

# Understanding Testimony

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I, Edward Nettel, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own, except where indicated.

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# Abstract

I present and defend an account of how it is that we acquire knowledge from what others tell us and an account of what it is for us to understand the utterances of others that can sustain this epistemology.

In Chapters 1 & 2 I present my account of how it is that we can acquire knowledge from others. I say that a speaker makes available irreducibly *testimonial knowledge* to their audience by *voicing knowledge*. Testimonial knowledge is a distinctive kind of knowledge that one can get by way of *transmission* from a knowledgeable source. One voices knowledge that  $p$  when knowledge that  $p$  (one's own, or another's) contributes in the required way in a causal explanation of why one produced one's utterance. I defend the claim that, so long as a speaker in fact voices knowledge that  $p$ , then their audience can come to know that  $p$  by believing the speaker, regardless of what reasons they initially had to think that the speaker uttered truth or falsity.

In Chapter 3 I show that the causal explanation of a speaker's linguistic behaviour will also appeal to expectations that the speaker has of their audience; expectations that they will have understood what speaker has done in so speaking. Understanding utterances is conceived of in terms of audiences meeting these expectations, by recognising what it is that the speaker thereby means to be doing. Chapter 4 contains a defence of

a proposal provided by Ian Rumfitt, which conceives of such understanding as a state of possessing capacities to make inferences specific to the kinds of acts that speakers' (mean to) perform with their utterances. I end, in Chapter 5, by applying this picture of understanding to some historic debates in which the notion has featured, highlighting its explanatory advantages over some rivals.



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I should also like to thank Mark Calderon, who co-supervised me over the final year of writing, whose encouragement and calming advice had the effect of allowing me to enjoy my philosophy even in the final stages of preparation (though perhaps not the *very* final stages).

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# Introduction

The main focus of this dissertation is on the role that our understanding the utterances of others has to play in enabling the transmission of knowledge. Taking a methodological cue from some remarks made by David Lewis, I'll be adopting the policy that, in order to say what understanding *is*, we may first ask what understanding *does*, and then find something that does that.<sup>1</sup> And one of the notable things that understanding does is enable us to acquire knowledge from what others say to us; if you make available testimonial knowledge that *p*, by uttering something, I cannot ordinarily hope to come by the knowledge that you have made available, without understanding your utterance. Here I will present, and attempt to defend, an account of how it is that we acquire knowledge from what others tell us and an account of what it is for us to understand the utterances of others that can sustain this epistemology.

One way that one can make available testimonial knowledge is by, in a sense, transmitting it to someone else by saying something that one knows to a suitably habituated audience. In Chapter 1, I try to make the

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<sup>1</sup> In 'General Semantics', Lewis says, "in order to say what a meaning *is*, we may first ask what a meaning *does*, and then find something that does that" (Lewis 1970, p. 193)

case for the idea that, when we allow for a distinctive kind of testimonial knowledge of this kind, we should allow for the possibility that the epistemic status of what the audience comes to believe to be entirely dependent on the epistemic status of what the speaker gives voice to. I show that views that allow for this kind of distinctively testimonial knowledge tend to assume that this cannot be *all* that determines when our believing others can result in the acquisition of testimonial knowledge. I try to cast doubt on that assumption. In Chapter 2, I'll say how it is that I think such knowledge does get made available, and what one has to do to acquire it. I defend the view we can make available this distinctively testimonial knowledge when we say something that we know to be true *because* we know it. That is to say that, if one makes available knowledge that *p* by saying that *p*, one's knowing that *p* will feature in the causal explanation of why one produced the utterance in which one said that. In a rational reconstruction of the reasons that one has for speaking, one's possessing the relevant knowledge will explain why one has the following belief: that if one's audience hears one say that *p* to them, they will have heard the truth with respect to the topic at hand. I want to suggest that, if a speaker gives voice to their knowledge that *p* in this way, their audience can come to know that *p* by believing the speaker, regardless of what reasons they initially had to think that the speaker uttered truth or falsity.

A rational reconstruction of the reasons one has for speaking can also help elucidate how understanding sustains knowledge transmission. It is to this that I turn in Chapter 3. Rendering the speech-action of speakers rational requires attributing to them certain expectations that

they will have of their audiences: expectations concerning the audience's capacity to recognise what sort of thing the speaker is doing in producing their utterance. Speakers perform many acts in uttering something, but the least an audience must do is recognise one thing in particular that speaker means to be doing—something that J. L. Austin called the *rhetic* act performed. Achieving such recognition is what is needed to meet the expectation of the speaker that enables the transmission of the knowledge that a speaker gives voice to. In Chapter 4, I end up endorsing a recent proposal provided by Ian Rumfitt, in which one's rhetic understanding of an utterance is constituted by a state of possessing a capacity to make inferences of specific kinds. When the utterance is one in which the speaker performs an act of saying something—an act in which one typically tells someone something—one who achieves rhetic understanding of this utterance is able to infer that the world is some way from the hypothesis that the saying is true/false (and vice versa). That is, to meet the relevant expectation of the speaker, one must be capable of making these kinds of inferences with respect to the particular rhetic act the speaker performed with their utterance.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I apply the picture we get from Rumfitt to a set of wider debates in which the relevant notion of understanding has a key role. There is an approach to providing specifications of what speakers say, employed to explain their linguistic behaviour, that appeals to what those who understand utterances of sentences of a language know. The most popular form that such an account takes is one that appeals to propositional knowledge of truth-conditions. Such accounts are, in a fundamental respect, circular. However, circularity is not necessarily

inimical to explanation. I attempt to show that, though no less circular, an account of this kind that employs Rumfitt's proposal does possess some explanatory advantages in comparison to these more popular versions of the approach.

Before embarking on this, though, I will take this opportunity to fix a little more precisely the target notion of understanding that I'm chiefly concerned with. 'Understanding', even as used in a distinctively linguistic context, is multiply ambiguous. One ambiguity is between the sense which takes as its object a *language*—as in, "She understands French", and one that takes as its object utterances of sentences of a language. The sense of 'understands' of the first kind picks out a particular kind of *capacity*. To attribute to a subject understanding of this first kind is (at least) to attribute the capacity to understand particular utterances made with sentences of that language. 'Linguistic competence' is a phrase that can be substituted for 'understanding' on this first disambiguation.

So to understand a language is to possess a capacity to do something: namely, to understand utterances made with sentences of that language. The attribution of a capacity to understand a language provides some explanation of how a subject manages to understand some particular utterance of a sentence of that language. Attributions of capacities can help explain why some particular events occur; there is some story—maybe causal—to tell about why some actions are *exercises* of some capacity. Where those exercises are non-defective, the result is a successfully doing of what one is capable of. The sense of 'understand'

used in these kinds of attributions, therefore, pick out what is achieved by the exercise of a capacity to understand a language. Let's call this kind of understanding, 'utterance understanding'. What this thesis, in the end, is attempting to contribute to an answer to is the question: what do we achieve when we achieve utterance understanding?

What is an utterance? By 'utterance' I mean to be picking out a datable event with which some distinctively communicative act, or set of acts, is performed. In the main, I will concentrate on, and talk in terms of, *spoken* utterances; in fact, I will narrow my focus further by looking at those utterances in which relational speech acts of saying, or asking, or ordering (etc.) something are performed by speakers vocalising sentences of a shared public language. Nonetheless, in more general terms, I take utterances to be those actions with which acts of the kind just mentioned are performed. Even though these are things that are typically done with sentences of a public language, they need not be. To account for understanding of the kind I am interested in as it applies to communication more generally, then, we will have to allow for (at least) very closely related cognitive achievements with respect to those actions in which acts of saying, or asking, or ordering (etc.) something are performed, but when a sentence of a public language is not used. (I am here trading on a distinction that can be drawn between 'acts' and 'actions' that I will have reason to discuss at more length in Chapter 3, §III, and thereafter. This is a distinction that Jennifer Hornsby makes between things done (acts) and the doing of those things (the actions); utterances are actions with which certain acts of stating, asking, ordering, etc. are done.)

I've just said that utterance understanding is that which is achieved by exercising one's capacity that constitutes one's linguistic competence. I have implied that a non-defective exercise of such a capacity results in some kind of recognition of what a speaker has done, or means to have to done, in uttering something on the part of the one who possesses it. But one might worry that an exercise of that capacity—even if non-defective—might not yield recognition of that kind, while nonetheless yielding *something* deserving the name 'understanding'.

There are a number of other senses of 'understanding' that should be separated from the target notion of *utterance understanding*; senses of 'understanding' which might be thought to capture what is achieved by an exercise of one's capacity to understanding a language, but fails to achieve the requisite level of recognition of what the speaker is doing. There is a notion of understanding some particular sentence-type, where one's understanding a sentence-type does not entail that one understands what a speaker has done with that particular utterance of that sentence-type. For all that, it is not straightforwardly to be identified with one's possession of linguistic competence.<sup>2</sup> This is brought out clearly in cases where the sentence uttered by a speaker is ambiguous, and one cannot work out, from the surrounding context, which disambiguation is the

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<sup>2</sup> I take this distinction between understanding a sentence-type and (utterance) understanding an utterance of that sentence-type to track a distinction that Guy Longworth makes between different kinds of understanding that he identifies with respect to 'meaning' and 'what is said'. The target notion of 'utterance understanding' most closely resembles Longworth's 'state-understanding of what is said', where that is identified as "understanding as a state entered though successful exercise of the ability" to discern what illocutionary act is performed by speakers on occasions. (Longworth 2010, p. 4).



one that the speaker intends. Indexicals, and more generally context sensitivity, bear this out too. You say, “I’m bored”. I don’t know who it is that is talking, but my understanding of the sentence-type that you made use of allows me to discern that the speaker of that sentence is bored, even though I don’t know who spoke. Discerning so much is to not to achieve utterance understanding as I am using the notion. What I have just described is that which is supplied by one’s linguistic competence, when the requisite background knowledge is absent. Absent that background knowledge, one falls short of utterance understanding, in that one fails to discern, in the requisite detail, what the speaker is doing in producing their utterance. What detail of discernment is required is one of the issues that this thesis attempts to address.

It is because of indexicality and ambiguity that Michael Dummett was lead to mark a distinction (which he first locates in G. E. Moore, drawn to his attention by some remarks by Gareth Evans (1982)) between what he called ‘occurrent understanding’ and ‘dispositional understanding’. The gloss that Dummett gave of the former is “that in which [the audience] may be said to understand a particular utterance”, and the latter is “that in which someone is said to understand a word, phrase or sentence, considered as a type” (Dummett 1993a p. 58). For reasons that will become clear in Chapter 4, I’ve decided to not use Dummett’s phrasing, even though the gloss he gives of ‘occurrent understanding’ accurately describes the kind of understanding that I am interested in. I avoid using ‘dispositional understanding’ because, in light of the gloss of it that Dummett provides, it seems to me to be ambiguous between that

which is secured by one's linguistic competence that falls short of utterance understanding, and what one's linguistic competence consists in with respect to individual sentences of the language that one understands.

I hope the foregoing suffices to provisionally fix the topic. As things progress I hope that it will come gradually into sharper focus. I'll now turn to the epistemology of testimony, which is my starting point in my investigation of utterance understanding.

# Knowledge from Others

## 1.

### Introduction

It is commonly thought that, to avoid a pernicious form of scepticism, we must allow for there to be a distinctive kind of knowledge that we can acquire from what others tell us. The distinctive kind of knowledge that I have in mind is what is normally thought of as knowledge that one can acquire, in some sense, *by transmission* from a knowledgeable source; that is, a kind of knowledge that one can only come by because someone who is knowledgeable about the topic at hand has told one something that they know to be true.<sup>3</sup> In allowing for this kind of knowledge we allow for the possibility of coming to know things from others when we are not in a position to establish those things for ourselves. The thought is that we must allow for this, or else we cannot count as knowing very much of what we ordinarily take ourselves to know.

In its essentials, I think a view like this has got to be correct. However, it seems to me that views that allow for knowledge transmission tend not to

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<sup>3</sup> I am temporarily suppressing a complication here. Really, if it to be plausible that knowledge can transmit in the relevant sense, it has got to be the case that either the speaker is knowledgeable about what they are talking about, or someone in their testimonial chain is. Without this qualification, the thought comes up against examples that have been pressed by Jennifer Lackey. I will say more about this when I come to set out my own account in Chapter 2 (see, in particular § IV. b.).

follow the consequences of this allowance where it leads. For once we allow for the distinctive testimonial knowledge of the kind I mentioned, we should take seriously the idea that the epistemic status of the belief an audience acquires on believing a speaker is entirely dependent on the epistemic status of what the speaker has given voice to in speaking. If that is right, then this dependence renders the initial grounds one had for believing that the speaker uttered truth, or falsity, epistemically inert. It is this consequence that I think is not always fully appreciated.

This chapter is dedicated to motivating this way of conceiving of the structure of the epistemic dependencies that are operative in ordinary testimonial situations. I'll try to make plausible the idea that it is an optional extra to one's view that one's accessing the knowledge that others can make available in speaking knowledgeably requires that one have sufficiently epistemically supported beliefs that the speaker has uttered truth.

*Reductionist* views deny that others can provide us with a distinctive kind of knowledge when they tell us things. In §II, by employing an argument given by Michael Dummett, I'll set out one respect in which I think that reductionist views engender a kind of scepticism. In §III, I'll set out what I take to be the central commitments of views that stand in opposition to reductionism—that is, *non-reductionist* views. Views of this kind tend to endorse what I'll call the 'enabling principle'. That principle says, roughly, that one must have sufficient epistemic support for believing that the speaker uttered truth, for one to come by knowledge that things are as the speaker says them to be. In the context

of non-reductionism, this is a principle that, I think, has very often been assumed to hold, but rarely argued for. My aim is to call this principle into question.

I end the chapter with a discussion of a view that can be read into some of the things that John McDowell has said. It is a view which affirms the structure of epistemic dependencies that I want to suggest occurs in testimonial situations. It can therefore be thought of providing one possible, more general, epistemological grounding for the kind of view that I want to eventually defend. That view is one according to which the epistemic status of the belief an audience acquires on believing a speaker is *entirely dependent* on the epistemic status of what the speaker has given voice to in speaking. This is a view that denies that there is any enabling principle that places substantive constraints on when our believing that a speaker has uttered truth can yield knowledge of that things are as the speaker says them to be (when, that is, they speak knowledgeably).

## II.

### Reductionism

To be reductionist in the epistemology of testimony is to take what others tell us to be, epistemically speaking, unremarkable. The epistemic significance of others' utterances is dependent on their status as evidence

for things being as they are said to be.<sup>4</sup> The epistemic worth that others' utterances possess, then, would depend on what features they have that could provide support for the conclusion that things are as the speaker says that they are. Typically, this will involve conceiving of the relevant features as serving as the basis of formulating premises in inductive, or abductive, arguments to the truth of what is being claimed by the speaker. On this view, coming by knowledge from what others say to one is like coming by knowledge in any other way in which one collects evidence. One might have good grounds for taking it that there are elk in the woods by finding what look like elk tracks leading into the trees (tracks of those kinds tend to correlate with there having been elk there). Likewise, one might have good grounds for believing that things are as the speaker said them to be, on the grounds that the speaker in this situation has certain features, and taking a speaker with those features, saying that things are that way, to be evidence in favour of their having spoken truly. The 'reductionist' element is that the epistemic value that others utterances possess is the value conferred on those utterances by

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<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Lackey (2006, 2011) marks a distinction between *global* reductionism and *local* reductionism. Global reductionism is the view that "justification of testimony as a source of belief reduces to the justification of sense perception, memory and inductive inference" (2006, p. 161). That is, we require that we have reasons—reasons that do not rely in anyway on the testimony of others—to suppose that testimony, in general, is a reliable source of true beliefs. Local reductionism, by contrast is the view that "the justification of each particular report or instance of testimony reduces to justification of instances of sense perception, memory and inductive inference" (p. 163). In other words, we need to have the right kinds of reasons to suppose that for any particular bit of testimony, *that* is a reliable indication of the truth. On the whole, I am here concentrating on what I take to be the more plausible *local* reductionism (for criticisms of global reductionism so understood see Lackey (2006, p. 162), Coady, (1992, p. 82) and Fricker (1994, p. 139)). I'll briefly discuss views that take both global and local factors to contribute to our grounds for taking things to be as the speaker says that they are.

whatever epistemic support can be garnered from perception, memory, and, most importantly, inductive inference.

Michael Dummett saw that views of this kind impose a particular kind of requirement on when we can count as acquiring knowledge from what others tell us,

[I]f we are to possess knowledge acquired [from the assertions of others in this way], we must be able to supply as backing an argument corresponding to the inference we omitted to draw [...]. According to this suggestion, if I am to be said to know what someone else has told me, and do not know by any other means, I must be able to supply a specific ground for supposing my informant himself to have been informed on the matter and to have been speaking truthfully, even though, in originally accepting what he said, I did not advert to those grounds.

(Dummett 1993b, pp. 419-20)

As a description of what reductionism demands, I think this has got to be right. Reductionism demands that there is an argument—most likely an inductive one—that one could appeal to for the claim that the speaker has uttered truth, when one comes to know that things are as the speaker said them to be (on the basis of believing them). The version of the view that Dummett is considering here is one according to which we need not make an inference corresponding to the grounds that we have to believe that the speaker has spoken truly, in order to gain knowledge that things are as they say them to be. What is required, rather, is that we are able to reconstruct an argument from these grounds that would sustain an

inference to knowledge. And we can grant that we could, and sometimes do, have such grounds for taking some of the utterances of others to be true. For example, if someone reports having seen the Foreign Secretary hand in an official resignation letter to the Prime Minister, and we know that they have an occupation that makes their having seen this likely (if it happened), and we know that they are serious in their assertions, then we may well have an argument good enough to confer on us knowledge that they uttered the truth. The question is, how often are we in possession of such good arguments?

Dummett claims that these kinds of cases—cases of our having sufficient grounds to construct a requisitely good inductive argument—are all too rare. The reason being that almost all the testimony we encounter itself relies, in some way or another, on the testimony of others. And when it does, the requirement imposed by reductionism is hardly ever fulfilled. Dummett makes that case in the following way:

[Y]ou will be allowed at any stage to add information you have received from others only if, at that stage, you have specific grounds for taking it to be trustworthy; and, at the outset, you may add such information only if such grounds are to be found within your unaided observation and reasoning. [...] You will [...] seldom be able to add to your stock of knowledge anything you were told by someone who himself had it from someone else: for, to do that, you would have to know who your informant's informant was, and have independent evidence that *he* was reliable.

(ibid.)



But, such is the thought, we hardly ever have such knowledge about our informer's informants. If that is right, then "we should have to confess to knowing pitifully little" (ibid.). On the supposition that we are not radically mistaken about what it is we know, and so do know roughly what we ordinarily take ourselves to know, then the view must be mistaken about what is required for us to come to know things on the basis of having been told.

Dummett's argument is this. For some fact to count as evidence in favour of some claim  $p$ , it must feature in an argument that one could construct for  $p$ . When it comes to the utterances of others, what is therefore needed is *that they said such-and-such* to feature in a premise of such an argument. For that premise to feature in an argument good enough to establish the desired conclusion, one must have grounds for the claim that they are being truthful in what they say. The argument that one must be able to cite in favour of the claim that things are as they said them to be must include the claim that, whatever other testimony is being relied on in their asserting so much, one has grounds to suppose that that additional testimony is truthful too. That is, if their *having been told such-and-such* also features as a premise in the argument one omitted to make, then one must have access to a further argument that the one who told them was truthful in their assertions. If one is not capable of doing this, then one does not have sufficient grounds on which to

construct a requisitely good argument. The point is not that this is not possible, but that one rarely has such grounds.<sup>5</sup>

This can be seen as a particular instance of a more general problem that is often said to affect reductionism. Believing others, in general, comes with an element of risk. That is to say, that when someone tells one something, the possibility that they are misleading one—by lying, or ignorance, or whatever—is not outrageously remote. Such things happen every day. For all that, we gain knowledge from what others tell us. Reductionism is committed to the idea that the epistemic support available to us for believing the speaker to have uttered truth must suffice for knowledge that they have uttered truth, and only then do we have good enough grounds to count as knowing that things are as they said them to be. The most common argumentative strategy employed against reductionism is to claim that the kinds of considerations that such views point to cannot do what is needed to sufficiently mitigate these risks. In other words, the paucity of the epistemic resources it points to is such that we rarely have enough to go on to count as knowing that they have spoken truly. It follows that we rarely come to be in possession of knowledge from what others tell us.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> This seems particularly true of our current situation in the early 21st century; in the actual testimonial situations that we find ourselves in the modern, complex, interconnected world, it seems that a body of justification so vast would be needed to meet this requirement that perhaps—*perhaps*—only certain governmental agencies have the resources available to construct arguments of this kind.

<sup>6</sup> Arguments of this more standard sort, amongst many others, are first advanced in their contemporary form in Coady's seminal (1992). As we'll see, such a strategy is also employed, though in a rather different epistemic context, in McDowell (1994). See §IV below.

