

Reactive Attitudes as Communicative Entities*

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Abstract

Many theorists claim that the reactive emotions, even in their private form, are communicative entities. But as widely endorsed as this claim is, it has not been redeemed: the literature lacks a clear and compelling account of the sense in which reactive attitudes qua private mental states are essentially communicative. In this paper, I fill this gap. I propose that it is apt to characterize privately held reactive attitudes as communicative in nature because they, like many paradigmatic forms of communication, have representational content and the function of evoking uptake of this content in a recipient.

1. Introduction

In “Freedom and Resentment,” P.F. Strawson famously identified the reactive attitudes—resentment, indignation, gratitude and approval—as playing a key role in our practices of holding others responsible (2008).¹ Many have

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¹ Strictly speaking, resentment, gratitude, indignation and approval are not exhaustive of the class of reactive attitudes. In addition to these *other*-regarding attitudes, there are the *self*-regarding reactive attitudes of guilt and self-approbation. I mention only the other-regarding reactive attitudes here because my aim in this paper is to redeem the claim that *they* are communicative in nature. I wish to remain agnostic about whether the self-regarding attitudes are communicative. Thus, in this paper, when I use the term “reactive attitudes” I am referring only to the other-regarding forms unless otherwise specified.

taken up this idea, identifying these emotions and their expressions as paradigmatic instances of praise and blame (Darwall 2006; Wallace 1996; Watson 1996). We blame both when we express our resentment (“You jerk!”) and when we keep it buried in our hearts. We praise both when we approve of another and when we express this approval (“That was a lovely thing to do”).

One of the most widely recognized features of the reactive attitudes is their communicative nature. To be sure, theorists put the point in a variety of ways. McGeer, for example, identifies the reactive attitudes as “forms of communication” (2013, 181). Watson, in “Responsibility and the Limits of Evil,” characterizes them as “incipient forms of communication” (2008, 122). In later work, he calls them “incipiently communicative” (2011, 328). Helm (2012, 224) and McKenna (2012, 88) tend to follow Watson’s original formulation, while Smith (2013, 39, 44) echoes his more recent claim. Often too we find the communication claim rendered in the language of address. Watson identifies the reactive attitudes as “incipient forms of moral address” (2008, 124). McGeer tells us that they “constitute a system of moral address” (2012, 316). And Darwall suggests that the reactive attitudes “implicitly address” their targets (2010, 265). But despite the variety of locutions used, theorists are all on to the same thing: the reactive attitudes have an inherently communicative nature.²

This claim—what I will call the “communication claim”—is not just widespread but crucial to debates about the capacities necessary for morally responsible agency (Watson 2008, 2011; Darwall 2006; Shoemaker 2007). Communicative acts are intelligibly directed only toward those who have the capacity to give them uptake—it is, for instance, unintelligible to say “Hi” to a tree. If blame is a form of communication, then like other forms of communication, it has uptake constraints on its intelligibility. Inasmuch as a morally responsible agent just is an intelligible target of blame, intelligibility constraints on blame translate into conditions on morally responsible agency. Thus, theorists who divide on the question of blame’s status as a communicative entity, also divide on the capacities needed for morally responsible agency. For example, Watson endorses the communication claim and thus holds that the capacity for uptake is necessary for morally responsible agency. T.M. Scanlon rejects the former and thus also the latter (Scanlon 1998, 2008, 2013).

² The claim that the reactive attitudes are essentially communicative is often accompanied by the claim that they are a specific kind of communication, namely demands (see, for example, Darwall (2006)). I have argued elsewhere that construing them as demands is untenable (Macnamara 2013a, 2013b). But since demands are not the only kind of communication (invitations, hails, etc.), the fact that they are not demands does not imply that they are not forms of communication.

If the communication claim is both widely endorsed and weight-bearing, it is also puzzling. Watson, Darwall, McGeer, Helm, McKenna and arguably Walker all extend the communication claim to the reactive attitudes in their private form. How though can a private mental state be essentially communicative? We sometimes express our emotions, and these expressions are clearly communicative acts, but often we keep them to ourselves. We may feel gratitude but never get around to saying “Thank you,” or again, we might feel resentment but keep it buried in our hearts. The claim that emotions themselves, absent expression, are essentially communicative in nature cries out for explanation.

This need is not obviated when theorists characterize the reactive attitudes as merely *incipiently* or *implicitly* communicative. While this claim is not baldly counterintuitive, it is, in a manner of speaking, mysterious. It is simply not clear what it amounts to. What features are being attributed to the reactive attitudes? Without a clear answer to this question we cannot even begin to assess the plausibility of the communication claim.

When we look to the literature for further explanation, we are left wanting. Where one hopes for sustained discussion, we find brief remarks; and while these remarks provide clues, they do not provide clarity. There is, I will argue, a lacuna in the literature. It presently lacks a clear and compelling account of the sense in which the reactive attitudes, even in their private form, are communicative entities.

I aim to fill this gap. I propose that it is apt to characterize the reactive attitudes qua private mental states as communicative in nature because they, like many paradigmatic forms of communication, have representational content and the function of evoking uptake of this content in a recipient.

The paper proceeds as follows. In section two, I critically survey the literature’s attempts to explicate the communication claim.³ In sections three and four, I leave the literature behind and focus on identifying the key characteristics of several core instances of communication. In sections five and six, I explain how this analysis enables us to redeem the claim that reactive attitudes are essentially communicative in nature. In section seven, I highlight two strengths of my view. In conclusion, I return to the literature to, as it were, connect the dots.

