sense) will be an issue. This is what my use of Moran’s example is meant to illustrate. An anonymous reviewer pressed this objection.

student who in fact was convinced by the lectures. Suppose the teacher praises that student for speaking sincerely. That would, again given the purpose of the conversation, be equally strange. What would the teacher be criticizing or praising the student for in the respective examples? Not for misinforming or informing the teacher about how he takes himself to be. After all, we are assuming that neither of the two students aim to inform or misinform the teacher. Of course, it may be suggested that the first student expresses beliefs she actually has. This is indeed true. However, given the purpose of the conversation, the reason for which the student says what she does is not because she has certain beliefs about the Civil war.²⁰ Given that the purpose of the conversation is for the students to demonstrate that they have understood the lecture, it seems quite strange to raise questions about the sincerity or insincerity of what is said.

However, suppose that one of the student's actually was trying to inform or misinform the teacher about his beliefs. That, it seems, would transform the example into an example where the speaker intends his words to be taken as a reason for thinking that he is in a particular state of mind. Under such circumstance, questions about the sincerity or insincerity of what is said, in contrast to Moran's example, makes perfect sense. This suggests a conception of sincerity in speech according to which the speaker's intention to inform his interlocutor about his states of mind is relevant. When we assess the sincerity of what is said we are interested in whether the speaker thinks he has the kind of state of mind he *intends* to get his interlocutors to think he has. Consider some other examples.

For instance, it seems quite possible to make an assertion or perform some other speech act functioning to express a state of mind (and/or think that one's words function to express states of mind) without intending to inform anyone about one's beliefs. For example, as Williams writes, "people constantly come out with truths which they know are as plain to their hearers as to themselves, and if P is such a plain truth, the speaker will still have asserted that P" (Williams 2002, pp. 71–72). In such examples, Williams argues that it simply is not true that a person who asserts that P "has to think that he is informing his hearer" (Williams 2002, p. 71). However, our interest is not merely confined to assertion as such, but speech more generally, but as Green writes,

...we do not always express ourselves for communicative purposes. For instance I might simply vent my rage towards the heavens, or for that matter my car, without expecting that anyone can or will hear me. Or I might utter an expletive as I accidentally slam my shin on a door frame. In these cases I am expressing my rage without directing the expression towards any audience (Green 2007a, p. 31).

What should we say about the sincerity or insincerity of what is said when a speaker expressing him- or herself without intending to inform anyone about his beliefs, emotions or the like? In Williams' example the purpose or aim of making

²⁰ This should be evident given a counterfactual case where her beliefs about the Civil war are different. In such a scenario it seems plausible to think that what she says will not change. Hence, her actual beliefs about the Civil war do not really seem to matter.

the assertion is not to communicate beliefs, but to teach someone how to use language. Even if we think that the words used function to express states of mind we are not the least interested in whether the speaker has the expressed state of mind. Again, this is a situation in which it would be very strange to raise questions about the sincerity and insincerity of what is said. This also seems true with respect to Green's example.²¹ Suppose Carl's accidentally slams his shin on a door frame and utters "Damn" which is a speech act he thinks expresses a state of mind he has, but should we say Carl's expletive is sincere? Of course, someone who expresses a state of mind he has may be considered sincere in the sense of showing what is within, but there seems to be a conception of sincerity in speech which concerns the sincerity of speech aimed at informing one's interlocutors about one's states of mind. Consider the following passage from Lionel Trilling.

In French literature sincerity consists in telling the truth about oneself to oneself and to others; by truth is meant a recognition of such of one's own traits or actions as are morally or socially discreditable and, in conventional course, concealed. English sincerity does not demand this confrontation of what is base or shameful in oneself. The English ask of the sincere man that he communicate without deceiving or misleading (Trilling 1972, p. 58).

Let us disregard the possible cultural differences. What is interesting, for our purposes, is that sincerity is said to consist in *telling* the truth about oneself to oneself or to others or *communicating without deceiving or misleading*. The reason why it intuitively may seem strange to raise questions about the sincerity or insincerity in the examples above is that the speakers are not using words to *tell or communicate* something about himself or herself to anyone. In these examples, borrowing the words from Harry Frankfurt, "the usual assumptions about the connection between what people say and what they believe are suspended" (Frankfurt 2005, p. 36). This is why questions about sincerity (where sincerity is a kind of communicative virtue) of what is said do not arise.²²

However, in the most paradigmatic communicative situations a speaker who asserts that *p* intends his interlocutor to think that he believes that *p* and/or intends to get her to believe that *p*. This is presumably one reason why Williams (2002) thinks assertion is placed "firmly in the context of one person's *telling* something to another" (Williams 2002, p. 71), i.e., using words with the intention to inform or misinform one's interlocutors about one's state or mind and/or the facts. Hence, we do not merely present ourselves as we take ourselves to be, but in addition to presenting ourselves as we take ourselves to be we also aim to inform our

²¹ See also Green 2007a, p. 61.