A standard line of response to this kind of objection is that those who advance it have not fully appreciated the inductive, and abductive, resources that the reductionist says that we have at our disposal, for most, if not all, of the testimonial exchanges that we encounter.<sup>7</sup> By building up our more *global* base of evidence for the reliability of testimony, that leaves less for the *local* base of evidence to do. That is to say that, by arguing that testimony is, to a greater or lesser extent, generally reliable as a knowledge source, what is needed to support a good enough inductive argument for the truthfulness of any particular instance of testimony becomes less demanding (for certain types of testimony, anyway).<sup>8</sup> For example, they might point to the fact that there are certain societal structures in place that mean that we are liable to certain sanctions in telling untruths, and these give us some grounds to suppose that, in general, when someone tells us something under the pretence of sincerity,

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<sup>7</sup> Aspects of views of the kind I am about to describe can be found in Adler (2002), who, at p. 157, says that “we both have enormous grounding for accepting a piece of testimony and do not first have to investigate its credulity”. Though no reductionist, this line has also been pushed, to some degree, by Faulkner 2011 on their behalf (see pp. 30-51). For further defences of reductionist lines of thought see Lackey 2006, pp. 172-7. Lackey, however, here only defends the necessity of one’s possessing positive epistemic support for acquiring the kind of knowledge that others can make available in telling us things, but denies its sufficiency. The necessity claim *in conjunction* with the sufficiency claim is what is distinctive of reductionism, so Lackey is not a reductionist.

<sup>8</sup> One might be tempted to appeal to testimonial *types*—that is, a way of classing the testimony of others in such a way that their being so classified provides grounds for supposing that they are reliable, or truthful (claims made in academic peer reviewed journals, for example, might, in general, be thought to be more reliable than those made in tabloid newspapers). This is a resource that the reductionist will, and should appeal to, though I don’t think that such an appeal will help in response to Dummett’s argument. That is because we will not have an information even about the *types* that the testimony that others rely on putatively falls into, so it is not information which can feature in an argument of the kind Dummett insists the reductionist must appeal to. For a different objection to separating testimony into *types* for these purposes, see Coady 1992, p. 84. For a reply see Lyons 1997.

they will be truthful more often than not. These claims may have a stronger weight once they are relativised to, for example, institutions (e.g. the societal sanctions for doctors telling untruths of particular kinds are particularly severe). The point is that once we have these more general grounds operative, then there will be far less for the features of the specific circumstance of utterance to do to lend requisite support to the relevant knowledge claims.<sup>9</sup>

Can such moves help the reductionist answer Dummett's objection? It strikes me that making this kind of move becomes increasingly implausible as the testimonial chain under consideration lengthens. The strategy that I have represented the reductionist as employing is that local justification can be bolstered by global justification. But when it comes to those speakers lower down the testimonial chain, local justification is liable to drop out entirely. I think that Dummett is right in saying that we rarely have any information about the specific properties or circumstances of the testimony that our interlocutor is relying on in telling us what they do.<sup>10</sup> If Dummett is right about this, then, at some point, usually pretty early on in the chain, all that we will have to go on is that testimony is a generally reliable knowledge source. But if that is all we do have to go on, then the reductionist cannot employ the strategy I've described to answer Dummett's objection. That's because such a claim of general reliability, even if true, would not be sufficient to ground

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<sup>9</sup> Various sophisticated moves of this kind are discussed in Faulkner 2011, pp. 30-45.

<sup>10</sup> This, of course, relates to the inference that we *didn't* draw. All that Dummett is demanding is that an argument could be constructed from which the inference *could* be drawn, not that reductionist are committed to the view that we make these inferences, or need to.

the requisite claims to knowledge that Dummett argues the reductionist says we need. At least, that is so if we are not to hold the implausible view that something presented as testimony, *as such*, is sufficient evidence to support a knowledge claim to its truth. That view is implausible because if that did constitute sufficient evidence, then *all* cases in which we were told something could support knowledge claims of their truth. But plainly they don't.

What this goes to show is that any time that we are told something by someone who themselves are relying on testimony, or is relying on testimony far enough down the testimonial chain, we cannot construct a sufficiently good inductive argument that represents the inference that we omitted to draw. Though we may come to know *some* of the things we thought we knew because another told us, it is still the case that we are mistaken about *most* of what we take ourselves to know. A milder, but still absurdly pernicious, form of scepticism follows. I am assuming that scepticism, even in this form, is false, so reductionism, on these grounds, can be rejected.

### III.

#### Non-Reductionism

We cannot, then, regard the utterances of others as capable only of providing evidence that supports inductive, or abductive reasoning to a conclusion that things are as the speaker said them to be. That is not to say, of course, that others' utterances cannot so function—I think, in point of fact, that they often do—but that others' utterances can have

epistemic significance beyond that conferred on them by their status as evidence of this kind.

The question is, *what* further significance can others' utterances have? What a rejection of reductionism allows for is the possibility that one can acquire knowledge from what another says, in the absence of having sufficient evidence to support a knowledge claim that they have uttered truth. Less strongly, it must allow for epistemic support for the belief that things are as the speaker said them to be, to outstrip the epistemic support for the belief that the speaker uttered truth. But then what is it that allows for such a thing? Where does the knowledge come from, if not from the status of the utterance as evidence?

The most natural, and interesting, suggestion is that the knowledge in question can come from the speaker, or someone in their testimonial chain. The idea is that, in the absence of possessing sufficient epistemic support to generate a conclusive argument that the speaker has uttered truth, and so that things are as they say them to be, we can still get knowledge that things are as they said them to be. We can do this, the thought would be, just when *the speaker* knows that things are as they say them to be (or someone in their testimonial chain does). So, on condition that the speaker, or someone in their testimonial chain, has the knowledge in question, our having something less than knowledge that the speaker uttered truth can still yield knowledge that things are as they say that they are.

### III. a.

#### Burge's Non-Reductionism

So understood, it is key to any view that rejects reductionism along these lines is that it marks a distinction between two kinds of epistemic support. It is the distinction between what I have been calling the “epistemic support for the belief that the speaker has uttered truth”, and what I have been calling the “epistemic support for the belief that things are as the speaker said them to be”. Tyler Burge—a prominent non-reductionist—marks that distinction, or something close to it, in the following passage:

[I]n interlocution we distinguish two bodies of epistemic warrant: (i) the recipient's *proprietary warrant* for a belief—that is, the reasons available to him together with his epistemic entitlements for holding the belief; and (ii) the *extended body of warrant* for a belief—which includes not only the recipient's proprietary warrant, but those warrants for the belief that are possessed or indicated by interlocutors on whom the recipient depends for his knowledge (though not for his proprietary warrant).

(Burge, 1998, pp. 5-6)

What I said was “epistemic support for the belief that the speaker utters truth” is what Burge refers to with his notion of “proprietary warrant”; what I said was “epistemic support for the belief that things are as the speaker said them to be” is what Burge refers to with his notion of the “extended body of warrant”. Given the place these notions have in

Burge's idiosyncratic view, I will avoid using his terminology. But what Burge does provide us with is one plausible way of articulating what significance others' utterance can have, once we have rejected reductionism.

The picture that Burge presents us with is one according to which there are distinct bodies of epistemic support, each of which have a different role to play in our eventually acquiring knowledge from testimony (when we do). His own view relies crucially on the idea of 'epistemic entitlements'. Epistemic support, according to Burge, has two forms, *justifications* and *entitlements*:

The distinction between justification and entitlement is this: Although both have positive force in rationally supporting a propositional attitude or cognitive practice, and in constituting an epistemic right to it, entitlements are epistemic rights or warrants that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject.

(Burge 1993, p. 458)

Burge regards his notion of entitlement as the externalist analogue to the internalist notion of justification. When one has justification, one can cite the argument that justifies one's belief. When one has an entitlement, there is an argument that gives epistemic support to the belief one is entitled to hold, but one is not necessarily able to cite that argument—it is not necessarily cognitively, or reflexively, accessible to one. Entitlements, in Burge's epistemology, occur all over the place—notably, in allowing us to properly possess knowledge on the basis of



memory, as well as from what others tell us. ‘Warrant’, for Burge, includes both entitlements and justifications—in other words whatever it is that (Burge recognises) as lending epistemic support to our commitments.

With this notion of an entitlement in place, he advances what he calls the *acceptance principle*, which sets out the conditions under which a speaker’s audience can exploit the ‘extended body of warrant’ that a speaker can make available. In other words, what it is that, at least in part, constitutes the audience’s “proprietary warrant”. That principle says,

A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and this is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so.<sup>11</sup>

What Burge’s acceptance principle tells us is that there is always an argument in favour of one’s believing that things are as the speaker says them to be. What that argument will ultimately depend on, it seems fair to assume, is a subsidiary premise articulating an entitlement to take the assertive utterances of speakers to be true—that is, an argument for the claim that the speaker has uttered truth. That subsidiary argument lends epistemic support to one’s believing that they uttered truth only when one has no (overriding) reason to suppose that they are misleading one in what they are telling one. What that argument sustains is the reliance we have on others when we form that belief about their uttering truth, for

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<sup>11</sup> Burge 1993, p. 467.

the epistemic support they make available for the belief that things are as they say them to be.

The justification that Burge provides for the claim that we are, in fact, in possession of an entitlement to accept as true that which is presented as true to us, is in the form of attributing to us a number of (additional) interlocking entitlements. Since what is presented to one, when confronted with speech behaviour, is intelligible, we are entitled to take the source of that behaviour to be rational. And since this source presents something true to us, by the nature of rationality as such, we are entitled to presume that what is presented as true, *is* true.<sup>12</sup> These presumptions can be overridden by any number of factors, but if they are not, we need no further reason to suppose that the speaker is speaking truthfully for us to exploit the epistemic position the speaker stands in with respect to the claims they are making.

Each of these entitlements are underwritten by an argument; an argument that constitutes the warrant for the claim that we possess the entitlement that Burge posits. So, for example, Burge takes it that it is because of the nature of rationality as such, that the rationality of the source of intelligible speech underwrites the entitlement to take as true

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<sup>12</sup> I am suppressing a great deal of detail in Burge's view (the full picture emerges across his 1993, 1997 and the beginning of his 1998). For example, Burge has an elaborate and very abstract argument that purports to establish the claim that the relationship between rationality and truth justifies the claim that what is presented as true from a rational source can be presumed to be true when one has no reason to take it to be false. This argument is the basis of the entitlement that he attributes to those who are confronted with speech behaviour. I am only really interested in the shape of this proposal painted with a broad brush because I want to highlight a structural point that his view has in common its competitors.

that which is presented as true by (what we are entitled to take to be) a rational source. All these entitlements can be overridden by contravening factors, but when they are not, the entitlements suffice to provide sufficient epistemic support to make claims of knowledge of their basis.

Burge's general strategy, if not the specifics of his own justification for it, have proved popular: with something like an entitlement of the kind he posits in place, we can preserve the idea that we can acquire knowledge in cases where we have insufficient inductive grounds upon which to make a plausible claim to knowing that the speaker, in that situation, uttered truth.<sup>13</sup> We don't need such grounds because we can rely on the knowledge, or warrant, that others possess for what they give voice to. The distinctive feature of this form of non-reductionism is that this only requires (though, crucially, it still does require) that we do not have overriding reasons to suppose that the speaker is being misleading in their uttering something that they represent as informative.

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<sup>13</sup> Other examples of such explicit claims can be found at Weiner 2003, p. 257, and Audi 1998, p. 142. I use Burge as my prime example because of the clarity with which the structure of this form of non-reductionism is represented. There are many other views that are close to Burge's form of non-reductionism—that is, a view of a kind that says we have a kind of epistemic right to rely on the word of others in the absence of (too much) contravening reason. Such accounts can be found, for example, in Austin (1946), Coady (1992, 1994), and Williamson (2000). An account of this kind is often read into Dummett (1994), though I think that Dummett's view is actually not what it is commonly taken to be. Dummett, on close inspection, does not claim that we have an epistemic right, in the absence of contravening reasons, to take as true what is presented as true. Instead, Dummett only commits to the weaker principle that only when I have reason to suppose that the speaker is being misleading, do I need reason to suppose things are as the speaker says that they are. It is consistent with this, I think, that we don't have an entitlement of Burge's sort, but I won't argue for that point here. Later in this chapter, I will also offer a reading of McDowell (1994) on which, despite surface appearances, there is no entitlement of the kind operative in Burge's account either.

It is not particularly surprising that Burge here provides us with only one form that non-reductionism can take, given the complexity of his justification for it. There have been plenty of accounts that have been advanced that reject at least one of the claims I have represented Burge as advancing. Many of the criticisms that have come his way concern his acceptance principle.<sup>14</sup> I too want to suggest that there something questionable about the principle. But that is not primarily for the reasons that are typically appealed to—usually, its putatively counterintuitive consequences. I think it is a questionable principle because it is not obvious what reasons there are for non-reductionists to impose *any substantial epistemic constraints* on when our believing that a speaker has uttered truth can result in the acquisition of the knowledge they can make available by speaking knowledgeably. Burge’s acceptance principle still requires that we don’t have reason to suppose that the speaker is being misleading—crucially, it still requires this when the speaker is not, perhaps despite appearances, being misleading. This is plainly a substantive constraint on when believing that the speaker is truthful results in the acquisition of irreducibly testimonial knowledge. One, or so I’ll suggest, that does not follow from a denial of reductionism.

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<sup>14</sup> The most persistent of these is that the acceptance principle engenders a sanction of gullibility. Elizabeth Fricker (1994) was the first to make the objection; similar complaints can be found in Faulkner (2000), and Lackey (2006).

### III. b.

#### The Enabling Principle

What non-reductionism does require is that we mark a distinction between the kind of epistemic support that one has for believing that the speaker has uttered truth, and the epistemic support that one can thereby acquire for believing that things are as the speaker said them to be. It is in this regard that non-reductionism differs from the kind of modified reductionism that I considered which appealed to factors that justified the supposition that testimony, in general, is reliable. That said that we have reason to suppose that, in general, speakers utter truth when making their assertions, and this provides the evidential basis on which one can build a strong enough inductive argument, when supplemented with enough reason to suppose the particular utterance in question is a truthful one. But non-reductionism says that the crucial epistemic support comes from the speaker's end—whatever they are in possession of that lends support to the claims they are making, is what supports the audience's testimonial beliefs.

Marking this distinction allows for a number of different views about how epistemic support of these two kinds relate to one another. In Burge, we find a view that says that we must lack reasons to suppose that the speaker has produced a false utterance, for us to effect the bypass to the speaker's knowledge. But other non-reductionist views on the market diverge wildly on the point of what is needed for this. In the next chapter I will spend some time on a non-reductionist account that has been given to us by Richard Moran (2006). I will wait until then to give

a full characterisation of that view, but in the present context it is worth mentioning that, though non-reductionist, Moran's view is incompatible with the claim that we have anything like the kind of entitlement that Burge posits. Instead, non-reductionists of Moran's stripe insist that we do require reasons in favour of accepting the utterances of others in order to avail ourselves of the knowledge such utterances make available. However, the kinds of reasons that Moran and his followers insist are needed, are not what provides the epistemic support for the belief that things are as the speaker says them to be. That is still dependent on the epistemic status of what the speaker gives voice to (hence, non-reductionist). Instead, what they say is required is reasons generated by the institution of *trust* that they think must hold between speaker and audience for the knowledge the speaker makes available to be picked up by their audience. In the absence those particular kinds of reasons being operative in situations in which a speaker gives voice to what they know, the audience is not in a position to avail themselves of knowledge that a speaker has given voice to.

So we have two forms of non-reductionism in contention: a kind of 'negative' version, that says we only require a lack of reasons to believe that the speaker has spoken falsely, in order to have sufficient epistemic support for the claim that the speaker uttered truth; and a kind of 'positive' version, that says we do require reasons in favour of the claim that the speaker spoke truth. Both commitments can be seen as instances of a subscription to a more general principle; both of these views require a level of epistemic support of the first kind, so that the beliefs we acquire on the basis of believing others (that things are as the speaker said them

to be) can attain the status of knowledge. That is, both suppose that an enabling condition on our exploiting others' knowledge in the way that non-reductionism allows for is that we possess that former kind of epistemic support—either in its weak form, in a way similar to that proposed by Burge, or in the stronger form, in a way similar to that proposed by Moran.

These views, then, subscribe to the following *enabling principle* for the acquisition of genuinely testimonial knowledge:

When *A* believes that *p* by way of believing that *u*, of *S*, which constitutes testimony to *p*, is true, *A* comes to possess testimonial knowledge that *p* only if there is sufficient epistemic support for *A*'s belief that *u* is true.

My aim in the rest of this chapter is to call this principle into question.

We should start by asking what reason there are, in the non-reductionist context, for accepting the claim that we need epistemic support of the first kind, in order to exploit the epistemic support of the second kind. Because this question, I think, becomes particularly pressing when we note what determines the epistemic status of our testimonial beliefs, once we allow for whatever enabling conditions we favour to have been met. In these favourable circumstances, one comes by knowledge that things are as the speaker says them to be *only if* the speaker themselves knows what they are talking about, or, at worst, says something that a speaker earlier in the testimonial chain knew. But if that is what determines the

status of the eventual belief acquired, why should the status of the distinct belief that the speaker spoke truth have a bearing on this?

No such questions arise for reductionism. The reductionist will think that one must have sufficient epistemic support for the belief that a speaker utters truth, for one's belief that things are as they say them to be to be sufficiently epistemically supported. That's just because, according to reductionism, the epistemic support for the former belief is what constitutes the epistemic support for the latter belief. But that is not the case when it comes to non-reductionism. The distinctive feature of such views is precisely that this epistemic support diverges. It has to have this feature, if it is to allow knowledge acquisition from what others say, in the absence of one's possessing sufficient evidence that the speaker utters truth. So there is justificatory lacuna that needs to be filled by those who insist that the former plays an *enabling* role in one's acquisition of epistemic support for the beliefs one acquires on the basis of understanding the utterances that one believes to be true.

Paul Faulkner, I think, articulates what would initially, at least, seem the obvious reason to be given about why epistemic support for the belief that the speaker has uttered truth is needed to exploit the epistemic support that the speaker confers on the claim that things are as they said them to be. What's more, if he is right, then this would go some way to explaining why the literature has so little to say about how the two kinds of epistemic support link up:



What is epistemically distinctive about testimony as a source of knowledge and justification is that it is a way of resting on *other people's epistemic standings*. However, inheriting this standing does *presuppose* something of an audience. It presupposes that accepting the bit of testimony to *p* is reasonable for the audience.<sup>15</sup>

(Faulkner 2011, p. 12)

Faulkner is giving expression to his own view about what is required to acquire testimonial knowledge by suggesting that one is only so much as capable of acquiring knowledgable beliefs on the basis of having been told, in the presence of reasons to do take the speaker to be truthful in her assertions (Faulkner endorses Moran's account). We are told, a *presupposition* of the claim that our accepting a bit of testimony can bear such epistemic fruit is that audiences are in possession of the reasons that Faulkner thinks are needed for one to meet this more general principle. Since I am including amongst the advocates of this principle non-reductionism of the kind advanced by Burge, we can amend this to include the view that a lack of sufficient reason to reject the utterance as false can render one's believing that the speaker uttered truth to be

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<sup>15</sup> This is not all. Faulkner relies on what he calls the 'argument from cooperation' to establish the claim too. This is important both for motivating his particular version of the view that originates in Moran, and for many of his criticisms of rival views. Interesting as I think that this argument is, I will have to leave it to one side here. I think that the argument itself relies on upstream commitments about the nature of practical interests of agents, which we may or may not want to accept. It strikes me, though, that if we do accept what underpins the argument, more is needed to show that it has a bearing on the epistemic status of what is acquired on the basis of accepting some piece of testimony, as opposed to the epistemic status of our acceptance. Though, I don't pretend that this is an adequate response to this aspect of the case that Faulkner makes. The argument is discussed repeatedly throughout Faulkner 2011.

sufficiently epistemically supported—sufficient, that is, to make available the knowledge that the speaker is giving voice to. So understood, why should we think that such a commitment is *presupposed* in putative cases of knowledge transmission?

My aim, in the rest of this chapter, is modest. I want to undermine the claim that a substantive reading of the enabling principle is presupposed by non-reductionist accounts as such. I'm going to do so by exploring a particular non-reductionist account, backed up by some more general epistemological commitments, and show how this view is genuinely non-reductionist and does not bring with it a substantive reading of the enabling principle. A view of this kind, I think, can be found in some things that John McDowell has said.