2. The Lacuna in the Literature

Theorists have left the project of redeeming the communication claim for another day. They have, however, in the course of pursuing other aims, put forth at least brief explications of the reactive attitudes’ communicative

³ From this point forward, when I refer to the reactive attitudes, I mean to refer to them in their private form, unless I explicitly state otherwise.

nature. In this section, I consider whether any of these explications provide us with a clear and compelling account of the reactive attitudes as communicative entities.

Let's start with Watson's comments in "Responsibility and the Limits of Evil." Watson says,

The reactive attitudes are incipient forms of communication, though not in the sense that resentment et al. are usually communicated; very often, in fact, they are not. Rather, the most appropriate and direct expression of resentment is to address the other with a complaint and a demand (2008, 122–123).

Here the core idea is that the reactive attitudes are incipient forms of communication insofar as their paradigmatic expression is a form of communication.⁴

Watson is surely right that reactive attitudes are so paradigmatically expressed. This alone, however, seems a far too tenuous connection to communication to render the reactive attitudes genuine communicative entities. Though it may be true that the paradigmatic expression of my intention to phi is phi-ing, it will be a steep uphill battle to show that my intention to phi is an incipient phi-ing. So too, though it is true that the reactive attitudes are paradigmatically expressed in communication, it is far from obvious that this fact renders them communicative entities. Much more needs to be said to show that the communicative nature of the reactive attitudes' paradigmatic expressions redounds to them in their private form.⁵

In "The Trouble with Psychopaths," Watson revises his position rendering the connection between the reactive attitudes and communicative acts more robust. He suggests that the reactive attitudes are not merely paradigmatically expressed in forms of communication, but rather that they are "in some elusive sense... 'meant to be expressed'" (2011, 328). Where before there was no teleology, now there is.

Watson's revised position introduces a new difficulty. His claim is self-admittedly vague. Until we identify the "elusive" sense in which these emotions are "meant to be expressed," we will not have a clear account of what renders them communicative in nature. Without a clear account, neither do we have a compelling one. We need to know what features are being attributed to the reactive attitudes before we can assess whether they do in fact have them.

Notably, most proponents of the communication claim forward a very different explication. They unpack the communication claim in terms of

⁴ Wallace makes a similar point (2010, 324).

⁵ For a similar argument, see Scanlon (2008, 233–234).

what I will call the “response claim”: reactive attitudes are conceptually connected to a response from a recipient.⁶ Smith, for example, claims that the reactive attitudes are incipiently communicative in that they “seek some sort of moral recognition of wrongdoing on the part of the blameworthy agent” (2013, 44). In Walker’s words, resentment “both expresses a sense of wrong and calls out to others for recognition and a reparative response” (2006, 136).

As these quotes suggest, theorists tend to be of one mind when it comes to the nature of the recipient’s response. Let me explain. On Strawson’s picture, the reactive attitudes can be either *other*-regarding (resentment, indignation, gratitude and approval) or *self*-regarding (guilt and self-approbation).⁷ The former are responses to *another’s* morally significant conduct; the latter responses to *one’s own* wrongdoing and kindness (Strawson 2008). I, like most theorists, am focusing on the communicative nature of the *other-regarding* reactive attitudes, leaving the question of whether and in what sense their self-regarding cousins are communicative for another day. But this does not mean that we can ignore the self-regarding reactive attitudes entirely. For many who forward the response claim, the self-regarding attitudes play a central role in their picture. The tendency is to suggest that the other-regarding attitudes are conceptually connected to their self-regarding counterparts. Specifically, resentment and indignation are associated with guilt from the wrongdoer, and gratitude and approval with self-approbation from the benefactor.⁸

In the case of the negative reactive attitudes, this association is made frequently.⁹ We saw this, for instance, in the above quote from Smith—to feel guilt is to recognize one’s wrongdoing. Consider also the following quote from Darwall, keeping in mind that, for him, to acknowledge one’s wrong is to feel guilt.¹⁰

⁶ Some theorists *explicitly* unpack the communication claim in terms of the response claim (see, for example, Smith (2013, 44)). Others make this point implicitly by forwarding the communication claim, in, as it were, the same breath as the response claim (see, for example Darwall (2006, 145)).

⁷ The other-regarding reactive attitudes include both the personal and vicarious. The victim or beneficiary of another’s morally significant conduct feels the former—resentment or gratitude. The latter—indignation and approval—are the reactions of third parties to the morally significant conduct of another (Strawson 2008).

⁸ While the strong tendency in the literature is to name guilt and self-approbation as the responses associated with the other-regarding attitudes, some theorists provide a more inclusive list. See, for example, Walker (2006), McGeer (2012, 2013), Helm (2012) and Smith (2008, 2013).

⁹ In addition to Smith and Darwall, who are cited in the main text, also see Shoemaker (2007) and Walker (2006).

¹⁰ Darwall (2006), 71, 79, 112.

...What resentment seeks is not getting back, but the other's acknowledgment of having wrongfully injured one and the other's taking responsibility for what he has done, for example, through compensation and, perhaps, punitive damages (Darwall 2011, 331).

Few theorists carefully consider the positive reactive attitudes, but Helm, an exception on this point, links gratitude to the response of "self-congratulations" (what I am calling self-approbation) (2012, 224).

While theorists arguably speak with one voice about the nature of the *recipient's response*, they articulate the nature of the reactive attitudes' *conceptual connection* to this response in myriad ways. In the above quotes, we saw Smith characterize the reactive attitudes as *seeking* a response, and Walker telling us that they *call out* for a response. This sampling, though, is only a tip of an iceberg. Reactive attitudes, it has been said, "demand," "invite," "call on, upon or for," "urge," "require," "deserve," "aim at," "serve to elicit" and are "successful when they receive" a response.¹¹ And it is not just that theorists each have their own preferred term: a single theorist will often employ several in the course of a single work. Thus, where Watson suggests that the reactive attitudes are in some elusive sense meant to be expressed, the theorists cited above leave us with the idea that the reactive attitudes are in some elusive sense conceptually connected to the responses of self-approbation from benefactors and guilt from wrongdoers.