²² It should be noted that I am not saying that questions about the sincerity of what is said do not arise unless the speaker is intending to inform someone. Suppose I am being interrogated by some crooked cops who are absolutely sure I did the crime. I realize this, and so realize that I have no chance of convincing them of my innocence. Suppose further that I am in fact innocent. When I assert "I'm innocent" it seems plausible to think I am sincere in what I say, in spite the fact that I have no intention of informing the cops of my state of mind. To have such an intention, I would have to believe it was possible to convince them, but I do not believe it possible. It may be agreed that I am given the circumstances, in a sense, speaking sincerely, but in another sense developed in this section, what I say is not communicatively sincere.

interlocutors about our beliefs, emotions and moods. In other words, we intend our words to provide reasons for our interlocutors to think we have certain states of mind. Call this conception Sincerity as Communicative Virtue.²³

Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue: A speech act is communicatively sincere if and only if the speaker (a) believes that she is in the state of mind that she believes her utterance functions to express and (b) desires that her interlocutor comes to believe, on basis of what is said, that she is in the state of mind that she believes her words functions to express.

However, maybe more is required to do justice to the sense in which sincerity in communication aims not to mislead or deceive one's interlocutors. Recall the example involving Athanasius considered in Sect. 5. When his persecutors asks Athanasius where Athanasius is he answers "Not far away." Athanasius does indeed say something true. Moreover, it seems as if Athanasius has the belief he thinks his words function to express. This, it seems, gives us reason to think that he is quite sincere in what he says. However, his words also imply (or (indirectly) express if you prefer) that he does not know where Athanasius is (perhaps in virtue of something like Grice's maxim of relevance). It seems plausible to think that Athanasius is aware of this and it consequently seems as if he is trying to mislead his persecutors by saying what he does (at the very least, he knows that his words will mislead them). Since this is the case, Athanasius cannot be considered communicatively virtuous despite the fact that he is a Saint. Maybe we should add a condition like the following in order to rule out cases like this.²⁴ A speech act is communicatively sincere if conditions (a) and (b) are satisfied and the speaker

(c) does not desire that her interlocutor, on basis of what is said, comes to believe that the speaker is in a state of mind that the speaker thinks she does not have.

When Athanasius says "Not far away" he must be aware of the fact that his words will lead his interlocutors to think that he does not know where Athanasius is which he surely knows. Hence, a person who is communicatively virtuous should aim to avoid using words that will lead his interlocutors to infer that he has/has not states of mind he does not think he has.

However, it may be suggested that there still is an aspect of an adequate conception of Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue (or maybe conceptions of sincerity more generally) missing from the conception outlined thus far. Suppose that the speaker's belief about the state of mind she believes she is expressing is entirely unjustified or even naïve. It may under such conditions seem unintuitive to think that the speaker is communicatively sincere in what she says. Consider the following example. David is a sex addict. He has on numerous occasions been unfaithful to his wife and repeatedly promised to stop sleeping around. However, he has constantly failed in his efforts. No sooner than he has made his promise he finds

²³ This label was suggested by an anonymous reviewer.

²⁴ Other relevant examples include, for instance, a person who says "Someone has been reading you mail" implying that it is not the speaker who is the culprit.

himself in bed with another woman. Nevertheless, when he makes the promise he thinks he has the intention he gives expression to. Should we really think that David promising for the umpteenth time is sincere in what he says? We know that he is destined to fail to abide by the promise just made and this should be something that he knows as well.²⁵ If the speaker lacks the proper justification for thinking, e.g., that he has the will-power necessary to keep the promise, then the sincerity of what is said seems undermined. The speaker is not, in the relevant sense, being communicatively virtuous. But suppose David just returned from rehab where he was treated for his sex addiction and now thinks he has the required will-power to abide by his promise. This, it may seem reasonable to argue, makes a justificatory difference. It makes it more plausible for David to think that he now will have the required strength of will to abide by his promise. Since this is the case it is intuitively much more reasonable to think his promise was communicatively sincere.