Before I do, it will be helpful to introduce some terminology. I will use a notion of epistemic *uptake* to pick out what an audience does when, confronted with a speaker telling them that *p* by producing an utterance, *u*, the audience *takes up* their utterance just in case they come to believe that *p* on the basis of understanding *u*, and believing that the speaker has uttered truth. We can conceive of the enabling principle as one that determines some of the conditions under which uptake can result in the possession of *testimonial knowledge*, where this is the knowledge that the speaker makes available in speaking knowledgeably. That is, the kind of knowledge that non-reductionism allows—the kind which one can only come to possess from a speaker telling one something that they know, or

something that someone in their testimonial chain knows.<sup>16</sup> I will talk of ‘irreducible testimonial knowledge’ (sometimes just ‘testimonial knowledge’), by which I mean to pick out this kind of knowledge that non-reductionism allows, but reductionism precludes—a kind of knowledge that one can acquire when one is not in possession of an inductive argument that can support an knowledge claim about the speaker’s uttering the truth. In these terms, the view that I’ll be advancing in this thesis is one according to which uptake can yield testimonial knowledge irrespective of one’s reasons to believe that the speaker uttered truth—that is, it suffices for uptake to result in irreducibly testimonial knowledge when it is uptake of an utterance with which (roughly speaking) a speaker tells one something that they, or someone else, knows. (I will consider some objections to views of this kind at the end of chapter 2).

#### IV.

#### McDowell’s Non-Reductionism

It might seem, on first inspection, that McDowell’s account is very similar to Burge’s. That’s because he appears to agree that *something* like an entitlement holds in the manner described by Burge. I think that this appearance is misleading. On the reading of McDowell that I give, the

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<sup>16</sup> Here I am advocating something close to the transmission principle that Lackey (2008, pp. 39) calls ‘TEP-N’, and something closer to what Faulkner (2011, p. 62) calls his ‘transmission principle for testimonial knowledge’. Lackey thinks that her ‘TEP-N’ is false because of a certain kind of putative counterexample. ‘TEP-N’ makes no reference to *testimonial chains* (as Faulkner’s transmission principle does), and the cases she discusses are counterexamples to ‘TEP-N’ as she presents it, but the view that I eventually end up advancing in Chapter 2 can accommodate these cases. I show how in §IV. b. of that chapter.

enabling principle that one can extract provides no substantial constraints on when testimonial knowledge can be acquired, beyond that which is a necessary condition on one's acquisition of testimonial knowledge—namely, that the speaker, or someone in their testimonial chain, possesses the knowledge in question. This is not the case according to Burge's version of non-reductionism.

Two notes before I begin my exposition of McDowell. First, I take it that the view that I eventually end up endorsing in the next chapter, is at least consistent with this reading of McDowell's epistemological conception. This, I hope, gives substance to my account in so far as it shows that there is a well worked out general epistemology that can serve to underpin it (though, I take it, other possible accounts could play this role). That, I think, is worth emphasising because of the some of the *prima facie* oddities of my account for those of a certain epistemological bent (I set out that view in §IV of chapter 2 and discuss possible objections to it in §V). Second, I don't think that McDowell's views are the only way of justifying the enabling principle, or any justification will have the consequence of, in effect, providing no constraints on uptake beyond those that I argue are imposed by McDowell's conception. So I don't pretend to be arguing, at least directly, against the cogency of those non-reductionist views that subscribe to a more substantive reading of that principle. I intend, only, to give reasons to doubt that the a substantial reading is presupposed by non-reductionism, and offer a cogent view that denies that any such the principle, so read, is in effect.

#### IV. a.

#### McDowell's Cook Wilsonian Conception

John Cook Wilson<sup>17</sup> took it that, in knowing that  $p$ , one cannot have the grounds one does for taking  $p$  to be so, and it not be the case that  $p$ . In other words, knowing something amounts to nothing less than one's possessing a kind of proof that things are as one takes them to be; if one has a proof that  $p$ , it cannot be that not- $p$ . A corollary of this is that if one's grounds for taking it that  $p$  are compatible, however unlikely, with not- $p$ , then one's possessing those grounds do not amount to one's knowing that  $p$ ; knowing, so conceived, excludes all possibilities that not- $p$ , thus one's possessing grounds that are even so much as consistent with that possibility, does not render one knowledgable as to whether  $p$ . McDowell defends a Cook Wilsonian conception, in the first instance, because he agrees that in knowing something, one's grounds cannot leave it open that things are not as one takes them to be.<sup>18</sup> If that is right, then whatever it is that we think constitutes one's knowing something has got to be such that, when it obtains, there is no possibility that things are not as one takes them to be.

Can a Cook Wilsonian conception of knowledge cohere with a plausible epistemology of testimony? The prospects may appear bleak. As we've seen, when one is told something by another, there would always seem to be a possibility that they are lying or are misinformed. That there is

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<sup>17</sup> I am entirely indebted to Travis (2005) and Travis & Kalderon (2009) for tracing elements of McDowell's epistemology back to Cook Wilson.

<sup>18</sup> McDowell (1982), (1995).

always, seemingly, such a possibility, in conjunction with the conception of knowledge that requires any possibility of that kind be excluded, appears to preclude one's coming to possess knowledge on this basis. So a Cook Wilsonian conception appears to commit us to a form of scepticism: this is, at any rate, the conclusion Cook Wilson himself drew.<sup>19</sup> But, of course, McDowell is no sceptic. He thinks that there *is* a way for testimony to be a source of knowledge under a Cook Wilsonian conception.

To see how, we can start by looking to McDowell's diagnosis about why it is that scepticism appears to be implied by that conception. McDowell isolates a general principle that he takes to be behind the reasoning of the kind I articulated in the last paragraph; a principle that, *prima facie*, is just a statement of the Cook Wilsonian conception of knowledge:

[I]f we want to be able to suppose the title of a belief to count as knowledge is constituted by the believer's possession of an argument to its truth, it had better not be the case that the best argument he has at his disposal leaves it open that things are not as he believes them to be.

(McDowell 1994, p. 421)

This principle, together with the claim that knowledge that *p* is one's possessing an argument for the truth that *p*, entails that one's knowing that *p* amounts to one's possession of an argument that does not leave it

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<sup>19</sup> Cook Wilson, 1926, p. 107.

open that not- $p$ . For the sake of ease of reference, let's give this principle a name: the *Conclusive Argument Principle*.

The Conclusive Argument Principle looks to be very strong; as I've suggested, for the instances in which it is thought to hold, sceptical consequences can appear inevitable. Take the claim that Cameron is Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. At the time of writing, this is true. Is it the case, though, that we are ordinarily in possession of an argument that excludes the possibility that Cameron has made a shock resignation since last we checked the news? McDowell, at any rate, thinks not. So far as he is concerned, there is no such argument that could be in my possession, given my current information. Since I am not in possession of an argument that is able to rule out these possibilities, then, if my knowing Cameron to be PM requires my possessing an argument of this kind, then I don't know that Cameron is PM. And if this kind of reasoning is correct in these relatively robust kinds of cases, then the kinds of commitments we incur in believing what others say to us cannot attain the status of knowledge: the Conclusive Argument Principle cannot be met by an argument with "A speaker,  $S$ , uttered  $u$ " as a premise, since there is always an open possibility that, in uttering  $u$ ,  $S$  uttered a falsehood.

To avoid the sceptical conclusion, one obvious route to take is to deny the Conclusive Argument Principle. It could, instead, be replaced by something like the *Good Argument Principle*:

If one's knowing that  $p$  is constituted by one's possessing an argument to its truth, that argument must render it sufficiently unlikely that not- $p$ .

There is a certain elasticity in the 'sufficiently unlikely', that *could* allow for testimonial knowledge, if, in some circumstances, the possibility that the speaker is being misleading is remote enough. Of course, subscription to the Good Argument Principle over the Conclusive Argument Principle is a denial of the Cook Wilsonian conception:

In knowing, we can have nothing to do with the so-called 'greater strength' of evidence on which the opinion is grounded; simply because we know that this 'greater strength' of evidence of A's being B is compatible with A's not being B after all.

(Cook Wilson 1926, p. 100)

Rendering something unlikely is not ruling it out. And since, according to the Cook Wilsonian conception, knowing just is one's ruling out the incompatible possibilities, this is to have a fundamentally opposed base conception of knowledge to that which McDowell endorses. What is required instead, on this altered picture, is that things happen to turn out as one takes them to be. Only then, does one's possession of a sufficiently good argument count as knowing, when the Cook Wilsonian conception is abandoned in this way.

So we now appear to be left with a choice: embrace scepticism, or abandon the Cook Wilsonian conception. McDowell, though, takes



neither option. To see how he manages this, notice that the above line of reasoning affirmed the antecedent of the Conclusive Argument Principle—namely, the claim that to know that  $p$  is to be in possession of an argument to its truth. With this in place, the only thing left to reject in the line of reasoning that leads to scepticism is the principle itself: according to the view, to know  $p$ , it is not the case that, *if* one's knowing is constituted by one's possession of an argument, that argument rules out that things are such that not- $p$ . This, for McDowell, is a mistake; the Conclusive Argument Principle is *true*. That's just because knowing that  $p$  is to exclude the possibility that not- $p$ , so *if* knowing something is a matter of possessing an argument to its truth, that argument cannot leave it open whether things are as one takes them to be. What we need to realise is that *the principle has no application in many cases*: there are domains of knowledge acquisition for which the antecedent is not satisfied. Of particular importance for present purposes is that testimonial exchanges fall into one of these domains. Knowing something on the basis of having been told does not require one be in possession of an argument that things are as the speaker says that they are.

Taking this line allows McDowell to retain the Cook Wilsonian conception, insisting that knowing that  $p$  does not leave it open that things are not as one takes them to be. However, it also allows him to deny that one need be in possession of an argument that rules out that not- $p$ , in order to rule out that not- $p$  (i.e. know that  $p$ ). For McDowell, we can rule out the possibility that things are not as we take them to be

in the absence of our possession an *argument* that rules this possibility out.

#### IV. b.

##### The Requirement of Doxastic Responsibility

For all that, though, we appear no closer to seeing how it is that a Cook Wilsonian conception can cohere with a plausible epistemology of testimony. McDowell has told us what is *not* needed to make the exclusions necessary for knowing under that conception, but we do not yet have in view how he conceives of the putative capability we possess to make the exclusions that are necessary in testimonial cases.

The crux of McDowell's epistemology of testimony rests on the claim that so long as we are *doxastically responsible* in our taking up the utterances of others, we are at least in a position to avail ourselves of whatever knowledge may be made available by a speaker. On the other hand, when we are doxastically *irresponsible* in our uptaking, we fail to exclude what is needed for knowledge. This is how McDowell himself puts it:

If one's takings of things to be thus and so are to be cases of knowledge, they must be sensitive to the requirements of doxastic responsibility. Since following the dictates of doxastic responsibility is obviously an exercise in rationality, this can be a partial interpretation of the thought that knowledge in general, and the specific epistemic positions like remembering and seeing, are standings in the space of reasons. We could not conceive

remembering that things are thus and so, say, as a standing in the space of reasons if a subject could count as being in that position even if he were not responsive to the rational force of independently available considerations.

(McDowell 1994, p. 429)

McDowell finds it helpful to think about knowledge in Sellarsian terms of ‘standing in the space of reasons’. How are we to make sense of this talk? McDowell himself tells us that,

If knowledge is a standing in the space of reasons, someone whose taking things to be thus and so is a case of knowledge must have a reason (a justification) for taking things to be that way.

(ibid., p. 427)

According to this conception what distinguishes one who knows from one who does not, is the reasons—the justification—for what they take to be so, that they are in possession of. Accordingly, one who does not know that  $p$  cannot have the same reason for taking it that  $p$  (if they do) from one who does know that  $p$ . They will be in possession of different reasons.

The structure of the view can be drawn out clearly in the perceptual case. McDowell takes it that if one sees that there is a goldfinch in the garden, then one knows that there is a goldfinch in the garden: seeing that  $p$  entails knowing that  $p$ . One’s seeing that  $p$  constitutes a *conclusive reason*

for one that things are such that  $p$ . That is, possessing a conclusive reason for the claim that things are some way, excludes the possibility that things are not as one has that reason to take them to be. On the other hand, if one hallucinates a goldfinch in the garden, even if one's hallucinations happen to be reliable as to how the world is arranged according to them, one is not in possession of a conclusive reason for things being as one hallucinates them to be.

However plausible we find this in the perceptual case, what is important here is that there is an analogue of 'seeing that  $p$ ', for McDowell, in the testimonial case. The conclusive reason for taking it that  $p$  on the basis of what another has said is one's *having heard from the speaker that  $p$* . Like the reason one possesses on seeing that  $p$ , if one's reason for taking it that  $p$  is that one has heard from a speaker that  $p$ , then one knows that  $p$ —it cannot be the case that one has heard from a speaker that  $p$  and not- $p$ . One's possessing the reason of having heard from a speaker that  $p$ , rules out the possibility that things are not as one has heard from the speaker that they are.

This shows why McDowell thinks that one can count as acquiring testimonial knowledge, even though one need not have an argument that rules out that not- $p$ . One comes to know that  $p$  on the basis of being told, one is in possession of a reason of this kind, and no argument is needed to come to be in possession of that reason.

Under what conditions is a speaker capable of providing their audience with a reason of this kind? Well, one plausible sufficient condition

would appear to be when the speaker is in possession of the knowledge that they intend to be communicating to their audience. That is because they are in a position that they are able to rule out that not- $p$ , by themselves possessing a conclusive reason for  $p$ . In being in that position (in possessing a conclusive reason for  $p$ ), they can allow another to hear from them (in the relevant sense) that  $p$ , given their capacity to communicate what they have conclusive reason for (namely,  $p$ ).

Why, then, does McDowell insist on ‘doxastic responsibility’ on the part of the audience? Why can such reasons not be possessed by one who is doxastically irresponsible in their making of epistemic commitments with respect to what others say?

## V.

### Doxastic Responsibility & The Enabling Principle

Absent McDowell’s background epistemological conception, it may seem that the requirement of doxastic responsibility engenders a form of standard non-reductionism much like Burge’s. Insisting (only) that one’s uptake is not doxastically irresponsible might seem to be just a different way of expressing a commitment to our possessing a kind of default entitlement to rely on the word of others in the absence of reasons to suppose that they are being misleading.

But on my reading of McDowell, this appearance is illusory. Having heard from another that  $p$ , we can rule out not- $p$ , in the absence of our possessing an argument that does this. We do this by possessing that

conclusive reason, and we can only come to be in possession that reason by being doxastically responsible. Doxastic *irresponsibility* is, in effect, a form of irrationality, because it is a kind of insensitivity to reasons. We have seen that McDowell's view is that knowledge just is one's possessing the right kinds of reasons—the conclusive ones. There is, then, an interpretation of this claim that doxastic responsibility is a sensitivity to the right kinds of reasons—the conclusive ones. As such, doxastically responsible uptake is just taking up those utterances which provide one with conclusive reason to take things to be as things were thereby said to be. If that is a correct interpretation of the requirement of doxastic responsibility, this is a very long way from the defeasible, *prima facie* entitlement that we got from Burge.

Coming into possession of the reason to take it that  $p$  by having heard from the speaker that  $p$ , itself is sufficient for knowing, because one cannot have heard (in McDowell's sense) that  $p$  from the speaker and there be a possibility that not- $p$ . Doxastic responsibility in one's acceptance as true some testimonial utterance, so understood, in effect, *entails* the acquisition of testimonial knowledge.

The reading of McDowell's requirement of doxastic responsibility on which it engenders a commitment to something like a Burgean entitlement to accept as true that which is presented to one as true is one that takes it that doxastic responsibility demands one not believe what one has (sufficient) evidence to suppose is false. Doxastic responsibility on this reading would not *suffice* for knowledge acquisition. Because on this reading of the requirement, it is consistent with one's accepting as

true some testimonial utterance in a doxastically responsible way, that one, nonetheless, fails to acquire testimonial knowledge. But then doxastic responsibility in uptake would not rule out that things are not as one takes them to be on that basis. As such, one falls short of knowing that things are as the speaker told one that they are. In one's taking oneself to have heard from the speaker that  $p$ , when the speaker has not acted so as to put you in a position to have heard that  $p$  from what she said, one is being insensitive to the reasons that there are for taking it that  $p$ . Insensitivity of this kind is consistent with things not being as one takes them to be. As such, it fails to count as knowledge. For doxastic responsibility to be a condition on acquiring knowledge, under the Cook Wilsonian conception, it has got to be understood not in these evidential terms, but in terms which allows doxastic responsibility to result in one's possession of proof that things are as one responsibly took them to be.

When we understand the requirement that one be doxastically responsible in one's taking up an utterance as one's being requisitely sensitive to reasons, the requirement of doxastic responsibility *can* be thought of as a version of the enabling principle. What it demands is that, only if one is sufficiently sensitive to the relevant reasons in taking up an utterance, can that uptake beget knowledge. So McDowell's grounds for advancing the requirement of doxastic responsibility may provide one form of justification for some version of the enabling principle. The justification would be that, since knowing that  $p$  is one's possessing a conclusive reason in favour of  $p$ , one's knowing that  $p$  from being told must itself require possessing a conclusive reason. If one is not

sensitive to the (conclusive) reasons there are for uptake, one cannot come by testimonial knowledge.

But this, of course, doesn't really amount to the kinds of demands on our epistemic behaviour that the enabling principle is intended to capture. On McDowell's epistemology of testimony, the principle that comes out is *trivially* satisfied when we successfully take up utterances that make available testimonial knowledge. The principle, so interpreted, places no substantive constraints on when uptake can beget knowledge. All that is required is that one take up an utterance with which testimonial knowledge is made available by the speaker. But that places no further constraints on us than the idea that there is such a thing as testimonial knowledge in the first place: namely, a kind of knowledge which can be acquired by an audience only when the speaker, or someone in their testimonial chain, possesses the knowledge in question.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> I want to include one caveat about the reading that I have given of McDowell. In a footnote discussing the case of the Boy Who Cried Wolf, we do get an expression of a view which is more like Burge's version of non-reductionism, than the one of the kind that I have been trying to make plausible. In effect, McDowell tells us that, when, on the third time of doing so, the shepherd boy (knowledgably) cries "Wolf!", he makes available knowledge that there is a wolf there to one who is passing, and has not heard the two previous lies, but does *not* make this available to those who *have* heard his lies, since uptake of this cry would be doxastically irresponsible. According to the interpretation that I have given, this is a mistake—it would *not* be doxastically irresponsible to believe the shepherd boy the third time round, even if one had been confronted with the first two lies. For this reason, I am hesitant to attribute to the actual McDowell the view that I have been articulating. All the same, I think I've said enough to show how we might motivate such a view, and with it the claim that there can be non-reductionist accounts of testimonial knowledge that deny the enabling principle.



## VI. Conclusion

Where does this leave things? The main point of this discussion has been to go some way to bring into question the claim that, in advancing a non-reductionist epistemology of testimony, one is committed to a version of the enabling principle that places substantive constraints on when uptake can beget (irreducible) testimonial knowledge. The point of providing the reading of McDowell that I have, is to show that there is a general epistemology on the market which allows us to make do without such a substantive constraint. I don't though, pretend to have established the denial of a substantive reading of that principle for non-reductionist accounts generally; I have offered no in principle arguments for that.

What I do take myself to have done is show why we should not accept reductionism, on pain of a mild, but pernicious, scepticism. In light of the structure of the alternative to reductionism, I have questioned the justification for supposing that we require epistemic support for the claim that the speaker has uttered truth, in order to come by knowledge, from their speaking, that things are as they say them to be. The discussion of McDowell is meant to show what kind of more general epistemology could vindicate a rejection of that requirement.

But I do not intend to argue for McDowell's account of testimony as I have read it. I will present my own view of how we acquire knowledge from others in the next chapter; a non-reductionist view that denies that there is an enabling principle that places substantive restrictions on when

uptake can beget testimonial knowledge. It is a view that takes it that the epistemic status of what one acquires on the basis of uptake is independent of the epistemic support one has for believing that the speaker has uttered truth. It is a view that I take to be consistent with many elements of the reading of McDowell that I have given here, though it by no means committed to it.

One final clarification before I move on. I have *not* argued for or against any particular view of what is required for us to be justified in believing that a speaker has uttered truth (at least within the context of non-reductionism about knowledge acquisition from testimony). For all I have said, to be so justified requires what the non-reductionist accounts I have been discussing say is required. Perhaps, if uptake is to be justified, one only need lack reasons to reject that utterance. On the other hand, that might be wrong, and one needs to be in a relationship of trust with one's speaker. The issue I will be taking a stand on concerns the epistemic significance of one's being so justified, however one thinks that is achieved. The view I am about to articulate says that one's grounds for antecedently forming such beliefs do not bear on the epistemic status of what one acquires on their basis.

## 2.

# Voicing Knowledge

### I.

#### Introduction

In this chapter I'll be setting out my own account of how we can acquire knowledge from what others say to us. I propose a non-reductionist account, according to which speakers make available testimonial knowledge by what I will call *voicing knowledge*. In §IV I set out how I am thinking of that, as well as providing some indication of what audiences need to do to come to be in possession of the testimonial knowledge made available by speakers voicing knowledge. That part of my view entails that there is no enabling principle that places substantial constraints on when uptake can yield possession of the testimonial knowledge made available by the speaker, beyond that which is imposed by the notion of irreducible testimonial knowledge itself (see Chapter 1, §§IV-VI). As such, I expect that it is likely to strike many as an unattractive view, or perhaps even just obviously false. I'll attempt to anticipate, and allay, some worries to this effect in §V.