Obviously, this third explication faces the same problems as Watson's. It simply does not provide us with a clear account of the sense in which reactive attitudes are essentially communicative. And this vagueness renders it impossible to effectively defend. Indeed, some ways of putting the conceptual connection render the response claim deeply counterintuitive. Many use speech act terms—e.g., "demand," "call for," "invite"—to describe the conceptual connection. To say that reactive attitudes are literally demands or invitations for a response just *is* to say that they are communicative acts, indeed a specific kind. This proposal is no more acceptable than when we examined it at the outset.

Over the course of this section, I have argued that the literature's explications of the communication claim fail to provide a clear and compelling account of the sense in which reactive attitudes should be understood as communicative in nature. To be clear, though, my point has *not* been to

¹¹ For "demands," see Walker (2006), 25, 26, 140, 143, 149 and Smith (2008), 369. For "invites," see Walker (2006), 114, 134. For variations on "call for," see Walker (2006), 135, 136, 138; Helm (2011), 230; Smith (2008), 369, 381; McGeer (2012), 303; McGeer (2013), 184; Darwall (2006), 145, 170; and Darwall (2011), 327, 328. For "urge," see Shoemaker (2007), 91. For "requires," see Walker (2006), 138. For "deserves," see Walker (2006), 138. For "aims at," see McGeer (2012), 304. For "serves to elicit," see McGeer (2012), 316. For "succeed when they receive," see Darwall (2006), 86. Finally, for "seeks," see Smith (2013), 40.

deny that the reactive attitudes (1) are paradigmatically expressed in communicative acts, (2) are in some elusive sense meant to be communicated, or (3) are in some elusive sense conceptually connected to the responses of self-appraisal from benefactors and guilt from wrongdoers. In fact, I endorse all of these claims, and the work below bears this out.

3. Communicative Acts

On my view, we can make the most progress by starting afresh: leaving behind the literature and focusing on the concept of communication. Over the next two sections, I highlight a number of key features of paradigmatic instances of communication. In sections five and six, I use this work to redeem the communication claim.

Let's turn, then, to communicative acts, an utterly familiar element of our social lives.¹² Most paradigmatically, our communicative acts involve sending spoken or written words to others. The NPR correspondent communicates with her listening audience when she announces that John Brown is the new president of the United States. My colleague communicates with me when she sends out an email advertising the upcoming colloquium. I communicate with those who pass by my house when I spray paint "Stay off the grass!" on my lawn. These examples, notwithstanding, not all human communication involves words. Sometimes we use gestures, like beckoning, and other signals—think here of flashing one's headlights at the driver of an oncoming car.

What do these various acts have in common? To start, it seems clear that all involve a message. Spoken words, an email, a beckoning gesture and the flashing headlights are all messages. A second common element is the activity of sending. In each of the above cases, the message is sent. Sometimes a message is constituted and sent in a single act—the beckoning gesture. Other times, the message exists prior to the sending—my colleague's email. Whether the message is constituted in the sending or exists prior to it, sending a message always involves doing something that conduces to the message reaching a recipient. Sometimes this involves causing the message to move through space all the way to a recipient—projected vocalized messages are like this. Other times, it is predicated on the reasonable expectation that our recipient will meet us half way. In these cases, sending amounts to what is best described as strategic placement. When I spray paint "Stay off the grass!" on my lawn, I send my message by placing it in a spot where it is likely to be perceived.

¹² My thoughts on communication have been heavily influenced by the work of Mitchell Green. See Green (2007).

Many paradigmatic instances of communication, then, are instances of message sending. But the above communicative acts share another core feature. They are all *for* eliciting a response in a recipient, where that response amounts to uptake of the message sent. The *success* of these acts is indexed to them producing this response. The NPR correspondent's announcement is for getting others to believe that Brown is the new president and achieves success if it has this effect (Millikan 1984, chp 2; Graham 2010). Painting 'no-trespassing' on my lawn is supposed to get people to stay off, and its success depends on people in fact doing so. Finally, the act of beckoning is for getting the beckoned to come hither, and a successful beckoning is one that elicits this response (Searle & Vanderveken 1985).¹³

My point is not simply that the paradigmatic communicative acts surveyed above *can* evoke uptake. The things an item *can do* often outstrip what they are *supposed to do*. A stapler can hold a door ajar and a heart makes thumping sounds, but this is not what staplers and hearts are for. Their success as staplers and hearts is not indexed to them having these effects.

So too, I am not saying that every time an agent performs a communicative act akin to the ones above, she does so with the goal of evoking uptake in mind. We perform communicative acts for many reasons. Sometimes we are merely venting. In fact, the point I am making is not directly concerned with the *agent's* purposes at all.

What I am attributing to the communicative acts above is a kind of non-intentional purposiveness. They are, I am urging, intrinsically directed towards the end of eliciting a response where that response amounts to uptake of the message by a recipient. For some, talk of non-intentional purposiveness may sound mysterious. Fortunately, though, there exists a rich literature devoted to demystifying this kind of teleology: the function literature. This literature dissolves the mystery by articulating what underwrites the sort of attributions we are making when we say that a function of hearts is to pump blood or again that a function of staplers is to fasten papers. Specifically, on the most widely accepted theory of function ascription, the etiological theory, X is a function of an item just in case (1) X is an effect of past tokens of the type and (2) this fact in part explains why current tokens of the type exist.¹⁴ Pumping blood is a function of hearts because past token hearts pumped blood, and this, at least in part, explains why current token hearts exist. New hearts exists because past hearts contributed

¹³ It is likely true that communicative acts can succeed or fail along multiple dimensions. Here, I mean only to imply that *one* of their success conditions is indexed to them producing a response from a recipient.