What this example suggests is that sincerity, in the sense of being a communicative virtue, at least sometimes, requires that the speaker is justified in expressing the state of mind he thinks his words express. But how often does a speaker need to have some justification for counting as communicatively sincere? Consider assertions. Timothy Williamson (2002), for instance, has argued that the norm for assertion is knowledge. In order for a speaker to be warranted in asserting that *p* he or she should consequently know that *p*. Maybe this is too demanding. It may still be argued that being warranted in asserting that *p* requires being justified to some extent. For instance, it seems rather plausible to think that a speaker who asserts that *p*, in a sense, promises that he is warranted in asserting what he does. After all, our interlocutors rely on us in acquiring beliefs not only about our states of mind but also (often as a consequence of forming beliefs about our states of mind) about the world. This is often important, in different ways, for their future actions and expectations. Trust is therefore often essential in communication. Depending on the relation between speaker and addressee, the participants have different communicative expectations. This, it seems, explains why we (often) expect that a speaker who, e.g., asserts that *p*, is warranted in asserting what he does, i.e., that he has taken the trouble to make sure that the belief is true. Similarly, we (often) expect that someone who promises to *p* has taken the trouble to make sure that she really is in a position to keep the promise and so on. This would explain why it is reasonable to think that someone who lacks proper warrant for saying what she does is not a speaker who is communicatively virtuous. It is a kind of deception, a breach of trust. It is difficult to say exactly how much and what kind of justification that is required. Maybe it depends on the circumstance or maybe it depends on the relevant kind of relation between speaker and addressee. Nevertheless, this suggests that proper warrant should somehow be reflected in a conception of Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue. Hence, in order for a speech act to be communicatively sincere, the speaker

(d) is properly justified in expressing the particular state of mind that she thinks her words function to express.

²⁵ This example was suggested to me by Richard Vester.

Adding this condition to Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue gives us the following conception.

Sincerity as a Communicative Virtue: A speech act is communicatively sincere if and only if the speaker (a) believes that she is in the state of mind that she believes her utterance functions to express, (b) desires that her interlocutor comes to believe, on basis of what is said, that she is in the state of mind that she believes her words functions to express (c) does not desire that her interlocutor, on basis of what is said, comes to believe that the speaker is in a state of mind that the speaker thinks she does not have and (d) is properly justified in expressing the particular state of mind that she thinks her words function to express.

This conception makes intuitive sense of what sincerity in communicating what is in our heart and mind, through the use of words, require.

9 Concluding remarks

The concept of “sincerity” is, I have argued, a multifaceted concept, but where does this leave us? In order to answer this question, consider a different, yet similar, case. There is not just one conception of “meaning.” For instance, we happily shift between speaker and word meaning. The word “boulder” means large rounded stone block, but a speaker can use it to mean, for instance, a kilo of cocaine.²⁶ There would be no point in arguing about which conception of meaning is *the* right one. The conceptions are simply assigned different tasks. This, I maintain, is equally true with respect to “sincerity.” Moreover, as with different conceptions of meaning, like speaker and word meaning, we should see what kinds of tasks different conceptions of sincerity are best suited for. So, what tasks are the different conceptions suited for? Let us end this paper by considering a couple of different ideas.

We value sincerity in speech and “sincerity” is very often used as a term of praise. Sincerity is very important to us. Indeed, “public opinion polls time and again show that honesty is among the top five characteristics people want in a leader, friend or lover” (Ekman 2009, pp. 124–125). As indicated at the outset of this paper, there seems to be a number of different explanations of this. One explanation is that we want words to reflect what the speaker believes and feels. However, actually getting things right does not seem to be what matters most when people use “sincerity” as a term of praise. This is plausibly why someone who is trying to misrepresent himself, but accidentally gets things right, is not someone whom we would praise for speaking sincerely, but rather someone whom we would criticize for speaking insincerely. Sincerity, in its (or one of its) everyday sense, is in one sense more requiring. It requires that people *try* to get things right, i.e., that the speaker (thinks her words) functions to express a state of mind that she thinks she has. However, in another sense it is less requiring; it does not require that we express what is actually in our heart or mind. This suggests that the relevant

²⁶ This example is taken from Davis (2003).

conception suited for the task of praise and blame is the one advanced in the previous section.

In philosophy, on the other hand, the use of “sincerity” is not always used as a term warranting praise. For instance, when “sincerity” is invoked in relation to speech acts it is devised to play a theoretical role and not first and foremost meant to square with ordinary peoples’ intuitions about ascriptions of sincerity and its connotations. Rather, it is designed to play a wholly different job. Again, in relation to speech acts, where the standard conception of sincerity has its origin, it is simply invoked to demarcate a difference between a person having or not having the kind of state of mind that, e.g., a speaker’s assertion functions to express. Someone who sincerely asserts that *p*, believes that *p*. This, it may be argued, enables us to distinguish between self-expression and more evidential forms of expression, i.e., a person expressing *his* or *the* belief that *p* where the latter merely warrants us thinking that the speaker has the belief. By asserting something sincerely a person performs an act that, because of the sincerity of what is said, shows her belief.²⁷

This suggests that different conceptions of “sincerity” are designed for radically different tasks. If this is right, then it should be obvious why the kind of criticism advanced against Sincerity as Showing in Sect. 4 miss their mark. Moreover, it suggests that arguing that there is *one* true conception is bound to fail. Rather, we should acknowledge the many facets of “sincerity” and be more careful about what facet we are using.

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