Before doing any of this, though, I will begin this chapter by considering a form of non-reductionism that has been advanced by Richard Moran. This stands in contrast to Burge's non-reductionism in so far as it requires audiences to be in possession of reasons in favour of believing that the speaker uttered truth in order to acquire testimonial knowledge from them. I will be concerned, in particular, with his account of what speakers need to do in order to make available testimonial knowledge (§II). I concentrate on Moran's view because, though I want to deny some of his key claims, I do think that on some important fronts, he correctly sets the terms of debate.

In §III, I'll present a counterexample to Moran's view in light of which I'll give my account. The most interesting thing, I think, about the fact that we can generate such a counterexample, is that it sustains a particular diagnosis of why his view is susceptible to it. My application of this counterexample can be seen as a case study that coheres with the general narrative that I have provided in the last chapter: his view, like many other non-reductionist views, does not properly account for the independence of the epistemic status of the rewards of uptake from that which supports engaging in uptake in the first place. The account that I go on to offer in §IV is one that is informed by this more general conclusion. But there is no pretence here of establishing the view I put forward. The limited aim I have is to convince the reader that a view of this kind is a live option. The rest of the thesis is, in large part, my attempt at saying what will, or at least can, fill the surrounding cognitive landscape in which I take this view of testimonial knowledge acquisition to be located.

## II.

### Moran's Account of 'Telling'

Recall that Moran is a non-reductionist because he takes it to be possible for us to acquire irreducibly testimonial knowledge—that is, a kind of knowledge whose availability depends essentially on the speaker, or someone in their testimonial chain, being in possession of it. However, he denies that we have a default entitlement to take as true that which is presented to us as true (in the absence of reasons to suppose otherwise). He believes that we *do* need reasons in favour of accepting what others say, and not just the absence of reasons not to, in order to avail ourselves of the knowledge that might be available to us when a speaker speaks knowledgeably. These reasons are non-evidential—they do not support inductive reasoning to conclusions concerning the truth of the utterance—but they are *knowledge sustaining*—they enable their possessors to avail themselves of the testimonial knowledge that the speaker may make available. These non-evidential, knowledge sustaining reasons are putatively generated from the intentional nature of some of those acts with which testimonial knowledge can be made available.

According to Moran, what speakers can do is, in effect, invite their audience to take their word for things being as they say them to be. Audiences can utilise this to avail themselves of the knowledge that the speaker has (at least implicitly) given their word that they (the speaker) have. The key idea is that to give one's word to one's audience in this way is not to provide them with any *evidence* that things are the way one has assured them to be. Categorically not; the ways in which speakers go

about giving their word would, when viewed as *evidence*, have a corrupting influence on the epistemic status of audience's taking it that the speaker has uttered truth. The intentional nature of this activity is something that, for Moran, precludes the treatment of testimonial utterances as evidence. That's because evidence that has such intentional features would be deemed corrupted, and epistemic support garnered from such corrupted evidence could not be knowledge sustaining.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, for Moran, quite the contrary: it precisely these very intentional features that make it the case that what others say can have the epistemic status sufficient to make available testimonial knowledge.

Those intentional actions that testimonial utterances are thought, by Moran, to constitute are what he calls acts of 'telling'.<sup>22</sup> By telling their audience something, in a specific sense of what it is to do this, speakers give their word in this way and, in so doing, can make available testimonial knowledge.<sup>23</sup> 'Telling' someone something, so understood, has the effect of instigating a kind of interpersonal relationship between

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<sup>21</sup> See Moran 2006, p. 277. This claim strikes me as questionable. That the cat burglar's calling card is left at the scene of the crime is evidence that it was the cat burglar who committed the crime. That it is intentionally left so as to get people to believe this does not undermine its status as evidence. But Moran's case against 'evidentialist' accounts would imply that it would be. See Keren 2012 for one kind of case against this part of Moran's argument (a part endorsed by Faulkner 2011). In any case, I'll leave this part of the case that Moran makes to one side, because even if sometimes other's utterances can be treated as evidence, it is plausible, at least on its face, that it is not necessary to do so in order to avail oneself of the testimonial knowledge that they make available.

<sup>22</sup> The scare-quotes are included because, though it is obviously Moran's aim that he give an account of our ordinary notion of telling, for reasons that will become clear I don't think that his account captures that notion.

<sup>23</sup> "*Telling* someone something is not simply giving expression to what's on your mind, but is making a statement with the understanding that here it is your word that is to be relied on" Moran, 2006, p. 280.

the speaker and their audience that allows for the transmission of knowledge when the audience trusts the speaker to be uttering truth.

## II. a.

### $M_R$ -intentions

Moran's notion of 'telling' is an act that is a variant on the kind of acts that have what Paul Grice calls 'non-natural meaning'.<sup>24</sup> To non-naturally mean that  $p$ , a speaker,  $S$ , must produce an utterance,  $u$ , intending that,

- (1) their audience,  $A$ , believe that  $p$ ;
- (2)  $A$  believe that  $S$  intends  $A$  to believe that  $p$ ;
- (3)  $A$  believe that  $p$  on the basis of his believing that  $S$  intends (1) & (2).

Grice has an abbreviation for this kind of intention: 'M-intention'.<sup>25</sup> Moran doesn't think that to 'tell' one's audience that  $p$  is for one to direct an utterance at them with which one non-naturally means that  $p$ ; nonetheless, Moran does think that  $S$  must M-intend  $A$  to believe that  $p$ , in order to *tell*  $A$  so much. The reason why it cannot suffice for  $S$  to utter  $u$  with an M-intention to induce the belief that  $p$  in  $A$ , for  $S$  to *tell*  $A$   $p$ , is that  $S$  can act in such a way as to fulfil conditions (1)–(3) but fail to

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<sup>24</sup> Moran 2006, p. 285.

<sup>25</sup> I have used, for ease of illustration, the representation of Grice's (1957) found in his (1969). There are some differences to be found in how Grice represents his former self to how he presented himself at the time. I suppress these complications. See, for details, Bach 1987.

make available testimonial knowledge.<sup>26</sup> This means that, in order for it to provide an account of the acts with which speakers make available testimonial knowledge, Grice's formulation of the intention he isolates needs to be modified. This is what Moran suggests:

The speaker intends not just that the recognition of his intention play a role in producing belief that P, but that the particular role this recognition should play is that of showing the speaker to be assuming responsibility for the status of his utterance as a reason to believe P.

(Moran 2006, pp. 289–90)

So to *tell* *A* something, *S* not only has to M-intend to induce a belief in them, but *S* must also intend that *A*, in recognising *S*'s M-intention, comes to recognise that *S* is taking on a kind of responsibility for her utterance. And, as well as that, *S* must intend that *A*'s recognising *S*'s intention to assume such responsibility is to be taken by *A* as a reason for them to believe what *S* M-intends them to believe. We therefore get a fourth and a fifth condition on *telling*: for *S* to tell *A* that *p*, *S* utters *u* intending,

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<sup>26</sup> Moran (2006, p. 290) uses the following kind of example to show us how (I paraphrase). A speaker is going to Scunthorpe. She intends to deceive her audience by saying that she is going to Scunthorpe, believing that her audience will take her for a liar—that is, believing that they will conclude that she is concealing her plans to go to, say, Bournemouth. However, the audience knows all of this about the speaker, so concludes that she is going to Scunthorpe after all. The idea is that recognition of the speaker's intention plays a role in the audience forming a belief, but not in the right kind of way for that belief to count as distinctively testimonial knowledge. So something more is needed.



- (4) *A* to believe that if *S*'s *M*-intention is fulfilled, *S* is assuming epistemic responsibility for *A*'s belief that *p*.

and

- (5) *A* to believe that *S*'s acting with the intentions (1)-(4) is a reason to believe that *p*.

Let's call those intentions that satisfy the conditions jointly set down in (1)-(5), *M<sub>R</sub>-intentions*. Moran thinks that *telling* somebody something is to act with an *M<sub>R</sub>-intention*. Such acts therefore involve one's possessing intentions concerning the beliefs of others, how those beliefs are acquired, and what role one takes as a speaker, in doing what one has done, in generating the reasons the audience has for the belief that one intends to impart.

How is acting with such intentions meant to have *epistemic* significance? In (4), I have rendered the content of the augmented Gricean intention as that of intending that one's audience to recognise that one, as a speaker, is assuming *epistemic responsibility* for the beliefs one intends them to form. But what is this notion of 'epistemic responsibility'? This is a phrase I am using to capture Moran's idea that the speaker takes "responsibility for the status of his utterance as a reason to believe" what he intends his audience to believe. This kind of epistemic 'taking of responsibility' needs some explanation given the central role it has to play in Moran's account of how utterances performed with *M<sub>R</sub>-intentions* can have the epistemic significance that he assigns to them. And I think that,

properly understood, the notion is a helpful one. I will now say something about how I understand it. I want to draw special attention to this because the notion of epistemic responsibility will be employed in my proposed alternative account of how it is that speakers make available testimonial knowledge. However, the role it plays in that account is not the role it plays in Moran's account, because I do not think, as will become plain, that one needs to act with the intentions Moran invokes in order to make available testimonial knowledge to one's audience.

## II. b.

### Epistemic Responsibility

In the central cases, epistemic responsibility is something that speakers can *assume* for their audiences and something that audiences can *defer* to the speakers for whom they are the audience. *A* defers epistemic responsibility, for their belief that *p*, to *S*, by treating *S* as (epistemically) authoritative as to whether *p*. If knowledge transmits (that is, if it is possible for us to acquire irreducibly testimonial knowledge from a speaker), this results in the epistemic status of *A*'s belief that *p* (on the basis of taking up *S*'s utterance), to be dependent on the extent to which *S* is (epistemically) authoritative about whether *p* (i.e. dependent on the epistemic status of what *S* is giving voice to). What is it to be epistemically authoritative in this context? One would be *maximally* epistemically authoritative if, and only if, one *knows* that *p*.<sup>27</sup> Epistemic

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<sup>27</sup> Epistemic authority, in the sense that I am using it, is not directly dependent on the speaker's certainty about something, or their status as an expert in the subject matter that *p* is a member of. Epistemic authority is dependent on *epistemic* status, the quality of one's grounds for taking things to be some way. There are, of course, other senses of one's being authoritative as to whether *p* that don't track this usage.

authority, as I am understanding it, is directly proportionate to the epistemic status of one's belief or knowledge state, which may or may not be transparent to the subject. This allows for the possibility that one may take oneself to be epistemically authoritative with respect to some claim, and fail to be. In such cases, one would not be epistemically authoritative in the sense relevant to discharging epistemic responsibility. That is only achieved in the fullest degree either when one possesses knowledge that things are as one's audience takes them to be (having taken up one's utterance), or when one is appropriately relying on others who do.<sup>28</sup>

Testimonial utterances (utterances with which testimonial knowledge can be made available) are utterances of a kind with which one assumes epistemic responsibility for those who take it up. I'm tempted by the thought that it is constitutive of such acts that one assumes epistemic responsibility, when it is deferred to one—that just is, at least in part, what it is for one to produce a testimonial utterance. Making available testimonial knowledge that *p* (by producing a testimonial utterance) is to discharge the epistemic responsibility one assumes in the production of the testimonial utterance with which one makes it available: it suffices for one to discharge one's epistemic responsibility in so speaking that one

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<sup>28</sup> The second disjunct here is included to allow for testimonial knowledge acquisition from non-knowledgeable speakers (see §IV. b. below). I have introduced my preferred understanding of 'epistemic responsibility' with respect to the *central* cases—cases, that is, in which the speaker is in possession of the knowledge that they are giving voice to. I think that these cases of making available such knowledge by proxy are to be understood in terms of the central cases.

knows that  $p$ .<sup>29</sup> One can produce a testimonial utterance and fail to discharge the epistemic responsibility that one assumes for those who take it up (when one is mistaken about what one knows, or when one is lying). I will have more to say about this shortly (§IV).

So much for my own understanding of epistemic responsibility. So conceived, what role does it play in Moran's account? It plays a dual role; not only does it play something like the role that I have just articulated, but it crucially interacts with another kind of responsibility: *justificatory responsibility*. This notion is familiar from Brandom's (1983) theory of assertion. He says that in asserting something, what a speaker thereby does is undertake "the conditional task responsibility to justify the claim if challenged" (p. 641). Moran does not commit to this being true of assertions generally, but does commit to the view that it is true of what might be regarded as a particular sub-set of assertions: Moran takes it that telling somebody something, essentially, brings about a normative effect of this kind. It is the assumption of justificatory responsibility, by the speaker, that is what it is for them to give their word about what they claim to be so to their audience. Doing so puts one in a position to be subject to a distinctive range of reactive attitudes (depending on how things subsequently turn out) with respect to what one has told one's audience. If the belief  $A$  acquired by believing what  $S$  tells them is challenged,  $A$  has a right to defer justification of that belief to  $S$ .  $S$ 's failure to do so, puts them at risk of being subject to those reactive attitudes from  $A$  (for example, resentment).

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<sup>29</sup> It is not, though, necessary. That is because one can discharge one's epistemic responsibility if one says what it is that another knows (even when one does not know it oneself). See, again, §IV below.

It is the assumption of justificatory responsibility on the part of the speaker, in this way, that Moran takes to be the source of the knowledge-sustaining, non-evidential reasons for *A* to believe that *S*'s utterance is true. The assumption of epistemic responsibility, in and of itself, is the source of the reasons for belief that are transferred to *A* in the event of their taking up the utterance. These two notions of responsibility thus interact in the following way: in order for one to take epistemic responsibility for another, one must give them a reason to accept what one says, by taking justificatory responsibility for what they end up accepting. The taking of justificatory responsibility is achieved by making one's intention to assume epistemic responsibility manifest—and one's so acting being recognised by one's audience. In sum: *S* intends to assume justificatory responsibility for *A* by intending *A* to recognise that *S* intends to assume epistemic responsibility for what *A* would acquire on taking up *S*'s utterance. When *S*'s intention is fulfilled, *A* defers epistemic responsibility to *S* in such a way that allows for the testimonial knowledge that *S* makes available (when she does) to be acquired by *A*.

### III.

#### A Counterexample

Moran's account of what it required to make available testimonial knowledge—i.e. by 'telling' something to one's audience—is susceptible to counterexample. That's because, according to it (a)  $M_R$ -intentions are *constitutive* of acts of telling, and (b) acts of telling are the *only* source of testimonial knowledge. But cases in which audiences can come by

testimonial knowledge from utterances performed without  $M_R$ -intentions are relatively easy to generate. So, the knowledge sustaining epistemic value of such utterances does not derive from the intentions with which they were performed.

### III. a.

#### Moran's Susceptibility

That  $M_R$ -intentions are constitutive of the acts of telling is secured by Moran's conception of what determines an utterance as the illocutionary act of telling. Moran has a notion of 'illocutionary authority'. This says that speakers are capable of determining the kind of illocutionary acts that they perform with their utterances. Suppose I utter the words "she sells sea shells on the sea shore". There are any number of things I could be doing in uttering those words. One thing I might be doing is practicing my pronunciation; another is making a statement about where a shell-seller sells her shells. What I, in fact, end up doing is down to me, because I have the power to decide what, of the various things I could be doing by uttering those words, I do end up doing. This is the idea behind illocutionary authority.

Assuming we possess illocutionary authority, what is it that determines whether I am making a statement or practicing pronunciation? For Moran, it depends on what my intentions were in uttering those words. It is for this reason that the reasons for acceptance that audiences come to have are dependent on their recognising what the intentions of the speaker are when uttering their words. The minimal claim is that such

recognition is an enabling condition on our acquiring (testimonial) beliefs. If I didn't know that you were trying to inform me of something, as opposed to, say, practicing your pronunciation, then your utterance could not so much as be a candidate for something for me to believe (see Moran 2013, p. 122).

If this is the extent of the epistemic significance of such recognition, then it has no bearing, as yet, as to whether the utterance is a *good* reason for belief. This element is secured by a speaker's assumption of justificatory responsibility in possessing an  $M_R$ -intention. When recognised, it is meant to provide non-evidential knowledge sustaining reasons to accept the utterance, and so defer one's epistemic responsibility to the speaker, for what one takes to be the case on the basis of what the speaker said. That is because, when recognised, one succeeds in assuming justificatory responsibility for the belief one intends one's audience to acquire, and such an assumption is a reason for accepting the utterance—it is the offer of a kind of indemnity against the falsity of the utterance:

[T]he speaker, in presenting his utterance as an *assertion*, one with the force of *telling* the audience something, presents himself as *accountable* for the truth of what he says, and in doing so he offers a kind of guarantee for this truth.

(Moran 2006, p. 283)

This shows why Moran is committed to the second point: that acts of telling are the only source of testimonial knowledge. Since (1) illocutionary acts are individuated by the intentions with which they are

performed, (2) the reasons for acceptance are generated by an assumption of justificatory responsibility, and (3) the assumption of justificatory responsibility is achieved by the audience recognising one's intention to assume epistemic responsibility for the belief one intends them to acquire (i.e. recognising one's  $M_R$ -intention), it follows that the kind of non-evidential knowledge sustaining reasons required for the acquisition of testimonial knowledge can only be generated by acting with these intentions (i.e. acts of 'telling').

### III. b. Rumfitt's Case

When discussing Grice's analysis of meaning, Ian Rumfitt presents the following case:

In the course of their interrogation by the police, it must have become clear very quickly to the members of the Birmingham Six that nothing they could do or say would persuade their interlocutors *either* that they (the suspects) had not planted the bombs *or* that they (the suspects again) *believed* that they had not planted the bombs. For all that, when they uttered the words "We did not plant the bombs", the suspects certainly meant that they did not plant the bombs, and asserted as much.

(Rumfitt 1995, p. 834)

Rumfitt presents this case as a counterexample to a Gricean analysis of (utterer's) *meaning* in terms of audience directed intentions, and is not



concerned with the epistemology of testimony. But given the relationship between Moran's notion of *telling* and the Gricean analysis, a similar case has application here.

Did the Birmingham Six *tell* (in Moran's sense) their interrogators that they did not plant the bombs? *S* does not tell *A* that *p*, if *S* does not possess intentions to induce certain beliefs. Grice has a plausible general principle concerning intentions: "it is in general true that one cannot have intentions to achieve results which one sees no chance of achieving" (Grice 1969, p. 158, cf. Rumfitt 1995, p. 833). On the assumption that Grice is right about this, it would seem to follow that the Birmingham Six did not tell their interlocutors that they did not plant the bombs, and, as such, did not perform an act which could transmit their knowledge that they did not (supposing they do know this).

Now suppose, unbeknownst to the Birmingham Six, that, among their audience, there's an individual who does not possess the scepticism towards their utterances that others in the room do; they are receptive to what the Birmingham Six have to say. Nonetheless, the situation so far as the suspects are concerned is just as hopeless as in the case as Rumfitt presents it. So, as in Rumfitt's presentation, they say, "we did not plant the bombs", without intending to induce any beliefs in their audience (because they see no chance of achieving that end). The non-sceptical individual in their audience decides to believe that they are uttering the truth, and so via uptake of their expressing something that they know, comes to know that the Birmingham Six did not plant the bombs.

If such an audience is able to come to possess knowledge in this way, it looks like a paradigm case of knowledge transmission—if they acquire any knowledge at all, it is irreducibly testimonial knowledge. As such, the Birmingham Six performed a speech-act which made available this knowledge. But they did not perform an act with  $M_R$ -intentions (in other words, intentions to induce beliefs in their audience—by way of recognising that intention—and assuming responsibility for the beliefs they intended to bring about). So, these intentions of the speaker are not the ultimate source of reasons required to sustain knowledge acquisition from testimony.

### III. c.

#### Grice's Principle

Is Grice's plausible principle true? To answer that question, as Rumfitt himself points out (p. 835), an ambiguity needs to be recognised in the what is being said of one who is 'acting with an intention'. David Velleman (1989, p. 112-3) observes that it could be that 'intention' here picks out one's "ultimate motivating desire"—i.e. their goal in so acting—or it could be what the agent *settles upon* doing—i.e. their making the decision to imminently so act. On the former reading of 'acting with an intention', Grice's principle is not clearly true—there is some plausibility to the claim that one can set oneself a goal that one does not believe that one can achieve. On the latter reading, by contrast, the principle is

clearly true—one cannot *settle upon* a course of action one believes one cannot achieve.<sup>30</sup>

Which sense of ‘acting with an intention’ is relevant to Moran’s account of telling? It is surely the sense in which it is the *goal* of the speaker to induce in their audience a certain belief, for it is not usually in one’s control to induce beliefs in others, in the sense required for one to properly decide to do so—this would involve a faith in one’s powers of persuasion that not all of us will have. For all that, though, one may still be able act with the goal of getting one’s audience to believe something, even if one does not regard that as an achievable goal.

It might, therefore, be thought that one *can* intend to do something, in the relevant sense of ‘intend’, that one does not think it is possible for one to achieve. It is, then, an open possibility that the Birmingham Six acted with an intention to get their interrogators to believe that they did not plant the bombs, and it is in virtue of their possessing such intentions that the unknown, non-sceptical member of the audience was given access to their knowledge.