¹⁴ For literature on function ascription, see Buller (1998, 1999, 2002), Millikan (1984), Neander (1991a, 1991b), Wright (1973), McLaughlin (2001) and Graham (2010, 2012, forthcoming).

to the reproductive success of their possessors by pumping blood. Just so, we have staplers now because past staplers proved to be effective paper fasteners. If past staplers had been rubbish at paper fastening, we would not have made any more.

If this theory of function ascription is correct, then we are right to attribute the function of evoking uptake to the kind of message sending under consideration. Reflection on one's past communicative acts reveals that they have (at least sometimes) evoked uptake of the message in a recipient. Just yesterday, I beckoned one of my children and lo, she came skipping over. To be sure, our communications sometimes fall on deaf ears. But this is not a strike against the function attribution I am proposing. The function of sperm is to fertilize eggs, yet they do this only infrequently. Indeed, relative to the number of sperm produced this almost never occurs. All function ascription requires is that past tokens produced the effect *often enough*. But not only have past communicative acts like our examples evoked uptake, this in part explains why we continue to engage in these sorts of communicative acts. Had previous instances failed to elicit uptake often enough, we would have ceased sending such messages long ago. We would be willing to waste our breath for only so long.

4. Messages

Above we looked at communication as an *activity*. But while forms of communication can be activities, they need not be. The term 'communication' can refer to either the activity of communicating or to the thing that is communicated—that is, to the message itself. The email itself, and not just the sending of it, or again the "No Trespassing" sign itself, not just its posting, is a form of communication.

How then should we understand messages as objects? What, in other words, are the features common to the correspondent's spoken words, my colleague's email, the "No Trespassing" sign, the beckoning gesture and the flashing headlights? For one thing, all have representational content. The correspondent's spoken words represent Brown as the new president; my colleague's email represents the colloquium as occurring at a certain time and place. The "No Trespassing" sign represents passersby as respecting the borders of my lawn; the beckoning gesture, the target as coming hither. As these examples illustrate, some messages—the spoken words and email—represent the world as it is. Others—the sign and gesture—represent the world as it could, or arguably, should be. Nonetheless, they are all in the business of representing the world.

Representational content is not the only feature that our messages share. They, I want to urge, have the kind of non-intentional purposiveness identified above. Our messages have, like the activity of which they are

paradigmatically a part, the function of eliciting a response in a recipient (Kukla & Lance 2009). Even if my colleague drafted but never sent the email, or again even if I picked up a “No Trespassing” sign at the hardware store but never got around to posting it, the sign and email are qua sign and email for eliciting a response. The “No Trespassing” sign is for keeping strangers off my lawn, and the email is for getting me to believe that the colloquium will occur at a certain time and place. Our messages are for evoking a response, even if, or when, they are not used in the activity of communicating.

The etiological theory of function ascription supports this claim. Past token beckoning gestures, spoken words, flashing headlights, “No Trespassing” signs and emails all have evoked responses. This, moreover, in part explains why we continue to create these sorts of messages. If they did not often enough elicit a response, we would stop creating them.¹⁵

We can be more specific about the kind of response messages—or at least the paradigmatic messages above—are meant to evoke. Each of our messages is for eliciting uptake of its representational content. Beckoning gestures represent their targets as coming hither and have the function of getting the target to enact this representation. Just so, the act of flashing one’s headlights at an oncoming driver has the content of the target’s headlights being off. Acts of this kind are for eliciting in the oncoming driver the belief that her headlights are off.

As these examples illustrate, there are different ways of taking up representational content. Sometimes uptake amounts to enactment of the content—making that content true; other times, it consists in taking up the content as true—belief formation. Note that this is by no means exhaustive of the ways of taking up representational content—for example, content can also be taken up emotionally. The appropriate mode of uptake will depend on the kind of message in question. But for now, we can leave these details aside. The core claim here is that messages of the sort at issue have the function of evoking uptake of their representational content in a recipient.

On the picture I am presenting, there is repetition of function over the message and the activity in which it is paradigmatically used. Messages

¹⁵ One might worry that messages themselves do not have the function of eliciting a response because an unsent message does not produce this effect. We see that this worry is unfounded when we remind ourselves that many items paradigmatically require intervention by an agent to fulfill their functions. Think here of hammers and coffee makers. The function of the hammer is to pound in nails and the coffee maker to make coffee. But these items, independent of some action by an agent, are not likely to do what they are supposed to do. The hammer must be hammered with; the coffee maker needs to be turned on, filled with water and coffee grounds etc. These items need to be used in the activity associated with them in order to fulfill their functions. So too with messages.

have the function of evoking uptake of their representational content. Insofar as message sending has the function of eliciting uptake of the message, it too, has the function of eliciting uptake of the message's representational content. On reflection this repetition is precisely what we should expect. Often objects and the activities with which they are associated have the same function. Think here of hammers and hammering, coffee-makers and coffee making, and cars and driving. The function of both hammers and hammering is to pound in nails, of coffee-makers and coffee making to make coffee, and of cars and driving to get us from point A to point B. Messages and message sending are members of this illustrious crowd.

5. Reactive Attitudes as Emotions

With the above explication of communication in hand, I return to the reactive attitudes and the task of explicating the sense in which they are communicative entities.