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<sup>30</sup> Though it is probably worth noting that Elizabeth Anscombe (1957, p. 94) appears to give us putative counterexamples when she says, “[A] man hanging by his fingers from a precipice may be as certain as possible that he must let go and fall, and yet determined not to let go. Here, however, we might say: ‘In the end his fingers let go, not he’. But a man could be as certain as possible that he will break down under torture, and yet determined not to break down. And St. Peter might perhaps have calculated ‘Since *he* says it, it is true’; and yet said ‘I will not do it’. The possible in *this* case arises from ignorance as to the way in which the prophecy would be fulfilled, thus St. Peter could do what he intended not to, without changing his mind, and yet do it intentionally.” Even if these really are counterexamples to Grice’s principle so understood, this does not affect the point I trying to make.

Does this mean that the Birmingham Six case is not a counterexample to Moran's account of telling after all? For the threat it poses to be neutralised, it would have to be the case that an intention that is thought to be doomed *must* be attributed to the members of the Birmingham Six when they produce their utterances, if they are to make available testimonial knowledge. But that looks like it would be a difficult claim to defend, because there are a number of equally, if not more, plausible explanations as why they acted as they did, than their possessing those intentions. For example, the members of Birmingham Six might have felt it important that their protestations of innocence were on record, or that it is important to tell the truth for its own sake, or whatever. Their acting with these intentions doesn't look like it should preclude such actions from making available testimonial knowledge; it looks like we can easily imagine cases in which they do not act with the Grice-style intentions that are meant to be constitutive of acts of telling, and nonetheless make available to a receptive subject the knowledge they possess (that they did not plant the bombs). And that is all that is needed to generate the counterexample.

#### IV.

#### Voicing Knowledge

I think that the susceptibility of Moran's view to this kind of counterexample is symptomatic of a more general issue that applies equally to non-reductionist views like Burge's. As I tried to make plausible in the last chapter, at the heart of the notion of irreducibly testimonial knowledge, there is a division of labour that legislates against

an enabling principle that places substantial constraints on when uptake can beget knowledge. I think that there is a class of views that has been generally overlooked, views that take there to be no substantial enabling principle in effect. These are views that take seriously the independence of the epistemic status of what is acquired on the basis of uptake from the status of epistemic support one has for believing that the speaker's utterance is true, that is at the core of the notion of irreducibly testimonial knowledge. Using some of the conceptual framework found in Moran's account, I'll now put forward, respectively, my own proposal of how it is that we make available testimonial knowledge in speech, as well as what I think is required of audiences for them to avail themselves of the testimonial knowledge that speakers make available.

*S* makes available testimonial knowledge that *p* if and only if *S* gives voice to knowledge that *p*. One way to do that is to give voice to what oneself knows; another way to do that is to give voice to what someone knows. One can only voice knowledge with a testimonial utterance. What is distinctive about testimonial utterances is that in uttering them, one assumes epistemic responsibility for whatever one's audience acquires, if they take the utterance up. They are those acts whose performance constitutively involves the assumption of epistemic responsibility for those who choose to defer responsibility for their beliefs to a speaker. Testimonial knowledge is acquired by an audience for whom a speaker assumes epistemic responsibility, when the speaker discharges that responsibility. Something needs, then, to be said both about what it is to *assume* epistemic responsibility for another, and what is needed for one to *discharge* the epistemic responsibility assumed. I'll take these in turn.

One cannot assume epistemic responsibility for another unless they defer epistemic responsibility to one. It is a cooperative endeavour. Such deference, here, takes the form of uptake—uptake of a testimonial utterance is, in effect, to act so as to defer epistemic responsibility for what one acquires on that basis, to the speaker of that utterance. So what is needed is some explication of what is required of a speaker for them to produce an utterance for which an audience's uptake has these results. In particular, what is required for them to do this in such a way that their audience's uptake can result in their acquiring testimonial knowledge.

There are two ways of performing a testimonial utterance and discharge the epistemic responsibility that one can assume: one can voice *one's own* knowledge, or one can voice the knowledge of *another*. In both cases epistemic responsibility is discharged (if assumed), but in different ways. But one can also perform a testimonial utterance without discharging epistemic responsibility. For example, when one lies, one is performing a testimonial utterance without voicing knowledge—roughly speaking, one attempts to assume epistemic responsibility for one's audience, with the deliberate aim of failing to discharge that responsibility. One can also perform a testimonial utterance honestly, but fail to discharge epistemic responsibility by ignorance (i.e. one took oneself to know what one claimed to be so, but was wrong about what one knew).

As such, one's producing a testimonial utterance, and so putting oneself in a position to assume epistemic responsibility for one's audience, is consistent with one doing at least four distinct kinds of things. I'll now

say a little about each of these things to be done by assuming epistemic responsibility, by way of illustrating what is required of speakers to do each of those things. I'll start with the two ways of making available testimonial knowledge, and then move on to the two ways to fail to discharge epistemic responsibility.

#### IV. a.

#### Voicing One's Own Knowledge

I want to suggest that we can explain what it is for one to voice knowledge, if knowledge that things are as the speaker said them to be can feature appropriately in a causal explanation of *why* the speaker produced the particular utterance, on the occasion of production, that they did. Let me begin with *voicing one's own knowledge*.

I will articulate what I have in mind here by appeal to what is known as a 'practical syllogism': articulations of instances of practical reasoning in the form of a particular kind of argument. Given that we rarely consider the arguments explicitly in the course of acting reasonably, practical syllogisms are specifications of reasons that inevitably involve a certain level of idealisation. These, then, will be descriptions under which speech actions can be thought to be rationalised in the spirit of this more or less mild idealisation. The premises of such a syllogism serve to articulate, in this more or less idealised way, and in combination with the other premises, what it was that caused the speaker to produce the particular utterance under consideration. To that extent such structures can be employed to answer the question, perhaps only partially, of why it

was that the speaker ended up producing the particular utterance that they did. The kind of premises I have in mind are those that articulate certain attitudes—beliefs and knowledge states, as well as other kinds of attitudes—that serve to rationalise the production of the utterance that the speaker utilises in performing the speech action they do. I will pick out the relevant attitudes with the operator ‘it is desirable that’ which I take to articulate a range of more specific pro-attitudes.<sup>31</sup> In this, I am making use of some aspects of Rumfitt’s (1995) way of using practical syllogisms to articulate the reasons why speakers produce their utterances.

I take something akin to the following articulation of why it is that a speaker produces the utterance that they do, in the circumstances that they do this, when they voice their knowledge:

- (1) It is desirable that my audience hear me say something true  
(concerning some subject matter *M*).<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> ‘Pro-attitude’ is a notion utilised by Donald Davidson to cover those attitudes that one might have that would prompt one to act in a certain way—such as desiring, possessing an urge, a recognition of a duty that one has, etc. See Davidson 1963, pp. 685-6.

<sup>32</sup> I originally had in mind an articulation that attributed to speakers a desire that their audience hear something that the speaker *knew* to be true. I gratefully acknowledge a debt I owe to Edgar Phillips who not only pointed out to me that this would fail to apply to many—indeed most—cases that I would want to classify as a speaker voicing their knowledge, but also pointed me in the direction that I have now taken in attributing to speakers the intention to say something true. Speakers rarely engage with what they take themselves to know in ordinary cases in which they engage in communicative exchanges of informative purport. For all that, their knowledge does have a role to play in explaining how it is that they made available testimonial knowledge to their audience. It is that role that I am presently trying to articulate.



- (2) If, in the present circumstances, they understand me to have said that  $p$ , then they will have heard me say something true (concerning  $M$ ).
- 

(3) It is desirable that my audience understand that I have said that  $p$ .

- (4) If, in the present circumstances, they hear me utter  $S_1$ , they will understand me to have said that  $p$ .
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- (5) It is desirable that my audience hear me utter  $S_1$  (in the present circumstances).

Voicing one's own knowledge that  $p$  involves one's knowing that  $p$ . That one knows that  $p$  explains why one knows something akin to (2). As such, when one possesses knowledge that one's saying that  $p$  is the case, in the circumstances, would be to state truth, one is in a position to make available knowledge that  $p$  in this way. One will end up doing what one is in a position to do only if that knowledge interacts in a way akin to that articulated above with other pro-attitudes that one possesses.

How plausible is the attribution of (1)? I take this to be an articulation that encompasses a desire that a speaker might have to inform their audience; the informative intention is captured by the desire to utter truth to an audience, about some topic. That obviously says nothing as to what motivates one to be informative—there will be more specific

desires of that are encompassed by what is articulated here as the desire to be informative. That just goes to show that (1)-(5) is not a full articulation of why a speaker would tell someone, knowledgeably, that *p*. There may be any number of reasons to do that, because (at least) there may be any number of reasons that the speaker wishes to be informative. It is for this reason, incidentally, that the Birmingham Six case can be accommodated, as well as the kinds of cases that Moran had in mind in setting out his notion of ‘telling’ (what motivates the speaker to attempt to speak truth differs in these cases). One *might* have the kinds of intentions that Moran focuses on, and that would then be an unpacking of what motivated one to be informative, but one *need* not. Whatever further details are needed to provide a full articulation of why the speaker produced their utterance, I want to suggest that if they are going to this in such a way as to make available testimonial knowledge, then their reasons had better cohere—to the extent to which it is an idealisation—with the rational reconstruction of their reasons for utterance that I have just given.

The belief, or knowledge, articulated at (4) is only rational given certain expectations that the speaker has of their audience. The expectation will precisely be that their audience will be capable of discerning what it is that the speaker was trying to do (though perhaps not *all* they were trying to do), by uttering the sentence that they utter. If the speaker were not to possess such an expectation, then it is not clear that (1)-(5) would serve to articulate why it was that they uttered the sentence that they did—their uttering that particular sentence is explained by their possessing an expectation of this kind. I will explore what it is for an

audience to count as having met this expectation at length in the next couple of chapters—i.e. what is required of audiences such that the belief articulated by (4) ('if, in the present circumstances, they hear me utter  $S_1$ , they will understand me to have told them that  $p$ ') comes out true.

This conception of what it is to voice one's own knowledge attempts to capture the thought that there is a kind of intentional engagement between what the speaker knows, and what it is that they say to be so, when they act so as to make available testimonial knowledge. That intentional engagement is important, because it is in terms of this that we can distinguish between cases which intuitively are cases of voicing knowledge and those which are not. Suppose that I am given a list of claims at random, and am told to read them out. As it turns out I know some of these claims to be true, and I don't know some of them to be true (I may even know some of them to be false). For those claims that I do know, there is a sense in which I am voicing something that I know. But, intuitively, we don't want to say that such voicings are cases of voicing one's knowledge (i.e. utterances with which testimonial knowledge is made available). Why not? The diagnosis that this view offers is that my knowing those claims did not feature appropriately in *why* I produced the utterance in question. I wasn't motivated to utter the sentence that I did utter by my knowing that, if my audience were to glean what it is that I am doing in producing that utterance, they would be exposed to my telling them something true.

This gives the basic shape of the view with regards to the central cases of voicing one's own knowledge. I'll now say a few brief things about the other acts one can perform by producing a testimonial utterance.

#### IV. b.

##### Voicing Another's Knowledge

So, first up, what about cases in which one voices not one's own knowledge, but the knowledge of another? I have in mind cases in which a speaker seems to make available knowledge by transmission despite their failing to possess the knowledge in question. Jennifer Lackey has a much discussed case of this kind.<sup>33</sup> In it, a devout Christian teacher believes that the theory of evolution is false, but nonetheless teaches it to her pupils. For some (true) claim of evolutionary theory,  $p$ , we can say that, though the teacher does not know that  $p$  (because she does not believe it), she puts her pupils in a position to know that  $p$  by producing an utterance that, in the circumstances, states that  $p$ . The question to be asked is, how has she done that? The thinking is that, if she puts them in a position to acquire *testimonial* knowledge that  $p$  (i.e. knowledge by transmission), she has done so in the absence of knowledge that  $p$ . Which, so far as Lackey is concerned, is just a *reductio ad absurdum* of the notion of knowledge transmission.

I said that one makes available testimonial knowledge by voicing knowledge, and one voices one's own knowledge that  $p$  only when one's knowing that  $p$  features in an explanation of why it was that one

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<sup>33</sup> Lackey 2008, p. 48.

produced the utterance that one did. This entails that one must know what it is that one intends to say is so. But in the kinds of cases that we are considering here, the operative speaker does not possess the knowledge at hand, so it cannot be a requirement on them that they know that what they intend to say is true. Notice, though, that no such thing has been demanded of speakers in order for them to make available testimonial knowledge: the necessary condition on testimonial knowledge that I committed to referred to *testimonial chains*. That is, I maintained that when some audience, *A*, comes to believe that *p* by way of taking up some utterance, *u*, of a speaker, *S*, which constitutes testimony to *p*, *A* comes to possess testimonial knowledge that *p* only if a prior speaker in *S*'s *testimonial chain* knew that *p*. The reference to testimonial chains is there to allow for the acquisition of testimonial knowledge, so to speak, *by proxy*. In other words, one can voice the knowledge of another in the absence of possessing that knowledge. In so doing one makes available the knowledge of another to one's audience.

If that is to be defensible then one's own knowledge, and so intentions of the kind articulated in (2), are not required to make available testimonial knowledge, when the knowledge they make available is not their own. There has got to be a way of voicing knowledge which allows it to be derivative on the prior (knowledgable) link in the testimonial chain. But an explanation of what it is to voice knowledge in this derivative way cannot appeal to one's knowing something akin to (2), since, *ex hypothesis*, one possesses no such knowledge but nonetheless makes available testimonial knowledge to one's audience. I think the solution is pretty straightforward. Instead of (1) and (2) as that which serves to

rationalise the production of the relevant testimonial utterance it is, rather,

(1)' It is desirable that my audience hear me say what *X* said  
(concerning some subject matter *M*).

(2)' If, in the present circumstances, they were to hear me say that *p*,  
then they would hear me say what *X* said (concerning *M*).

(where (3)-(5) are as before). For one so motivated, to succeed in making available testimonial knowledge, it needs to be the case that *X* voiced knowledge by saying what they said about the relevant subject matter. That is, *X* needs to have either voiced their own knowledge or voiced the knowledge of another. This allows for testimonial chains to get as long as they need to be. Such chains will end in a speaker, or group of speakers, voicing their own knowledge.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> The qualification here which references *groups* of speakers is meant to allow for testimonial knowledge acquisition when the relevant knowledge is not had by any one speaker, but by a group speakers. The kinds of cases I have in mind are those which are discussed in, for example, Faulkner (2000), pp. 595-9, where he discusses a case found in Hardwig (1985) in which an experiment is conducted by a number of scientists, each with different expertise, that could not have been conducted by one alone, whose collaboration results in some claim *p*. Though no one of the scientists has non-testimonial knowledge that *p*, that they all together contributed to the claim by the knowledge that they collectively come to possess, we still want to allow that one can acquire testimonial knowledge that *p* from the group of scientists as a whole. I see no reason why this cannot be brought in the current fold.

#### IV. c.

#### Speaking from Ignorance

Let me now turn to cases in which speakers fail to make available testimonial knowledge by producing a testimonial utterance. In cases in which one is not saying something that someone else in one's testimonial chain knows, one fails to make available testimonial knowledge when one does not know what one is talking about. That will be because one will be driven to produce that utterance in a way akin to that which was articulated in (1)-(5), but in such cases one will not know that  $p$ , so the mental state articulated in (2) will not be a state of knowledge. Of course, when one is sincere, but ignorant, what will fill the gap left in the rationalisation of one's utterance of the sentence in question will be one's *taking* oneself to possess such knowledge, but, as it happens, one is mistaken about what it is that one knows. And as a result, one rationally, but not knowingly, speaks non-knowledgeably at best, or, at worst, falsely.

Similarly, when one is passing on what another has said, one fails to make available testimonial knowledge if they failed to make available testimonial knowledge by either failing to voice their own knowledge or failing to voice the knowledge of another.

#### IV. d.

#### Lying

Finally, I'll make a couple of brief remarks about lying. Lying is a complex phenomenon, the precise details of which are disputed.<sup>35</sup> I won't attempt a comprehensive account of lying, by any means, but I do want to give some indication of how I think it should be thought of in the present framework. I want to suggest that there is a slightly different, but closely related rationalisation of the production of testimonial utterances in the course of lying where we again drop (1) and (2) and replace them with something else. I suggest,

(1)\* It is desirable that my audience hear me say something false.

(2)\* If, in the present circumstances, they hear me say that *p*, they would hear me say something false.

Here (2)\* need not be known by the speaker, but only believed for them to be regarded as lying to their audience. This, though, is not *sufficient* for the speaker to be lying. For there are cases in which one, for example, may make an ironical statement by acting in such a way that the rationalisation of the production of the utterance with which one makes such a statement can similarly be articulated. Ironical statements are those which can plausibly be rationalised in a way consonant with the articulation starting with (1)\* and (2)\*, but we do not want to say that

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<sup>35</sup> See Sokke 2013 for an up to date discussion of some of the complications involved in defining lying.



being ironic is thereby a case of one lying. One can make an ironic statement without lying.

What will make the difference here will be the expectations that the speaker has of their audience, that underpins their possession of the various states of belief and knowledge, and other attitudinal states, that rationalise their action. A noteworthy difference between cases of voicing knowledge and cases of lying is that, unlike voicing knowledge, lying seems to me to require of a speaker that they possess an intention to induce in their audience a certain belief. That, again, just goes to show that the rationalisations of utterances articulated in (1)-(5), and its variants, are not *full* articulations of why the speaker produced their utterance. In cases of lying, why it is that the speaker takes it to be desirable that their audience hear them say something false is that they intend that their hearing this will result in their coming to possess a false belief that what they (the speaker) say is so. With regards to ironical statements, there will be no such intention, but rather an expectation that, in the circumstances the audience recognise that in saying what they do, the speaker is being ironic.

## V.

### Receptivity to Knowledge Voiced

I have emphasised the cooperative nature of testimonial knowledge acquisition by insisting that it requires of the speaker that they assume epistemic responsibility for their audience, and from the audience that they defer epistemic responsibility to the speaker. I have said a few

things both about what it is for a speaker to assume epistemic responsibility, by producing testimonial utterances, and about what is needed for a speaker to discharge the epistemic responsibility they assume. It is now time to look at what is required of audiences for them to defer epistemic responsibility to a speaker.

I said in the last chapter that some version of the *enabling principle* is almost universally accepted. That is, it is almost universally accepted that in order to avail oneself of the knowledge made available by a speaker (in whatever way one thinks that happens), it is necessary for one to have some antecedent epistemic support for the claim that the speaker is uttering the truth. That is, unsupported beliefs to that effect will not yield knowledge that things are as the speaker says them to be. That principle, recall, is thought to be met in a number of different ways by the different kinds of accounts of how we acquire knowledge from others. So on a Burgean kind of non-reductionism, the enabling principle is met by one's possessing no, or sufficiently little, evidence for the supposition that the speaker is somehow being misleading. On a Moran-style account, by contrast, the enabling principle takes the form of requiring that the audience's uptake of the testimonial utterance of another is reasonable given their other attitudes. This requires more than the standard form of non-reductionism requires (an absence of contravening reasons is not sufficient to render one capable of acquiring testimonial knowledge by uptake), but the attitudes that it recognises as able to provide the requisite support for uptake extend beyond that which the reductionist is prepared to recognise. However, what makes it the case that uptake can yield knowledge, according to Moran's version of

non-reductionism, is not what constitutes epistemic support for that which is acquired on its basis. That is dependent on the status conferred on it by the relevant party in the testimonial chain.

Consider, again, the Birmingham Six. I suggested that in the absence of the speaker providing reasons to accept what they say—at least, those reasons isolated by Moran as required for testimonial knowledge acquisition—an audience could still avail themselves of testimonial knowledge made available in the course of their protestation of innocence. Given the audience had every reason to suppose that they were not speaking truth in protesting their innocence, it is a plausible description of the situation that they did *not* lack sufficient reason to suppose they were misleading them. Nonetheless, it is at least arguable that they acquired testimonial knowledge by taking up the utterance with which the protestation was made; at least, I'll be making that argument. Accordingly, I think even non-reductionist accounts like Burge's preclude the possibility of testimonial knowledge acquisition in cases in which it is made available.

So, in the spirit of the account I have already given, I want to suggest that audience's reasons for taking up a speaker's utterance have, then, *no* bearing on the epistemic status of what they acquire on the basis of such uptake. The epistemic status of the upshot of uptake is, rather, entirely dependent upon the extent to which the speaker has discharged the epistemic responsibility that the audience has deferred to them. That means that deference occurs when uptake does. And uptake begets testimonial knowledge regardless of the evidence in one's possession for

the claim that the speaker is uttering something false, when it is uptake of an utterance in which the speaker voices knowledge. That is, in cases in which the speaker discharges the epistemic responsibility conferred on the by their audience's deference (i.e. uptake).

I am now going to turn to two possible objections to this aspect of the view—the thought that audiences can acquire testimonial knowledge on what appears to be a pretty undemanding basis—I have just sketched.