One thing is obvious: the reactive attitudes, absent expression, are not *communicative acts* in any familiar sense. These involve sending, and reactive attitudes in their private form do not send anything. Indeed, this is just to render one of the earliest points of the paper more precise. We recognized the paradox in claiming that reactive attitudes are communicative acts at the outset. We can now identify the source of the paradox. Sending is the culprit.

But as we now know, not all communicative entities involve sending. Both communicative acts and messages are communicative entities, and the latter have as their core characteristics representational content and the function of eliciting uptake of that content. Over the course of the next three sections, I urge that reactive attitudes share in these two characteristics and that it is in virtue of this that we are justified in making the communication claim.

I begin here with two tasks. First, I make a case for the plausibility of attributing to the reactive attitudes representational content. Second, I turn to the function ascription. Recall that according to the etiological theory, X is a function of an item just in case (1) X is an effect of past tokens of the type and (2) this fact in part explains why current tokens of the type exist. In this section, I render plausible the claim that reactive attitudes meet the first of these two criteria.

Do reactive attitudes have representational content? Philosophers who study emotions certainly tend to think so. It is widely agreed that emotions are intentional mental states, that is, that they represent or are about the world (de Sousa 2013). In particular, theorists tend to agree that emotions represent a feature of the world in evaluative terms. For example, Amanda's

fear of the snake is about the snake and its dangerousness. Kelly's grief over the recent death of her mother is about her mother's death and the loss it represents.

More specifically, emotion types have what theorists call a "formal object." This is the evaluative term specific to each emotion type. For fear, the formal object is dangerousness; for grief, loss. In addition to a formal object, token emotions have particular objects. This is the feature of the world that the emotion represents. The particular object of Amanda's fear is the snake and of Kelly's grief, her mother's death.

So, too, for the species of emotion known as reactive attitudes. They are intentional states that have both a particular and a formal object. Reactive attitudes represent a person (the particular object) as having done something morally significant (the formal object). My resentment of you for betraying my confidences represents you as having injured or offended me. Similarly, my gratitude toward you for timely feedback on my draft represents you as having done me a favor.

Notice that I have drawn support for the claim that reactive attitudes have representational content from what one might have antecedently thought to be an unlikely source. At the outset of the paper it was the reactive attitudes' status as emotions that arguably rendered it counterintuitive to think of them as essentially communicative. Now it is precisely because reactive attitudes are emotions that we can successfully establish that they have representational content. As will presently be clear, reactive attitudes' status as emotions will also be crucial to showing that they plausibly meet the first criterion set out by the etiological theory of function ascription.

The idea that past reactive attitudes have elicited uptake of their representational content begins to gain credibility when we consider that many emotions, reactive attitudes included, produce facial signatures. Over the past thirty years, there has been an explosion of research documenting the non-intentional, expressive behaviors characteristic of and produced by emotions—in particular, facial expressions. Specifically, evidence suggests that there are facial signatures for at least six evolutionarily-based, biologically-determined emotions: disgust, sadness, happiness, anger, fear and surprise (Ekman 2003).¹⁶ The research on complex or higher order emotions—e.g., contempt, jealousy, disappointment, and, most relevant to us, the reactive attitudes—is neither so extensive nor so conclusive, but

¹⁶ For example, we express fear with raised upper eyelids, raised and drawn together brows, and lips stretched horizontally toward one's ears, while one's chin is pulled back (Ekman 2003, 162).

nonetheless exists (Parrott 2000).¹⁷ In short, the evidence suggests what we all intuitively know: that we are hardwired to wear our emotions on our faces.¹⁸

The point here is not that we always wear our emotions, and in particular our reactive attitudes, on our faces; often we don't. The literature discusses what are called display rules—norms that govern the ways in which we intentionally inhibit facial expressions (Ekman 2003). Nor, again, is it to say that emotions are expressed only through the face. There is also posture, vocal modulation and, most obviously, we often intentionally express our emotions via word or gesture: “That was a lovely thing to do,” or “I am so angry with you right now, I could punch a wall!” The point, rather, is that research shows that many emotions have an internal mechanism by which they are capable of rendering themselves public. At the risk of undue anthropomorphization, we might say that many emotions, including the reactive attitudes, are inclined to send themselves to others.

The empirical evidence suggests not only that many emotions produce facial signatures, but also that these signatures themselves tend to produce emotional responses in others (Keltner et al. 2006, 122, 125; Keltner & Haidt 1999, 511; Keltner & Kring 1998, 324; Wilda et al. 2001). Seeing distress on the face of another often evokes sympathy in others (Eisenberg et al. 1989). Angry faces have been shown to elicit fear (Dimberg & Ohman 1996). And fearful faces produce fear in conspecifics (Hatfield et al. 1994).

¹⁷ The claim that more complex emotions also have facial signatures is supported by the theory that the complex emotions are built up out of the basic emotions. Nature endows us with the biological substrate of basic emotions and culture steps in to shape the contours of our higher order emotions (Keltner & Haidt 2001). In particular, it has been suggested that the reactive attitudes are built up out of anger on the negative side and happiness on the positive. For example, Ekman identifies resentment as part of the anger family (1992, 190). This view seems to have purchase among philosophers as well. Walker explicitly states that resentment is “a kind of anger” (2004, 145). Jesse Prinz (2003, 53) and McGeer (2013, 170) both associate moral indignation with anger. Likewise, it is reasonable to suppose that the positive reactive attitudes such as gratitude and approval are intimately related to one or more basic emotions. Tracy & Randles (2011, 401), for instance, link gratitude with happiness (401). Ortony et al. (1990, 24) make a similar suggestion. Finally, Turner (2000) suggests that gratitude is a complex emotion that is comprised of mostly happiness with varying amounts of fear (77).