V. a.

#### Unsafe Testimonial Knowledge

Stated as baldly as this, this account is likely to strike some as obviously false. Couldn't there be cases in which there are many close possible worlds in which one acquires a false belief, yet still counts as knowing, according to this account? Consider the Hall of Morons: a hall chocked full of the ignorant, each of whom, invariably, speaks falsely when producing testimonial utterances. The hall, though, does have one sage in it; that is, one who only says things to be as she knows them to be. A consequence of the view that I have been outlining appears to be this: so long as the audience takes up a testimonial utterance that constitutes a voicing of knowledge, they can avail themselves of the knowledge made available by the speaker. If one were to approach the sage in the Hall of Morons, then taking up her testimonial utterance would allow one to acquire the knowledge she gives voice to (despite the, say, million-plus morons one could so easily have approached). But since, one might suppose, one only knows something if it is not the case that there are

(too many) close possible worlds in which one acquires a false belief, then the view I have been proffering predicts knowledge where there is none. As such, it should be rejected.

This objection relies on the idea that there is a *safety* condition on knowledge—that is, roughly, that it is a necessary condition of knowing that  $p$  that there are no close possible worlds in which one acquires a false belief. That is meant to capture the thought that in knowing something, it couldn't have easily been the case that one's taking things to be as one knows them to be, was wrong. This is widely thought to hold true of states of knowledge, but the view I have presented about how it is that we can acquire knowledge from testimony appears to violate this safety condition. That's because it appears to allow one to acquire knowledge in the hall of morons (if one approaches, by chance, the sage), and any view that allows this does not look like it is consistent with the thought that one can only acquire knowledge in cases in which one could not have easily been wrong. That's because it looks like one *could* have easily been wrong in taking up an utterance in the hall of morons.

There is, though, a way of bringing the present account in line with at least some of these views that impose a safety condition on states of knowledge. It involves making two additional commitments to the view I articulated above. First, we need to relativise knowledge attributions to *methods* of belief formation; and second we need to be radically externalist about method individuation (something to this effect is suggested in Williamson 2000, pp. 152-6).<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> I owe a debt both here and in §V. b., even more than elsewhere, to Rory Madden.

What are methods? When Robert Nozick (1980) first presented his sensitivity based account of knowledge, he had to qualify the view by relativising to methods, so as not to preclude knowledge acquisition when it has obviously been acquired. Nozick's view was that, so long as one's beliefs were *sensitive* in the right way to the truth, then that belief counts as a knowledgable one. The manner in which he initially characterised that view is well known; according to it *A* knows that *p*, just in case, (i) *p*; (ii) *A* believes that *p*; (iii) if *p* were not the case, *A* would not believe that *p*; and (iv) if *p* were the case, *A* would believe that *p*. The counterfactuals in (iii) & (iv) are to be understood in terms of what is true at possible worlds that are close to the actual world, on some understanding of what that amounts to.<sup>37</sup> Sensitivity, though, is not safety. Safety can be represented as the contrapositive of (iii), namely that if *A* were to believe that *p*, *p* would be the case (i.e. there are no close possible worlds to the one in which *A* believes that *p*, and *p* is false). But on the majority of semantics for counterfactuals, they don't contrapose. The two conditions therefore amount to different requirements.

Though it is widely held that there is a safety condition on knowledge, it is much less widely held that there is a sensitivity condition on knowledge. But the relativisation to methods that Nozick employed can open an avenue to make the present account of testimonial knowledge consistent with a safety constraint.

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<sup>37</sup> See Williamson 2000, Ch. 7 for what it does, ultimately, amount to for Nozick.

Nozick introduced methods because he foresaw a problem with condition (iii), giving the following counterexample:

A grandmother sees her grandson is well when he comes to visit; but if he were sick or dead, others would tell her he was well to spare her upset. Yet this does not mean she doesn't know he is well (or at least ambulatory) when she sees him.

(Nozick, 1980, p. 179)

The thought is that the grandmother's false belief that her grandson is well in the (relatively) close possibility that her grandson is sick is consistent with her knowing the he is well when he comes to see her. Thus, it looks like if  $p$  were not the case (if her grandson was sick), the grandmother would still believe that  $p$  (that her grandson is well), and she nonetheless still knows that  $p$ .

The problem also affects condition (iv). Take the following case. Sam is having an affair with Pat. I don't know this—in fact, Sam and Pat are so good at hiding this fact that I am convinced that they hate each other, and believe that they are not having an affair (as opposed to withholding judgement). I am taking my usual commute into town on the Tube. I'm punctual, and every morning I take the train that arrives at, say, 08:03. Take it, too, that Sam and Pat are travelling on the route that takes them past my station on this particular day only because a freak accident caused their usual travel arrangements to be disrupted. They are, then, canoodling on the train that arrives at my station at 08:06. Now, punctual as ever, I am descending the steps to the platform at 08:02. But

halfway down a child, who is walking up, drops all her marbles. I'm normally extraordinarily selfish, but get a quite uncharacteristic urge to be altruistic, and help the child pick up her marbles. This takes a couple of minutes, so I miss my usual train. When the next train arrives, I spot Sam and Pat in embrace, and infer knowledgeably that they are having an affair.

There is at least one close possible world in which Sam and Pat are having an affair and I don't believe that they are. There are many close possible worlds in which I am not delayed on my way to the way to the platform, or there is no freak accident on their usual commute. And in such worlds I don't believe that Sam and Pat are having an affair (in fact, I believe that they aren't). So it is not the case that, if Sam and Pat were having an affair, I would believe that they were. So, according to the conditions as originally stated, I do not know this—I fail to meet the fourth condition. But, I *do* know that they are having an affair on the basis of seeing them embrace, so the view precludes knowledge where it occurs, and so is to be rejected.

The introduction of methods of belief acquisition are meant to help here, because if we relativise to such methods, the counterexample can be neutralised. The kind of belief that should be under scrutiny is not the belief (by whatever means) that Sam and Pat are having an affair, but the belief, based on one's seeing their embrace, that Sam and Pat are having an affair. We can now just look at the close possible worlds in which you acquired the belief that Sam and Pat are having an affair by seeing their embracing on the train. In all those worlds, I get delayed in such a way



that I take the 08:06 train (and their travel plans are disrupted), and so in all those worlds, I believe that they are having an affair. I now meet the fourth condition, and so, according to Nozick, come by knowledge.

Once we have methods in the picture, we can make the view I have put forward consistent with there being a safety condition on knowledge. We can do so by committing to the claim that believing a speaker who voices knowledge is to employ a different method to the method one employs when believing a moron (or a liar, or anyone who is not voicing knowledge). A safety condition relativised to methods demands that when one knows something, there are no relevantly close possible worlds in which one acquires a false belief by employing the same method of belief formation. When methods are individuated in such a way that believing one who voices knowledge is to employ a different method to believing one who does not, we then get the result that believing the sage in the hall of morons is to employ a different method to believing a moron. And since there is no close possible world in which one acquires a false belief in believing what the sage tells one (since the sage is giving voice to a belief that, *ex hypothesis*, satisfies a safety condition), one can count as knowing that things are as the sage said them to be.

But is the above individuation of methods in testimonial contexts plausible? One may worry that something fishy is going on because one would not be able to tell whether one was using one method rather than another in the hall of morons. That is, one cannot tell if one is confronted with the sage, or just another moron, and if one cannot tell which one is confronted with, then one cannot be said to be employing

different methods in believing the sage and the moron respectively. To avoid this kind of objection, we need to be externalist with respect to method individuation, in the sense that it is not transparent to the subject *which* method of belief acquisition they are employing. There is independent plausibility for the claim that we should be externalists about method individuation. As Williamson has argued, if we are not externalist about method individuation, then sceptical consequences appear to follow. Williamson provides the following consideration:

Suppose that in the good case one believes via M that one is not in the bad case. Then [the counterfactual: necessarily, if *S* knows *p* via method M then if *p* were false, *S* would not believe *p* via M] forbids this true belief to constitute knowledge that one is not in the bad case via M only if in the bad case one believes *via* M that one is not in the bad case.

(Williamson 2000, p. 155)

The good case is one in which one sees one's hands, the bad case is one which is indistinguishable from the good case, but in which one does not have hands. The idea is that in the when one is in the good case, one may believe that one is not in the bad case by seeing one's hands. But one won't come to believe this in the bad case by seeing one's hands, since one doesn't have any hands in the bad case. One can then insist that one is employing different methods in each of these cases, and in the good case one knows that one has hands, even if that is not known in the bad case. If one is to avoid sceptical results, it is not plausible that one is

always able to discern what method one is employing, so it is not plausible to individuate methods by what one can discern.

For all that, I do not endorse this elaboration of the account I have given. I am only demonstrating that it *can*, with some additional theses, accommodate a conception of knowledge on which our knowledge states satisfy a safety condition. Nonetheless, going externalist about methods (or employing a similar such manoeuvre) does cohere with the conception of testimonial utterances that I have already indicated is needed on my account. That conception is this: it is distinctive of testimonial utterances that, in the event of their being taken up, the utterer assumes epistemic responsibility for the uptaker. If the testimonial utterance constitutes a voicing of knowledge, then the epistemic responsibility assumed is discharged, and, as such, the uptaker has availed themselves of the knowledge the speaker gives voice to. If the testimonial utterance constitutes something other than a voicing of knowledge—a voicing of mere belief, say, or a lie—then the speaker has failed to discharge the epistemic responsibility they have assumed for the uptaker. As such, the uptaker is unable to avail themselves of any (testimonial) knowledge, because none has been made available. According to the line of thought I have been considering, these mark different methods of uptake—one method is by way of a testimonial utterance that constitutes a voicing of knowledge, the other method is by way of a testimonial utterance that does not constitute a voicing of knowledge. Uptakers may not be in a position to tell which method they are employing, but for all that, they employ different methods of belief formation in the different cases. As such, in the Hall of Morons, there is

no close possible world in which the audience comes by a false belief by employing the same method of belief acquisition.

V. b.

### Easy Knowledge

Another potential problem arises when we consider the possible interaction between the alleged knowledge that the view allows to be acquired, and the kinds of inferences that one can make on the basis of possessing that knowledge. In knowing that Jim smokes, on the basis of having been told by one who voices knowledge, I should then be able to infer all sorts of things that I know to be implied by this. One of the things, particular to testimony, that I will know that is implied by things being as the speaker said them to be is that the speaker spoke truth with their utterance. So, since (1) I know, on the basis of being told, that Jim smokes, and (2) I know that my knowing that Jim smokes on this basis implies that the utterance with which that knowledge made available is true, then (3) I am in a position to know that that utterance is true.<sup>38</sup>

Prior to my acquisition of knowledge that Jim smokes by accepting your testimonial knowledge, that constituted a voicing of knowledge, I cannot be said to have been in a position to know that you uttered truth. I, though, am allowing knowledge acquisition even in the presence of

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<sup>38</sup> Notice that this argument does *not* rely on any Closure principle, we can remain neutral on whether the principle holds, and the problem is still generated. All it relies on is two plausible claims about what one knows, and one's making the relevant inference given the relation between them. In this I have taken inspiration from Zalabardo's (2005) presentation of the problem of easy knowledge (*pace* Cohen (2002)).

(discounted) reasons to suppose that the speaker is being misleading. I should now be in a position to knowledgeably infer that the speaker uttered truth. That's because I know that Jim's being a smoker implies that your utterance is true, so it follows that I am in a position to know that your utterance is true (if I know what the relevant implications are). It looks like, then, by force of will alone, I have managed to move from having reasons to suppose that it is not the case that the speaker uttered truth to being in a position to know that the speaker (you) uttered truth. Just because I happened to accept something that in fact was an expression of knowledge, my decision, potentially based on a mere whim, puts me in a position to know something I wasn't in a position to know before. So the objection goes, I cannot put myself in that position in this way, so the account I have offered is false.

Why can I not put myself in that position in that way? It *prima facie* looks troubling that the view can allow for *knowledge* to be so easily available, on the basis of our whims about who to believe, because then it might seem that we debase *knowledge* to the point that it no longer occupies the conceptual space that is distinctive of it—i.e. that it is that most elevated of epistemic statuses. Is knowledge so debased on the view I recommend? Notice that testimonial knowledge is only made available in cases in which the speaker voices knowledge. They do that by saying something that they, or someone else, knows to be true. So the view has it that, when it comes to testimony, only knowledge begets testimonial knowledge. As such, the knowledge in which the testimonial chain is grounded is that which satisfies whatever conditions that are distinctive of it (for example, they satisfy a safety condition). This means that one is

only in a position to acquire knowledge that the speaker uttered truth, when what they give voice to with that utterance is something that satisfies all the conditions one imposes on a state being knowledgable.

In effect, the response that I want to recommend is an exercise in bullet-biting. The bullet that needs to be bitten, though, is only as hard as what is needed to accept non-reductionism in the first place. Non-reductionism says that we can acquire distinctively testimonial knowledge—knowledge that we can only acquire from one who themselves is in possession of it (or someone who is in the testimonial chain of one who possesses it). It is a commitment to one's acquiring knowledge when one has insufficient evidence to establish what is being claimed for oneself. The point that I am making is that the acquisition of knowledge that the speaker uttered truth acquired in this way is no easier to acquire than testimonial knowledge that things are as the speaker said them to be (when they voice knowledge).

## VI.

### Conclusion

That concludes my initial characterisation of the epistemology of testimony I am defending in this thesis.

Relying, in part, on an argument made by Michael Dummett, I claimed in Chapter 1 that we should accept that there is such a thing as irreducibly testimonial knowledge. That is, a kind of knowledge that one can acquire from a knowledgable source, even when one does not have a

conclusive inductive argument for the belief that the speaker uttered truth. I showed that views that agree that we can acquire knowledge of this kind from what others tell us, tend to accept what I called ‘the enabling principle’. This principle says that one must have a sufficiently epistemically supported belief that the speaker uttered truth in order for one to acquire the knowledge that a speaker can make available by speaking knowledgeably. I have tried to show that the enabling principle is strictly optional; given the epistemic dependences that non-reductionism *as such* is committed to, further argument is needed to show that there are restrictions on our acquiring testimonial knowledge beyond whether knowledge has been present at some appropriate point in the testimonial chain. The absence of such an argument opens up the possibility that there are no restrictions of the kind imposed by the enabling principle on when we can acquire irreducibly testimonial knowledge.

In this chapter I have put forward a view of this kind. Extracting further motivation in favour of such a view in light of counterexamples I gave to Moran’s account, I then employed some of his conceptual framework in setting out the view that I favour. I suggested that irreducibly testimonial knowledge was made available by a speaker *voicing knowledge*, where one voices knowledge in uttering something when the knowledge in question features in the appropriate way in a casual explanation of why one produced that utterance. In particular, one counts as voicing knowledge when one utters something because one knows that what one is saying is true, or because one is saying something that someone else said in the course of voicing knowledge. I showed how we can understand failures

of testimonial knowledge acquisition, and addressed a couple of objections that might be thought to affect the account I offered.

I'm now going to attempt to orientate this account in a wider cognitive landscape by turning to the role that our understanding the utterances of others can play in sustaining this (putative) way of acquiring knowledge from what others tell us.



### 3.

## Expectations, Intentions, and the Things Done with Words

### I.

#### Introduction

I have started to build the case for an account of how it is that we come to possess knowledge from what others tell us that takes the epistemic status of what is acquired on the basis of uptake of a testimonial utterance to be independent of the epistemic support one may have for believing that the utterance is true. Allowing for genuinely (irreducible) testimonial knowledge acquisition is to allow for knowledge acquisition from what someone says that is of a kind that is only possible if the speaker knows what they are talking about (or someone in their testimonial chain does). I wanted to suggest that if we take seriously the possibility that we can acquire testimonial knowledge of this distinctive kind, we can then take the epistemic status of what is acquired on the basis of uptake—the belief that things are as the speaker said them to be—to be entirely dependent on the epistemic status of what is taken up—the belief, or knowledge, that the speaker gave voice to. And it is a corollary of this that the epistemic status of what is taken up is unaffected

by the quality of one's evidence for, or against, the claim that the speaker uttered truth. I have presented an account which affirms this conception of the structure of the epistemic dependencies involved in coming by knowledge from others.

According to that account, a speaker makes available testimonial knowledge to their audience by *voicing knowledge*. I said that there are two ways to do that: in the basic cases, one voices one's own knowledge and in the derivative cases one voices the knowledge of another. A speaker voices knowledge, in either way, by producing a testimonial utterance that constitutes a relational speech act that makes available testimonial knowledge. In other words, by telling them something that oneself, or someone else, knows to be true.<sup>39</sup> Sticking with the basic cases, a speaker voices their own knowledge, in the course of telling someone something, when they produce a particular (testimonial) utterance *because* they know that what they tell their audience, in the course of doing this, is true. The 'because' here is meant to capture the idea that such knowledge will feature in a causal explanation of why they produced that utterance in those circumstances. Such an explanation can take the form of a rational reconstruction of the speaker's reasons for so acting. When voicing their own knowledge, the speaker's knowing what they are talking about will contribute in the required way to that explanation. When the speaker is voicing knowledge that is not their own, the explanation will appeal to the knowledge possessed by someone in their testimonial chain.

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<sup>39</sup> The notion of 'telling' I am employing is meant to be a pre-theoretical, ordinary notion; one that, the arguments in the last chapter suggest, is not captured by Moran's account of 'telling'.

But I also mentioned that voicing one's own knowledge involves having an expectation that, on producing some particular utterance, in some particular circumstance, one's audience will understand what one has done in producing that utterance. What, precisely, is one meant to be expecting here? And what would it be for one's audience to meet an expectation of this kind? That is, what would it be for the expectation to be met in such a way that the audience can avail themselves of the knowledge made available when a speaker produces a testimonial utterance that constitutes a voicing of knowledge? It is to these questions that I turn in this chapter.<sup>40</sup>

This chapter can be seen as being in two parts. From §II until §VI, I focus on a way of classifying kinds of speech acts that J. L. Austin gave us in his *How To Do Things With Words*. From §VI onwards, I'll be focusing on elements of Paul Grice's program of analysis of the notion of 'utterer's meaning'.

In the first part, I'll start (§II) by considering a sample rational reconstruction of a speaker's reasons for producing a particular testimonial utterance to draw out what sort of things we tend to expect of our audiences. I will isolate one expectation that it is reasonable to attribute to speakers in general, that serves as a foundation of (attempted) communicative interactions. In §III I mark a distinction that Jennifer Hornsby has made between acts and actions. Having done so I

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<sup>40</sup> The full picture, or at least, the fuller picture, won't emerge until the end of the next chapter, once Ian Rumfitt's account of the relevant level of understanding has been explained and defended.

introduce, in §IV, the framework for thinking about the kinds of things to be done in speaking that was given to us by Austin, and has been taken up by Hornsby. I discuss some different ways we might think that we can specify what Austin calls the *rhetic* act performed. I then turn, in §V, to an influential claim of John Searle's—the claim that it is both necessary and sufficient for success in performing certain kinds of acts that one can perform in speaking, that one's audience recognise what act one is trying to perform. I assess the extent to which Searle's claim is true, and conclude that it holds good for the rhetic acts performed by speakers. This suggests that the relevant expectation of the speaker is one which can be met by the audience recognising what the speaker means to be doing, at the level of description of the rhetic thing that they have done.

In the second part, I start, in §VI, with the Gricean analysis of 'utterer's meaning'. I remark on the connection between the rhetic act performed and 'what's said', as well as the connection between the so-called 'literal meaning' of words and what's said with them, on particular occasions. §VII turns to John McDowell's (1980) criticisms of Grice's account. I think that McDowell's criticisms are valid, but, using the resources from the preceding discussion, I show why McDowell's reaction to Grice is, in one important respect, an overreaction. I conclude in §VIII, by saying what kind of account might take its place. In the next chapter I'll outline a view that one might think can play the relevant explanatory role, that is found in Rumfitt (2005).

## II.

### Speakers' Expectations

Suppose that *S* knows that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. If *S* is to make available that knowledge to *A*, by giving voice to what she knows with an utterance of the sentence, 'the Foreign Secretary has resigned', then, from *S*'s perspective, something akin to the following practical syllogism serves to at least partially articulate why it was that, in the circumstances, *S* uttered that sentence:

- (1) It is desirable that *A* hear me speak the truth (about the Foreign Secretary's resignation).
  
- (2) If, in the present circumstances, *A* understands me to have said that the Foreign Secretary has resigned, will *A* have heard me speak the truth (about the Foreign Secretary's resignation).

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- (3) It is desirable that *A* understand me to have said that the Foreign Secretary has resigned.
  
- (4) If, in the present circumstances, they hear me utter "the Foreign Secretary has resigned", they will understand me to have said that the Foreign Secretary has resigned.

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- (5) It is desirable that my audience hear me utter “the Foreign Secretary has resigned” (in the present circumstances).

Each of (1)-(5) are more or less idealised representations of the content of various pro-attitudes that speakers can possess. So long as the causal explanation for why the speaker uttered “the Foreign Secretary has resigned” is something akin to that as represented in (1)-(5), and so long as they possess knowledge that underwrites (2), then the speaker can truly be said to have voiced their own knowledge.<sup>41</sup> It is only when speakers are motivated to speak in a way that is captured by a rational reconstruction of their reasons for speaking on these lines, and when it is the speaker’s knowledge of the relevant fact that explains the presence of (2) in it, that they voice (their own) knowledge.