¹⁸ In literature, we often find descriptions of people wearing their reactive attitudes on their faces. See, for example, Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*: “‘Please tell the young ladies what I say, and if they don't care to come, why, never mind;’ here a little hand slipped into his, and Beth looked up at him with a face full of gratitude, as she said, in her earnest, yet timid way—‘Oh, sir! they do care ...’” (2009, 28). See also Virginia Wolf's *A Room of One's Own*: “Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation” (2001, 8).

Many emotions, then, via their facial signatures, evoke emotional responses in others. Crucially for our purposes, some of these responses constitute emotional uptake of the very representational content of the original emotion. Consider fear. If Devin's fear, which represents his environment, or some aspect of it, as dangerous or threatening, evokes in Andrew fear, then Devin's publically manifested fear has evoked in Andrew uptake of its representational content. That is, Andrew has given emotional uptake to the environment, or some aspect of it, as dangerous or threatening.

Noticeably absent from the above is specific empirical evidence that the other-regarding reactive attitudes in fact elicit emotional uptake of their representational content. Alas, those doing empirical research are not as enthralled by the reactive emotions as we might hope. However, the fact that some emotions, via their facial expressions, elicit emotional uptake of their representational content certainly gives some credence to the idea that past token reactive emotions have done so.

Even so, we need not rely solely on the empirical evidence. Reflection on how we tend to react to others' resentment, indignation, gratitude and approval also lends credence to the idea that past reactive attitudes, like past instances of fear, have elicited emotional uptake of their representational content in others. To see first consider what emotional uptake of the representational content of the other-regarding reactive attitudes amounts to. Notably, it amounts to precisely the emotions that those who forward the response claim identify: the self-regarding reactive attitudes. Specifically, emotional uptake of the representational content of resentment or indignation by the wrongdoer amounts to *guilt*. Benefactors' emotional uptake of the representational content of gratitude or approval amounts to *self-approbation*. This is explained by the fact that the other and self-regarding attitudes have parallel representational contents. The former represent *another* as having done something morally significant and the latter represent *oneself* as having done something morally significant. Thus if Devin's publically manifested resentment which represents Andrew as having done something morally untoward, evokes in Andrew guilt, then Devin's publically manifested resentment has evoked in Andrew uptake of its representational content. After all, in feeling guilt Andrew has given emotional uptake to the fact that he has done something morally untoward.

But if emotional uptake of the representational content of an other-regarding reactive attitude amounts to self-approbation in a benefactor and guilt in a wrongdoer, then the idea that past publically manifested other-regarding reactive attitudes have elicited emotional uptake of their representational content does seem to have common sense on its side. My own reflection suggests that grateful and approving faces often elicit feelings of at least mild self-approbation. Similarly, publically manifested resentment and indignation often evoke guilt. To be sure, not always. Gratitude may

make one feel uncomfortable, and resentment and indignation are often met with resentment, indignation or straight up anger in return. But when the resentment, indignation, gratitude and approval are aptly felt and aptly expressed and their target is neither too defensive nor too shy, the self-regarding reactive attitudes do seem to emerge.¹⁹

6. Building and Healing the Moral Community

Above we saw that once we take reactive attitudes seriously as emotions, it is plausible to attribute to them representational content and to suppose that they meet the first criterion set out by the etiological theory of function ascription. In this section, I show that it is also plausible that the reactive attitudes meet the second criterion: it is reasonable to think that current token other-regarding reactive attitudes exist in part because past tokens (often enough) elicited in benefactors self-appraisal and in wrongdoers guilt.

Consider first the fact that gratitude and approval contribute to the formation and growth of the moral community when they evoke in benefactors their self-regarding cousin. Moral communities are not just collections of individuals. Rather, their members are bound together in a network of relationships. Such interconnection, though, is not an immediate consequence of either geographic or normative collocation. Community must be built, and kind acts help to build it. In other words, the formation and growth of the moral community depends upon the continual turning of the circle of kindness. If, as is being supposed, gratitude and approval elicit self-appraisal in benefactors, they are a crucial part of this process. Self-appraisal, at least in its modest form, is constituted by an inclination to do nice things for and build relationships with others (for example, see Tangney et al. 2007; Fredrickson 1998, 2004; Fredrickson & Losada 2005; Schnall & Roper 2012).²⁰ Thus, in evoking

¹⁹ To be sure, a response in others is not the most proximal effect of a reactive emotion qua private mental state. A reactive emotion can only produce a response in a recipient *by* producing its facial signature or some other public manifestation of itself. But this is not a problem: a more distal effect of an item is just as fair game for function ascription as the most proximal. Consider for example, photophores, a light emitting organ of many deep-sea fish. The function of a photophore is to camouflage the fish. It does this though *by* producing the amount of light needed to make the luminescence of the fish match the luminescence in the water. The most proximal effect of a photophore is light production, which leads to the more distal effect of camouflaging the fish. There is nothing illicit in identifying the more distal effect, i.e., camouflaging as the function of the photophores. The function of the item may be something it does *by* doing something else.

²⁰ See Prinz (2007, 80) for more on the role of positive emotions in promoting pro-social behavior.

self-approbation, gratitude and approval spur on just the sort of acts that bind us together.