At (4), I have attributed to the speaker a belief about what her audience will take her to have done, if she were to produce a given utterance. In the last chapter, I said that a speaker’s possessing beliefs of that kind is rational only given the expectation that their audience is capable of understanding the utterance that constitutes the particular (speech) action performed. In the absence of their having these expectations, the rationality of the speaker’s action is put in doubt. So the first question to ask is, what, precisely, are speakers expecting of their audiences here?

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<sup>41</sup> Recall that the attribution of (1) is a kind of catch-all for more specific motivations for speakers to be informative when speaking to their audience (see below). And I said that one voices the knowledge of another when (1) is replaced with something akin to “It is desirable for *A* to hear me say something that *X* said”, for some *X* who themselves voices knowledge (either their own or another’s). Whether one is voicing one’s own knowledge, or someone else’s, it makes no difference for my purposes in this chapter. For ease of exposition, I will continue to primarily deal with the basic case of a speaker voicing their own knowledge.

Of course, there are many things that speakers may well expect of their audience. They might expect them to laugh, or to keep quite and listen, or to try to see one's own point of view. There are, though certain expectations that can seem more central than others—central, that is, to the purpose of engaging in the activity of speaking at all.<sup>42</sup> The uttering of something is an intentional action; in so acting, a speaker tends to have certain goals. An enabling condition on their achieving those goals, I will suggest, is that the expectation which underwrites (4) is met; the expectation, that is, that makes it rational to believe that in their uttering a certain sentence, in the circumstances of speaking, they will be recognisably, doing something that furthers their broader aims (in a distinctive way). It is the meeting of *this* expectation that contributes so centrally to those things occurring that I'm most interested in here, namely to the very success of the distinctively *communicative* goals that the speaker had in speaking.

Suppose that the expectation that underwrites (4) in the relevant practical syllogism is not met. *A* will not have taken *S* to have said that the Foreign Secretary has resigned, on the basis of hearing *S* utter 'the Foreign Secretary has resigned'. There might be any number of reasons why *A* fails to so take *S*'s action, some of which will come under scrutiny in what is to follow. But however that failure comes about, one consequence will be that whatever else *S* sought to be doing in telling *A* about the former Foreign Secretary's career decisions, they will not be

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<sup>42</sup> I am leaving soliloquy to one side, though I think that it is derivative on our communicative speech.

achieved—at least, not in the manner that *S* intended. So we can get a handle on what it is that the speakers are expecting here by discerning what it would be for them to have facilitated the achievement of these goals.

### III.

#### Basic Communicative Acts

I am going to start by saying something about what we can think of as basic communicative acts. But before I do, there are some structural points about actions in general, and so speech actions in particular, that are worth setting out up front.

#### III. a.

##### Acts & Actions

Jennifer Hornsby distinguishes between ‘actions’ and ‘acts’, and I will do the same (her application of this distinction to speech can be found in her (1994), pp. 187-8). Actions are particular events in which acts are performed. Acts are the things done, actions are the doing of those things. So, when I perform the action in which, on some occasion, I move a carved piece of bone on a checkered board, there may be any number of other things that I do—that is, acts that I perform. I can, for example, put my opponent in check, or show how much of an amateur I am. You can do those things too, if you were to also move a carved piece on a board in some appropriate way, in the appropriate circumstances—that is, perform the same acts as me (but with a different action). When



it comes to language, I will take utterances to be actions (particular datable events) where there are many acts (properties of those events) to be performed with an utterance.

We can, in general, impose an ordering of acts performed when acting on an occasion; some such acts stand in a *more basic than* relation to others. In moving the bone from one place to another, I put you in check. The use of ‘in’ here indicates the ordering along the more-basic-than scale—my moving the bone is a more basic act than putting you in check. What goes for acts in general, goes for acts performed with utterances in particular. For example, we can suppose that in telling *A* that the Foreign Secretary has resigned, *S* persuaded *A* that the government is on the verge of collapse. And in so persuading *A*, *S* caused *A* to weep. In the practical syllogism above, the lower down the argument that it is articulated with, the more basic the act which it is the goal of the speaker to perform. Thus, the desire expressed in (3) pertains to a more basic act than the one expressed in (1). And (5) to a more basic act than (3).

I have already mentioned, in the last chapter, that (1)-(5) is incomplete as an articulation of the reasons why *S* produces her utterance in those circumstances. It is, plainly, only a *partial* rational reconstruction of her reasons. Something like (1) (the desire that her audience hear her speak the truth about something in particular), is an articulation of the goal that a speaker might have—the goal of having her audience be informed by her—but that there may be any number of reasons why she has *that* goal. In accordance with the above, this is to be understood in terms of the relative basicness of acts. For example, *S* might find it desirable that

*A* hear her say truth concerning the recent changes in Cabinet, because *A* will be attending a recording of a popular television news quiz, and *S* thinks that in informing *A* of this, *S* will lower the chances of *A* making a fool of himself. In this case, the act of informing is more basic than the act of preventing *A* from looking a fool.<sup>43</sup>

There is a certain point in this ordering where the acts that feature at that point are those whose performances are, in an important sense, central to the speaker; there are some very central aims of the speaker that need to be met for these ancillary acts to have any chance of succeeding. If the speaker's belief in (4) turns out to be false—if her audience fails to have figured out, at an as yet unspecified basic level, what she was trying to do in making the sounds that she did—none of the multifaceted goals that people have in speaking have a chance of being achieved.

### III. b.

#### The Primary Communicative Intention

I take as my point of departure here, some remarks about communication that have been made by John McDowell. The performance of a speech act is, McDowell tells us, is a kind of publication of one's communicative intentions:

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<sup>43</sup> The more comprehensive rational reconstruction, then, will include attributions of beliefs to the effect that if the audience hear one speak truth about the Foreign Secretary's resignation, they will believe that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. Since their believing so much will contribute to their not looking a fool, it is desirable that they believe that the Foreign Secretary has resigned (given its desirable that they not look a fool).

the primary aim of a speech act is to produce an object—the speech act itself—which is perceptible publicly, and in particular to the audience, embodying an intention whose content is precisely a recognisable performance of that very speech act.

(McDowell 1980, p. 41)

The aim of communication is a form of mutual awareness—it is the *sharing* of something between the speaker and her audience. It comes about when audience is aware of something that the speaker wanted them to be aware of. The unusual thing about communication is that it is the audience's awareness of what those aims are, that is a vital part of what one is trying to achieve. In uttering “the Foreign Secretary has resigned”, there is something that you want me to recognise. The very least that you want, is for me to recognise that there is something that you are trying to convey with your words. The point is that, absent the aim of getting me to see what it is that you are trying to convey, you cannot be thought of as engaging in a communicative pursuit at all.

If that is right, we can think of the primary communicative intention as the aim of achieving such mutual awareness. When that *is* achieved, some basic form of communication has occurred between speaker and audience. The primary requirement of success, then, is that what one is intending one's audience to become aware of is recognised. And that is done by one's audience recognising that intention. When recognised, one has succeeded in doing that basic communicative thing. It is basic in the sense that it serves as the basis upon which all the other kinds of acts that we attempt to perform in speaking. Absent success at this level—

absent the awareness in one's audience that one is attempting to convey something to them—no other goals that one might be hoping to advance in speaking can be pursued. It is, so to speak, the starting point from which all the other things we attempt in speaking must take their departure; which is just another way of saying that it is what it is to be engaging in *communication* at all.

The conjecture that I am working with in this chapter is that such a 'primary communicative intention' is what underwrites the expectation that makes one's holding something like (4) rational. That is, what one is expecting is, in part, that such an intention will be realised—that one is understood to have performed an act of a particular kind that one means to be performing (though not necessarily every act that they mean to be performing).

What is required for one's audience to cooperate in the required way—that is, meet the expectation one has of them? The central claim I'll be making is that it is for an audience to meet the relevant expectation of the speaker, when the speaker is trying to tell somebody something, is for them to recognise something in particular—what Austin calls the 'rhetic' thing—that the speaker means to be doing, in the course of their trying to do this.<sup>44</sup> On basis of this, I'll say something about what, more specifically, it is that speakers and audiences need to do, for acts of this kind to succeed.

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<sup>44</sup> A view of this kind has many ancestors. Two can be found in Searle (1969) and Rumfitt (1995).

#### IV.

### The Things Done With Words

Not everything that a speaker can do with an utterance will be relevant to their achieving the basic level of success with respect to some of their goals in speaking. That's because recognition of only some of the things that a speaker can (intent to) do in uttering something matter to the speaker's achieving that basic level of success.

To see more clearly what the relevant level of success is, as well as why recognition of this kind is so key to its achievement, it will help to impose some structure on the sorts of things that we can do with our utterances. I am going to make use of a classification of the sorts of things to be done in speaking that has been given to us by Austin, and, more specifically, by way of an interpretation of how best to implement that classification given by Hornsby.<sup>45</sup> Having done so, I will focus on the category of things done that Austin calls the 'rhetic' acts. As I've said, it is the rhetic acts that we perform, I will suggest, which are vital to our achieving the basic level of success that I'm concerned with.

Austin distinguished between the *locutionary*, *illocutionary* and *perlocutionary* things done (i.e. *acts*) in the uttering of something (the *action*). As we'll see, these are *determinable* acts to be performed with an utterance, of which, with the exception of the perlocutionary, there will be determinates of each of these determinable acts performed whenever we succeed in uttering something (on the significance of the employment

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<sup>45</sup> In particular, in her (1988) & (1994).

of the determinate/determinable distinction here, see §IV. a. below). The perlocutionary is excluded because not every utterance involves the doing of some perlocutionary thing, but every significant (linguistic) utterance does, necessarily, involve the doing of a locutionary and an illocutionary thing.

I'll start by looking at how we might understand more precisely the category of the locutionary by examining what Austin told us are the determinable acts that compose the locutionary things done. I'll then turn to the illocutionary things done, in particular by looking at in the way that Hornsby's claim that the distinctive feature of determinate *illocutionary* acts is that success in performing them can be secured by one's audience's recognising what one is trying to do. If that were true, then illocutionary acts might start looking like they have those success conditions that I've said are distinctive of basic communicative acts. I will cast doubt on Hornsby's claim, at least to the extent that what are *normally* thought of as illocutionary acts have the success conditions that she says is distinctive of the illocutionary as such. I will then turn, briefly, to *perlocutionary* acts when I look at Grice in §VI.

#### IV. a.

##### The Phatic & The Rhetic

So what, more exactly, is done in doing a *locutionary* thing? Austin used 'locutionary' as an umbrella term to encompass three distinct determinable things to be done when uttering something: a phonetic act,

a phatic act and a rhetic act (Austin 1962, p. 109). Here is how Austin marked off each of these acts:

[T]o say something is

- (a) always to perform the act of uttering certain noises (a 'phonetic' act), and the utterance is a phone;
- (b) always to perform the act of uttering certain vocables or words, i.e. noises of certain types belonging to *and as* belonging to a certain vocabulary, in a certain construction, i.e. conforming to *and as* conforming to a certain grammar, with certain intonation &c. This act we may call a 'phatic' act, and the utterance which it is the act of utterance a 'pheme' [...]; and
- (c) generally to perform the act of using that pheme or its constituents with a certain more or less definite 'sense' and more or less definite 'reference' (which together are equivalent to 'meaning'). This act we may call a 'rhetic' act, and the utterance which it is the act of uttering a 'rheme'.

(Austin 1962, pp. 92-3)

The two important categories for my purposes are the *phatic* and the *rhetic*. Restricting our attention to those utterances that are the speaking of a sentence of a language in a context, the phatic thing done is the uttering of the words of a language, whereas the rhetic thing done is the uttering of them with a certain kind of significance.<sup>46</sup> A description of

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<sup>46</sup> Austin himself invokes the Fregean notions of 'sense' and 'reference'. Though it is not necessary to do so, this does indicate what kind of features of utterances Austin wanted to pick out with the notion. It is a description of what one does by producing an utterance at the level of what it is that is being spoken about: specifically, that about which something is being said or asked or commanded, etc..

the phatic thing that is done in the course of a speaker's uttering something is a description of what one does, for example, by uttering "Jim smokes", that is pre-theoretically captured with the description, 'speaking (the words), "Jim smokes"'. A description of the rhetic thing that is done in the course of a speaker's uttering something is a description of what one does that is pre-theoretically captured with the description, 'saying that Jim smokes'. In accordance with this, I'm going to use a notion of 'saying' that marks out (at least) the *rhetic* thing typically done by an utterance of an indicative sentence in the course of making assertions. It is, perhaps, a somewhat artificially thin notion, though I don't think it strays too far from ordinary usage.

So conceiving of the distinction between the phatic and the rhetic is suggestive of how we can think of the relationship between them. A description of the phatic things done is, so to speak, a description of the vehicles, whereas a description of the rhetic thing done says what some of the significance of the occurrences of these vehicles are. That suggests that a description of the rhetic things done by speakers will say what some of the significance is of the phatic thing done (in that language) in that context. Only some of the significance of the action that is the utterance in question will thereby be specified because a fully developed linguistic theory will ultimately involve a portion that is dedicated to the uses to which the sounds that are significant in that language can be put.<sup>47</sup> This is, in effect, a partitioning of theoretical responsibility of describing acts that stand at different points on the more-basic-than scale. In saying the words 'Jim smokes' (the phatic thing), one said that

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<sup>47</sup> Hornsby 1988, pp. 31-3; see also her 1994, p. 188, and 1986, p. 92.



Jim smokes (the rhetic thing), and in saying that Jim smokes, one told one's audience (for example) that Jim is a smoker (the illocutionary thing). This provides at least *prima facie* reason to suppose that we have a well demarcated set of domains about which to conduct our theorising.

#### IV. b.

#### The Rhetic & The Illocutionary

But not everyone agrees that this kind of categorisation of putative things done in speaking is correct. Indeed, some don't think that is really a good distinction to be made between the rhetic things done and the illocutionary things done. A view of this kind was once put forward by John Searle (1968) on the grounds that Austin had not properly motivated the locutionary/illocutionary distinction. Why Searle was mistaken here will help bring into sharper focus just what lies on either side of this distinction.

The grounds Searle had for so criticising Austin are generated by the thought that there was something suspect in relying on something that was meant to be an abstraction from the total speech act performed. As Searle conceives of the way that one could draw such a distinction, he is convinced Austin was mistaken in thinking that there is a discernible (rhetic) thing that we can truly say to have been done *over and above* the illocutionary act performed:

The concepts *locutionary* act and *illocutionary* act are indeed different, just as the concepts *terrier* and *dog* are different. But the

conceptual difference is not sufficient to establish a distinction between separate classes of acts, because just as every terrier is a dog, so every locutionary act is an illocutionary act.

(Searle 1968, p. 413)

The idea seems to be that acts that count as locutionary stand to acts that count as illocutionary, as particular animals that are terriers stand to animals that are dogs. That is, that they stand to each other in some form of the way that species stand to a genus. There are a few different kinds of species/genus distinction.<sup>48</sup> One is the determinate/determinable distinction. We can think of the determinate/determinable distinction as a specific form of the species/genus distinction, when we understand the latter in the following way.<sup>49</sup> We can take B to be a species of A, and A to be a genus of B when something's being B entails its being A, but its being A does not entail its being B. The determinate/determinable distinction holds between B and A when they stand in the species/genus relation by virtue of B being a form of things that are A can take. *Terrier* is a species of the genus *dog*, because terriers are a form that dogs can take.

To see what this comes to, it might be helpful to contrast the determinate/determinable distinction from other forms of the species/genus distinction. One of these distinctions Anton Ford has recently

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<sup>48</sup> That is, there are different species of the genus, *species/genus distinction*. As it happens, they are determinate of the determinable, *species/genus distinction* (where the *determinate/determinable distinction* is itself a species of that genus).

<sup>49</sup> I am taking this way of drawing the species/genus distinction, and the location of the determinate/determinable distinction with respect to it, from Ford (2011).

labelled ‘accidental’ generality as against ‘accidental’ specificity. The species in such instances is derivative in kind on its genus—that is, something belongs to the species, in virtue of belonging to the relevant genus. For example, one is a brother in virtue of one being male, not the other way round; a brother is a male sibling—to be a brother is to be male plus something else (a sibling), and it is in virtue of this that brothers are species of males. This is not the kind of generality that applies in the determinate/determinable structure; things here go in the opposite direction.<sup>50</sup> Something is a determinate of a determinable when it belongs to the genus in virtue of belonging to the relevant species. Something is a dog in virtue of being a terrier, not the other way round. And that’s precisely because terriers are forms that dogs can take.

Searle appears to think that what Austin picks out is just different ways of classifying the very same act on something like the determinate/determinable distinction, so understood. But that doesn’t seem to get Austin’s distinction between the locutionary and illocutionary right. In the first place, the ordering suggested in Searle gets things topside down: the quotation suggests that some illocutionary act is going to be the genus of some locutionary act which is a species. Take the (putative) rhetic act of *saying* and the illocutionary act of *asserting*. That would be the idea that saying that Jim smokes is a species of the genus, asserting that Jim smokes. Accordingly, it must be that every case of saying that Jim smokes is a case of asserting that Jim smokes, and not every case of asserting that Jim smokes is a case of saying that Jim smokes. But, if anything, the opposite is true—arguably, every asserting is a saying, but

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<sup>50</sup> Ford prefers to call this ‘categorical generality’ vs. ‘categorical specificity’.

not every saying is an asserting, because one can say something—in jest, for example—without putting it forward in a way distinctive of assertions.

For all that, might there be really only one act being performed here, not two? Just as we are not saying that there are two things in saying that, of some creature, it is a terrier and a dog, there are not two acts being described when we specify, of some utterance, the locutionary thing done and the illocutionary thing done in the course of its production. But Austin's classification is meant to pick out a number of *different* acts, each of which are determinates of different determinables, that we perform in uttering something. Hornsby brings out why this is in her discussion of *explicit performatives*:

Picturing two theoretical taxonomies, one for animals and one for utterances, we imagine *dog* taking its place above *terrier* in a hierarchy of levels, but we imagine *saying that one promises to return the book* and *promising to return the book* as on some same level in the other taxonomic hierarchy. These two speech acts are subsumed by the rhetic and the illocutionary act respectively, and the rhetic and the illocutionary act are both at some same (high) level.

(Hornsby 1988, pp. 34-5)

When I promise to return the book, in uttering “I promise to return the book”, my *promising to return the book* is the illocutionary act I perform, and I do this by performing the rhetic act of *saying that I promise to*

*return the book.* One promises something, by way of speaking, by saying that one promises, but for all that *promising* and *saying that one promises* are different acts. But if illocutionary acts were determinate acts of determinable rhetic acts, there would not be two acts performed here. So we should think of the rhetic acts and the illocutionary acts in the course of uttering things as *determinable* acts, where one does at least two distinct things in producing one's utterance.

I'm now going to focus specifically on the rhetic thing done, and say something about the nature of these acts, on the basis of considerations adduced about how we should go about specifying them.

#### IV. c.

#### Rhetic Acts & Mood

The way that Hornsby proposes that we should seek to specify the rhetic thing done in uttering something is to follow divisions that are present in what is known as *mood*. Mood is a syntactic property that applies to *sentences*—sentences have a certain mood, utterances make use of sentences in a certain mood, but do not themselves have a mood. What utterances do have is an illocutionary force. The connection between mood and illocutionary force is, at least, that utterances of sentences that have certain moods are *typically* used to perform certain kinds of illocutionary acts.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> For discussion of the relationship between mood and force see Hornsby 1988, Wilson & Sperber 1988 and Boisvert & Ludwig, 2005.

The reasons for so specifying rhetic acts, are brought out when considering whether the kinds of acts typically performed with utterances of non-indicative sentences can be assimilated by acts of the kind typically performed with indicative sentences. There are two prime candidate accounts that attempt this: the *explicit performative* account found in Lewis (1970), and Donald Davidson's (1979) *paratactic* account. Davidson shows us why Lewis' account fails; Hornsby (1986) has shown why Davidson's account fails. I will concentrate on the latter. The reasons for the failure of such an attempted assimilation demonstrates why we should think of rhetic acts in a way that ties what rhetic acts there are to do with mood in something like the way Hornsby suggests.

Davidson's idea is that "an utterance of a non-indicative sentence can be decomposed into two distinct speech acts", where Davidson is picking out what I'm calling actions (i.e. utterances) with his use of "speech acts".<sup>52</sup> The decomposition is constituted by the first utterance making reference to the second, by (performatively) saying what kind of illocutionary force it (putatively) has. Each utterance is *declarative*—i.e. can be accurately represented as an utterance of an indicative sentence. The second 'utterance' is of a putative indicative core of the non-indicative sentence, and the first 'utterance' makes reference to that indicative core. When one utters "Put your hat on!" to command someone to put their hat on, Davidson says that this should be thought of as constituted by, or at least equivalent to, two declarative utterances: (i) "my next utterance is imperative" which is followed by (ii) "you will

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<sup>52</sup> Davidson 1979 p. 119. See §VI. a. for elaboration on this point.

put on your hat”. In this way, Davidson takes himself to be able to say that the meaning of non-indicatives can be accounted for in the same way as indicatives: by employment of suitably constrained truth-theories (see Chapter 5).