While gratitude and approval help bind us together, resentment and indignation help keep us together. Existing relationships are not immune to damage. Wrongdoing creates rifts in relationships, straining the bonds we have built. If the community is going to stay together, these rifts need to be repaired. Repair happens when wrongdoers inhabit their fault: feel guilt and give it its natural expression in apology and amends. Thus, insofar as resentment and indignation elicit guilt in wrongdoers, they catalyze the reparative work that is so essential to healing the bonds we work so hard to build.²¹

Past token other-regarding reactive attitudes have, then, by eliciting their self-regarding cousins contributed to the building and repair of the moral community. I now want to urge that in doing so, they have played a crucial role in creating the conditions necessary for the existence of current token reactive attitudes. Think of it this way. Caring is a necessary condition for emotional vulnerability, and caring about moral values in specific is the ground of our susceptibility to the reactive attitudes.²² To be sure, one who does not care about moral values might coolly note when another has thwarted or promoted one of them. But this is a far cry from responding with resentment, indignation, gratitude or approval. Just like it is one thing to *believe* that the pointillist painting at the Museum of Modern Art is of Marilyn Monroe, and quite another to *see* the dots *as* the face of Marilyn Monroe, so too it is one thing to ascribe to another the property of having done something of moral import and quite another to emotionally experience the import of another's morally significant action.²³ It also seems true that we come to care about moral values at least in part by being enculturated into the moral community. We, as children, are taken into the fold and we, in turn, take in and take up its values. But if caring about moral values is necessary for the susceptibility of the reactive attitudes and the moral community in part explains why we care about moral values, then the moral community at least in part explains our susceptibility to the reactive attitudes.

In short, then, past token other-regarding reactive attitudes have, by contributing to the building and healing of the moral community, contributed to the existence of current token other-regarding reactive attitudes. A case has been made that the reactive attitudes meet not just the first but also the

²¹ See Walker (2006) for a thorough treatment of this idea. See also McKenna (2012, 169).

²² On the nature of caring, see Frankfurt (1999), Jaworska (2007), Seidman (2009) and Shoemaker (2003). On caring about moral values in specific see Wallace (2011).

²³ For more on this point, see Hurley & Macnamara (2011). I am indebted to Little (1997) for the Marilyn Monroe example.

second criterion set out by the etiological theory. It is thus plausible that the reactive attitudes have the function of eliciting their self-regarding cousins, or more abstractly, the function of eliciting uptake of their representational content.

To say this is, of course, not to deny the obvious: reactive attitudes that remain buried in our hearts do not fulfill this function. This, though, is of little consequence because the fact that an item does not fulfill its function does not obviate the fact that it has said function. A hammer gathering dust on the workbench has the function of pounding in nails; just so, the resentment that remains buried in one's heart has the function of eliciting uptake of its representational content. Nor does this function ascription preclude the possibility that reactive attitudes have other functions. Items can have many functions. Think of the tongue; it is for eating and talking (Graham 2010). Your smart phone is for taking pictures, emailing, texting and of course making phone calls. Indeed, I take it as a given that reactive emotions, like emotions more generally, have any number of *intrapersonal* functions—informing the emotion-bearer about, and preparing her to respond to, her environment, to name a few. The claim I have been defending here is simply that the reactive attitudes have, in addition to their many intrapersonal functions, an *interpersonal* function of evoking uptake of their representational content in a recipient. To ignore this fact would be to ignore a crucial part of their nature.

7. Two Strengths

Above, I urged that reactive attitudes have representational content and the function of eliciting uptake of that content in a recipient. On my view, it is because the reactive attitudes have these characteristics that we can legitimately claim that they are communicative in nature. In this section, I highlight two strengths of this account.

First, recall that the communication claim is thought by many to have important implications for the reactive attitudes' intelligibility conditions and thus for conditions of morally responsible agency. In particular, it is supposed to imply that the reactive attitudes are intelligibly directed only toward those who have the capacity to give them uptake. My rendering of the communication claim supports this implication.

Start by considering why *communicative acts* have an uptake constraint on intelligibility. Why, in other words, is it unintelligible for Mary to tell the tree that it is raining, but intelligible for her to tell her son the same thing? Arguably communicative acts are saddled with an uptake constraint on intelligibility because of their function: communicative acts are *supposed* to evoke uptake, and thus are unintelligibly directed toward entities incapable of uptake. If this is right, then my rendering of the communication claim

is as inferentially potent as one could hope. Reactive attitudes, I have urged, share with communicative acts the function of evoking uptake and thus they, like communicative acts, have an uptake constraint on intelligibility.²⁴

A second strength of my view is that it implies that reactive attitudes are not the only essentially communicative emotions. Fear, after all, has representational content and arguably, in addition to many *intrapersonal* functions, has the *interpersonal* function of eliciting uptake of its representational content. As I mentioned above, evidence suggests that past instances of fear, via their facial signatures, elicited fear and thus emotional uptake of their representational content in conspecifics (Hatfield et al. 1994). This fact in part explains the existence of current tokens. When one's fearful face elicits fear in conspecifics, it not only helps to alert the receiver to the danger present, but also facilitates a coordinated response to that danger (Keltner et al. 2003). Thus past instances of fear have contributed to the reproductive success of those who are biologically primed to feel fear in the presence of danger. In other words, past instances of fear in part explain why current tokens exist. Nor is this reasoning to be confined to fear—surely other emotions have the relevant properties. Thus, my view implies that reactive attitudes are members of a more populated class of communicative emotions.²⁵

This is, to my mind, a strength of my view for two reasons. For one thing, it reinforces the plausibility of construing a private mental state as a communicative entity. For another, it puts my view in line with claims made in fields such as social psychology, behavioral ecology and evolutionary biology. In these fields, it is commonplace to depict emotions as communicative in nature (for example, Keltner et al. 2006, Keltner & Haidt 1999, Keltner & Kring 1998).

Furthermore, locating the reactive attitudes within the class of communicative emotions does not imply that they lack their own critical individuality. It is after all one thing to identify an emotion as a communicative entity and quite another to provide a comprehensive account of just what kind of communicative entity it is. Given that the view put forth here does the former and not the latter, it does not rule out the possibility that reactive attitudes have a distinctive communicative nature. Indeed, on my own view, they very likely do. In particular, arguably a reactive attitude is, and fear is not, a necessarily directed form of communication. What I mean by this is that reactive attitudes necessarily have an addressee. They have the function of eliciting a response from a specified recipient—namely the wrongdoer or benefactor. In contrast, fear is at least in some instances *for anyone*. Its function is to elicit

²⁴ For more on this point, see Macnamara (forthcoming).

²⁵ Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for suggesting that I address the fact that my view has this implication.

a response from whoever happens to be in a position to give it uptake. Just as the NPR correspondent's broadcast is for all who are willing and able, so too is the fear I wear on my face when I encounter a bear while hiking. It is for any and all of the conspecifics in the vicinity.²⁶

To be clear though, my point here is not to prove that a reactive attitude is, and fear is not, a necessarily directed communicative entity. It is rather to give a preview of what a theory of the reactive attitudes' distinctive communicative nature might look like. Articulating and defending a comprehensive account of the reactive attitude's communicative nature is a project for another day. My aim here has been to redeem the communication claim: to show that it is plausible to attribute to the reactive attitudes features that render them communicative in nature.

8. The Literature Revisited

In conclusion, I show that my account amounts to a specification and defense of many of the literature's key claims.

Recall first that theorists have characterized the reactive attitudes as "forms of communication" or again as "incipient or implicit forms of communication." At the outset, I suggested that these characterizations cried out for further explanation: the former because it is counterintuitive, the latter because it is mysterious. My work on communication together with my explication of what underwrites the communication claim shows that both of these claims accurately characterize the reactive attitudes.

Many paradigmatic messages have the two core features of representational content and the function of evoking uptake of this content. Insofar as I have urged that reactive attitudes share these features, I have urged that they are sensibly construed as messages. This in turn is just to say that they are sensibly construed as forms of communication *and* incipient forms of communication. The former follows straightforwardly from the fact that messages are forms of communication. The latter follows from the fact that communicative acts are also forms of communication and that messages are plausibly construed as incipient communicative acts. Messages are, after all, communicative acts "in the making" in the sense that they are the kind of thing that is supposed to be communicated.

My account also allows us to specify both the elusive sense in which reactive attitudes are "meant to be expressed" (Watson 2011, 328) and the elusive sense in which they are conceptually connected to a response. Obviously so in the case of the response claim: the conceptual connection is a

²⁶ This picture of the reactive attitudes is consistent with them being what we might call hybrid communicative entities: communicative entities that are neither exclusively directed nor exclusively for anyone. On this picture, reactive attitudes are like open letters. For more on this point, see Macnamara (forthcoming).

functional one.²⁷ Specifying the sense in which reactive attitudes are “meant to be expressed” requires more work. To see, consider hammers and party invitations. These items have the function of pounding in nails and securing party attendance respectively. But a hammer in a toolbox and an unsent invitation, are not occurrently fulfilling their functions. To fulfill their functions they need to be hammered with or sent. Hammers and party invitations are, then, in a very real sense *meant to be* hammered with and *meant to be* sent respectively. These are, after all, the paradigmatic “hows” of how they fulfill their functions. Similarly, for the reactive attitudes. Reactive attitudes have the function of evoking uptake, but when they remain buried in our hearts they are not occurrently fulfilling their function. To fulfill their function, they need to be expressed. Reactive attitudes, then, are meant to be expressed in the sense that this is the paradigmatic “how” of how they fulfill their function.

The work we have done allows for more than specification of the above claims. It provides a defense of them. Insofar as we have in hand a defense of my function claim, so too we have a defense of the claims that reactive attitudes are meant to be expressed and that they are conceptually connected to the responses of self-appraisal and guilt. The latter are, after all, merely more generic versions of the former.

²⁷ In hindsight, it appears that those who forward the response claim were pointing to a functional connection all along. Recall that theorists employ myriad terms in articulating the conceptual connection between the reactive attitudes and a response. It turns out that the majority of these locutions fall into two general categories: speech act terms (“demand,” “call for, on, or upon,” “urge” and “invite”) and teleological terms (“seek,” “serve to elicit a response,” “aim to elicit such responses” and “are successful when they get a response”).

The teleological language wears its connection to functions on its sleeve. The connection between the speech act terms and functions, though a bit less obvious, nonetheless exists. Speech act theorists often provide taxonomies of speech acts. Searle & Vanderveken (1985), for example, identify five types of speech acts: assertives, commissives, directives, declaratives and expressives. Notably, all the speech act terms catalogued above are directives. ‘Demand,’ ‘invite’ and ‘urge’ are three distinct kinds of directives, and “call for” can be used to refer to directives generically.

This is significant because directives have the kind of non-intentional purposiveness that we have been focusing on in this paper. Directives, as a type of speech act, have the function of getting their target to respond in ways that make their propositional content true (Searle & Vanderveken 1985). Thus these speech acts, e.g., calling for, demanding, inviting and urging a response, all have the function of evoking a response in their targets.

Given that emotions are not speech acts of any kind, it would be uncharitable to interpret theorists as saying that the reactive attitudes are directives. Directives are, after all, just a specific type of speech act. It seems reasonable, then, to read theorists’ uses of speech act terms figuratively. The point of this figurative use is, I urge, to highlight the fact that reactive attitudes have the same function as the directives, i.e., the function of getting a response. It is not, then, just the explicitly teleological formulations of the conceptual connection that point to a functional explication. It is also the speech act formulations.

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