Hornsby picks out two connected problems with this. In the first instance, it is difficult to see how Davidson can avoid commitment to the claim that all utterances of non-indicates have truth-values. Davidson sought to avoid just that conclusion, while affording non-indicatives a truth-conditional treatment. Consider the explicit performative account. That tells us that “Put on your hat!” is equivalent to “I command you to put on your hat”. But if they are equivalent, then “Put on your hat!” turns out to be true, since the explicit performative “I command you to put on your hat” is true. But the utterance of the imperative isn’t true—imperative speech acts are not truth-apt. So the two cannot be equivalent.

Davidson seeks to avoid this consequence, though it is not clear that he succeeds. The first sentence says “my next utterance is imperative”, and, it turns out, that it “is true if and only if the utterance of the indicative sentence is imperatival in force” (Davidson 1979, p. 120). Since that first sentence is what makes the second imperatival in force, then the utterance of the indicative sentence *is* imperatival in force. For all that, both utterances have truth conditions, and those conditions either will, or will not, fail to be fulfilled. Suppose we were to include a conjunction where the hidden full-stop is supposed to be. If you did do what was putatively ordered of you, then the utterance of the conjunctive sentence

would come out true, since the conditions for the truth of the second conjunct would be fulfilled. But Davidson wants to say that though both utterances have conditions under which they come out true, “the combined utterance is not the utterance of a conjunction” (p. 121). As a result this combination itself doesn’t have a truth value.

It is a little puzzling to see what possible grounds there are for Davidson to insist this (consider, “The bath is full. The water is hot.”) But the important point is that this oddity points to a deeper difficulty with Davidson's approach. The issue turns on whether we can regard the two utterances that such uses are supposed to be equivalent to *saying* anything. And it is on this front that the second, and more troubling objection that Hornsby raises bites. When we take some issuing of an order, such as “put on your hat!”, Davidson’s paratactic treatment attempts to assimilate this into two uses of indicative sentences. But, typically, indicative sentences are used to *say* things. So if such utterances can be assimilated in this way, does that mean that, despite appearances we *say* what utterances of the indicative sentences extracted would typically say? That is, does the speaker say, first, that the next utterance is imperative, and, second that you will put on your hat?

No combinations of answers to these questions is acceptable here. Suppose that both utterances are instances of saying things. In that case the first utterance turns out to be false, since the second would not be imperitival in force. And if it is not imperitival in force, it is unclear how it could be distinguished from the prediction that the audience will put on their hat, and so could be issued as an order to do anything.



Suppose the first utterance is a saying that is true. Then the next utterance *is* imperatival. But that is inconsistent with the second utterance being indicative; that is, the next utterance (“you will put on your hat”) does not *say* anything. If the mood-setting utterance is *true*, and so an order is issued in our example, then the next utterance does *not* say anything in the sense that an utterance of an indicative sentence typically says something. What it does is to classify the utterance as an *imperative* one, and so straightforwardly ascribe the property of its being imperative to it, that the mood-setting utterance was meant to. But then it is not clear why the paratactic treatment is called for at all, since “put on your hat!” could itself be deemed (surely correctly) to be imperatival. Then there is no need to say that the utterance is imperatival, and no need to get the indicative core out—it could be done in the imperatival mood.

If this is right, then it looks like what is needed is some way of distinguishing the kinds of (determinable) *rhetic* things done according to those (determinable) rhetic things that are typically done with utterances of sentences of different moods. This is exactly what Hornsby proposes. She suggests that we should take these different determinable rhetic acts track the distinctions we find in the moods of sentences. We take there to be a class of rhetic acts that are performed, at least typically, with indicative sentences. We can then attach to utterances with which acts of that class are performed a verb that specifies the rhetic thing done in the course of uttering something of that kind. For those acts associated with utterances of indicative sentences, we can employ a relatively thin sense of ‘saying’ whereby utterances of that kind are said to

*say that such-and-such* (such a notion of saying would be, to all intents and purposes, the notion of ‘saying’ that I’ve been using to this point).

But we can then take it that there is a class of rhetic acts that are performed, at least typically, with impertival sentences, which are typically done by the performance of a rhetic act that is specified by claims that make use of a thin sense of, for example, ‘enjoining’, which attaches to utterances of this kind where they order, command, advise or whatever. For interrogatives, and perhaps optatives and exclamatives, we might find similarly appropriately thin notions with which to specify the rhetic things done by utterances of the relevant kinds.<sup>53</sup> So conceived, rhetic acts fall into different categories, categories that are reflected in the different moods that sentences can bear. These moods of sentences are those syntactic properties that they have, sentences with these properties are those with which acts of these different categories are typically performed.

That suffices as an initial characterisation of the sort of thing that I mean to be picking out with my use of Austin’s category of the rhetic thing done. I am now going to move on and consider the conditions under which acts of the rhetic kinds and acts of the illocutionary kinds can be said to be successful. I’ve claimed that the our basic communicative intentions have got to be such as to be those whose recognition is both necessary and sufficient for their success. We shall see that Searle thought

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<sup>53</sup> Hornsby employs, instead, various notions of ‘saying’—indicative saying, interrogative saying, optative saying—each of which roughly correspond to the kinds of verbs that were employed on the moderate approach in specifying the rhetic things done by utterances that constitute illocutionary acts of the various corresponding kinds.

such recognition was both necessary and sufficient for the success of our performing acts of the illocutionary kind; Hornsby has followed Searle to the extent that she agrees that such recognition is sufficient for success in one's illocutionary aims. I will discuss some putative counterexamples to this weaker thesis of Hornsby's that Jane Heal has recently given. What I take these to show is that not everything that is usually referred to as an illocutionary act has the success conditions that Hornsby thinks is distinctive of the illocutionary as such. However, *rhetic* acts *do* have these success conditions. This, I think, lends support to the claim that what is, fundamentally, expected by a speaker is that their audience recognise their rhetic intentions.

## V.

### Searle's Extraordinary Properties

We typically make available testimonial knowledge by performing an utterance with an indicative sentence. I have employed the term 'saying' in specifying what rhetic thing is done with utterances of the kind that are typically performed with indicative sentences. With respect to the utterances of simple sentences that I have mainly concentrated on, such specifications will specify what thing is referred to and what property is being attributed to that thing (i.e. what properties it is *said* to have). A paradigmatic illocutionary act that itself tends to be performed in one's doing a rhetic thing of this kind, is *telling* someone something.<sup>54</sup> They are also speech-acts with which we inform our audiences of things; that

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<sup>54</sup> At least, what tends to be classed as an illocutionary act. Some reasons one might have for thinking that not all acts of *telling someone something* are illocutionary acts will be discussed shortly.

is, make available knowledge to them. They therefore seem like a good place to start.

Searle famously defended the claim that communicative acts in general, and acts of telling in particular, have certain ‘extraordinary properties’:

If I am trying to tell someone something, then (assuming certain conditions are satisfied) as soon as he recognises that I am trying to tell him something and exactly what it is that I am trying to tell him, I have succeeded in telling it to him. Furthermore, unless he recognises that I am trying to tell him something and what I am trying to tell him, I do not fully succeed in telling it to him.

(Searle 1969, p. 47)

Searle suggests here that it is both necessary and sufficient for the success of the illocutionary act that the speaker means to be performing that their audience recognise what they are trying to do by uttering those words.<sup>55</sup> Searle’s claim therefore amounts to the idea that, with regards to telling, one succeeds in telling one’s audience something when, and only when, it is common knowledge between oneself and one’s audience what one intended to be doing—namely, telling them something—in producing one’s utterance.

This would suggest an unpacking of the content of the expectation that I have said the speaker has, and that their audience must meet, for the

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<sup>55</sup> *Modulo* the implicit distinction drawn between succeeding and *fully* succeeding in the quotation; cf. Heal 2013, p. 149.

primary requirement of the success for communication to likewise be met. Because that primary requirement of success is met by audiences recognising what the speaker means to be doing, that serves as the basis for their attempting to achieve whatever myriad goals that have in speaking. And I said that there is an important connection between this basic level of success, and the kinds of acts whose success is secured by the recognition of one's intention to so act, because that basic level of success is achieved by performing acts with these conditions for success. This is at least suggestive that, if illocutionary acts possess Searle's extraordinary properties, the expectation of the speaker, then, that I have isolated would be met if, and only if, speaker and audience are in possession of common knowledge of what illocutionary act the speaker is trying to perform.

But putative counterexamples abound to the attribution of these properties both to acts of *telling*, in terms of which Searle presents these properties, and to paradigmatic illocutionary acts of other kinds, like *warning* somebody. Both the necessity claim—that in order to tell someone something, they need to recognise what one is trying to tell them—and the sufficiency claim—that it is enough to have told someone something that they recognise that one was trying to do so—have come under pressure. I'll look at some cases in a moment. But before I do, I want to note that Hornsby agrees with Searle to the extent that she thinks that the sufficiency claim holds of illocutionary acts in general. In fact, she thinks that it is this feature of those acts which distinguishes them from the *perlocutionary* things done by one's uttering something, because perlocutionary acts do not have these success conditions.

To see why, we first need to understand the role of what Hornsby calls ‘reciprocity’. She introduces that notion with a discussion of the illocutionary act of *warning*. When a speaker performs the less basic act of warning somebody of something by doing the more basic act of ‘expressing a thought’ to them,

it seems that the speaker relies only on a certain receptiveness on her audience’s part for her utterance to work for her as illocutionarily meant: the audience takes her to have done what she meant to. The audience’s being warned appears to depend on nothing more than the audience and the speaker being parties of a normal linguistic exchange.

(Hornsby 1994, p. 192)

What we are then told, is that *reciprocity* is a relation that holds between people that “provides for the particular way, just illustrated, in which one speech act can arise from another, more basic one”. Reciprocity is thus thought to be an enabling condition on illocutionary acts having the success conditions that Hornsby thinks is distinctive of them. Since telling someone something is likewise thought to be an illocutionary act, the same holds for utterances with which acts of telling are performed:

[W]hat a person relies on to tell A something is A’s being open to the idea that she might be telling him what in fact she means to tell him: unless A can readily entertain the idea that she might be doing this, A could hardly take her to be doing it; when A does take her so, she is in a state of mind sufficient, with her utterance,

for her to have done it. What reciprocity provides for on this account is the success of attempts to do certain speech acts. It allows there to be things that speakers can do simply by being heard as (attempting to and thus) doing them.

(Hornsby 1994, p. 193)

But, is it true that illocutionary acts, in general, have the kinds of success conditions that reciprocity putatively provides for? Jane Heal has recently pointed out that there may be different things that we are willing to say about how success is achieved when the audience takes the speaker to be insincere or unreliable.<sup>56</sup> I say, “there’s a bull in that field”, intending to warn you of the bull in the field you are about to enter. The necessity claim in Searle’s statement is meant to be undermined by cases in which you take me to be joking. We can imagine such a case in which one does so, and so one enters the bull’s field without caution. Seeing the on-rushing bull you exit the field in haste. Did I succeed in warning you or not? If I did, then it is not necessary that you recognise what I was trying to do for me to have succeeded in doing that. Suppose, alternatively, that you took me to be unreliable about where the bulls are around here (say, as opposed to cows). You recognise that I am trying to warn you of a bull in the field, but you don’t pay it much mind—it’ll only be a cow. Again you enter and then exit swiftly on being confronted by the fast approaching bull. Did I succeed in warning you or not? If I didn’t, because I failed to persuade you that I am reliable in this case, then it is not sufficient that you recognise what I was trying to do for me to have succeeded in doing that.

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<sup>56</sup> Heal, 2013, pp. 147-50

Heal's point here is that, sometimes, recognition of what we typically think of as the illocutionary thing the speaker intended to be doing, isn't enough for it to be true that they thereby did what they were trying to. In some situations, it is sometimes right to say, "I warned you, but you thought that I was being neurotic". That is, *sometimes*, either one, or both, of Searle's extraordinary properties are exhibited by the acts performed by speakers at what is intuitively the level of the illocutionary, but not always. Heal's diagnosis is that the appropriateness of the judgements about success and failure here are dependent on various contextual factors about what is at stake in the situations in which the utterance is made. If what matters is whether I have discharged my duty to warn you, then we may suppose that I succeeded in acting so as to issue a warning. On the other hand, if what matters is that I protect you from danger in the way I wanted to, then we may suppose that I failed.

What are we to make of this? In these kinds of cases, it seems right that one has failed to do *something* that one meant to do in producing one's utterance. But we might think that whatever that failure is, it can't be such as to be a failure of one successfully performing the *illocutionary act* that one intended to perform, if Hornsby is right, and it suffices for the success of an illocutionary act that one's audience recognise which illocutionary act one means to be performing. If this is the right way to take Heal's case, then it'll turn out that a number kinds of acts that are usually taken a paradigmatically illocutionary acts—acts that, in significant number of cases we are inclined to call acts of telling, or warning, etc.—are not such. Alternatively, we take those success



conditions not to in fact be distinctive of the category of the illocutionary at all—what Heal's examples show is that these success conditions don't universally hold of illocutionary acts, so the illocutionary as a category cannot be distinguished according to its inclusion of only acts with those success conditions.

So far as I am concerned, it doesn't really matter which of these options are taken up. The point I want focus on is that what I have classed as *rhetic* will have Searle's extraordinary properties. Consider *saying* something, in the thin sense of 'saying' which specifies the rhetic thing typically done by speakers producing utterances of indicative sentences. Does it suffice for one to have said to someone such-and-such for them to have recognised that one means to be saying such-and-such? At first glance, it would appear so. Take an arbitrary speech act whose rhetic element is properly specified by this notion of *saying*—for example, one in which one asserts that there is a bull in the field by saying that there is a bull in the field. What is one trying to do, in trying to say something to one's audience? Remember that one can do a range of determinate illocutionary things in one's saying something. In each of the rhetic acts of saying by which those different illocutionary acts are performed, one will be referring to something, and saying of it that it is some way or other. So, to come to discern what rhetic thing the speaker has done in producing their utterance, would be to recognise that it is an utterance with which the speaker is referring to some object, and attributing some property to it, though, without necessarily recognising that in the course of doing so, the speaker intends to be putting forward a hypothesis, or making an assertion, or joking or making an ironical statement. What

one thus recognises is the speaker doing something in which things of that more specific type can be done.

If my audience recognises to what I'm intending to refer, and what it is that I want to say is true of that thing, nothing more would seem to be needed for me to have succeeded in saying to them that that thing is that way. Do Heal-style cases apply? If one's audience takes one to be unreliable with respect to what one is talking about—about whether there is a bull in the field, say—are there any situations in which recognition of what rhetic thing one was trying to do won't be enough for one to have in fact said what one intended to to one's audience? That is, is there a threat to the success of a speaker's referring to some object and saying something of it, that their audience recognise to what they intend to refer, and what they mean to be saying about it, but they think they are unreliable? It is not clear how it could—considerations about unreliability won't affect one's judgements as to what the speaker is saying, in the relevant sense, but only how one should take their having said that.

Likewise for the necessity claim. For me to have said to you, in the sense of performing the rhetic act of *saying*, that there's a bull in the field, you need to have recognised that that is what I intended to say. Of course, I can say *the words* to you, and you not listen, but then I won't have done that basic communicative thing that is distinctive of *saying* as I am understanding it. If you fail to recognise to what I am intending to refer, and what I am intending to be saying of that thing, then I won't have succeeded in doing that, in the sense that it enables me to pursue the

other ends that I had in speaking. That is, if you don't even recognise *this* much, very little can be achieved. And Heal-style cases also don't constitute counterexamples to the necessity claim. If you take me to be joking, that is no block to your recognising what I was trying to say. Only, rather, once again, you won't have taken my having said that in the way that I intended.

If the rhetic things done does have the requisite success conditions, this allows that the primary requirement of success in speaking to be that one succeeds in performing the rhetic act one intended to. That might suggest that the relevant expectation that the speaker has is that their audience discern the rhetic thing they mean to be doing with their utterance. This has considerable plausibility. After all, all determinate illocutionary acts are performed by one's doing some rhetic thing. So audiences recognising what rhetic thing one means to have done looks like it can play the enabling role that was assigned to the speaker's expectations being met. That is, the meeting of the speakers expectations was meant to enable the speaker to pursue all their multifaceted goals in speaking, and discerning what rhetic thing the speaker meant to do allows speakers to do this.

That concludes my characterisation of the rhetic acts that we perform in speaking. I'm now going to move on to the question of what it is that one is intending to do, in speaking with rhetic intentions, by investigating some of the things that Grice has said about what is speakers to mean things with their words.

## VI.

### Grice's Communicative Intentions

Grice made it standard to draw a distinction between what was said by a speaker uttering some sentence on an occasion, and what the speaker meant by their saying that. The distinction, very roughly is that our words, by way of convention, have meaning. The meaning that our words possess determines something that, in the right kinds of combinations, when uttered on an occasion, can say things. When that utterance is of a kind that is typically performed with an indicative sentence, those words, so combined, can say something capable of truth or falsity. But sometimes speakers use their words to say, or mean, something other than what that conventional meaning determines. When this happens, what a speaker means to be saying is not, or not only, what those words, as used on that occasion, *do* say. For all that, the words, so combined do say what their conventional meaning determines that they do.<sup>57</sup>

This distinction was employed by Grice in an attempt to carry through an ambitious analytical project. Grice thought that the conventional meaning of our words was ultimately to be analysed in terms of what a speaker means by way of using those words. And this 'utterer's meaning' was itself to be analysed in terms that are not overtly semantical in character; in particular, by appeal to the intentions that the speakers have when they produce their utterances. Given that the analysans, for Grice,

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<sup>57</sup> For some trenchant criticism of this distinction, at least as Grice draws it, see Travis (1991). See also his (1985).

is the notion of utterer's meaning, the research program that he instigated is one that seeks to fill the gap in the following schema:

A speaker, *S*, utters *u* means that *p*, with an utterance, *u*, if and only if \_\_\_\_\_ .

Grice's precise motivation for conducting an analysis of this kind is a matter of some dispute. One seeking to reduce semantic vocabulary to mentalistic vocabulary, of course, will be enthusiastic about Grice's program, but Grice himself denied possessing such reductionist motivations (Grice 1987, p. 350). Grice's objective was *analysis*, and, where possible, analysis should not be conducted in a circle. For Grice, an analysis of semantical terms that employs the same, or closely related, notions in the analysis would be circular.

The desideratum of non-circularity that Grice insists upon precludes the employment of the notion of meaning (or a 'close relative'—e.g. saying, stating, etc.) within the scope of the propositional attitudes in terms of which Grice thought that analysandum should be analysed. If such semantical vocabulary were allowed to be so employed, the gap above could be filled with something akin to 'the speaker intended to mean (better: say, state, command, etc.) that (/whether, etc.) *p* by uttering *u*'. But such an account, we are told, will be problematically circular:

a position hardly seems satisfactory when we see that it involves attributing to speakers an intention which is specified in terms of the very notion of meaning which is being analysed (or in terms of

a dangerously close relative of that notion). Circularity seems to be blatantly abroad.

(Grice 1987, p. 352)

If a non-circular account is available, it is to be preferred in the course of analysis (indeed, it is questionable that a filling of the gap that creates a circle small enough is an *analysis* at all). So what Grice sought was a way of specifying intentions with which a speaker produced their utterance which captures what they do, in uttering that, where the content of these specifications is itself devoid of semantical terms. Grice himself, and others following him, have had a few goes at this in light of a propagation of counterexamples to Grice's original (1957) proposal that have necessitated alterations. I will stick, for the ease of illustration with that original proposal. This is permissible, in the present context, given that the real object of enquiry is the requirement of non-circularity, and whether it is correct to demand that a proper account of speaker meaning employ no semantic notions.<sup>58</sup>

That first proposal, roughly, was that a speaker means so-and-so by their words, if and only if they intend to induce in their audience such-and-such a certain reaction, by their recognising that very intention of the speaker to induce that reaction. When the vehicle involved is an

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<sup>58</sup> The initial shift, in light of these counterexamples, was to an analysis in terms of intentions to induce beliefs about the speaker's beliefs. But, perhaps unsurprisingly, in hindsight, this is subject to counterexamples of its own. McDowell captures what is fundamentally wrong with this suggestion: "the primary point of making assertions is not to instil into others beliefs about one's beliefs, but to inform others [...] about the subject matter of one's assertions (which need not be, though of course it may be, the asserter's beliefs)" (McDowell 1980, p. 127).

“indicative-type” utterance, the intended reaction is the formation of a belief about how some particular things stand in the world—in particular, how the speaker believes them to be. Earlier we saw that Moran employed something close to Grice’s notion of ‘non-natural meaning’, and there I employed the abbreviation of ‘M-intention’ for the intentions. To non-naturally mean that  $p$ , a speaker,  $S$ , must produce an utterance,  $u$ , with an M-intention, that is with the intention that,

- (1) their audience,  $A$ , believe that  $p$ ;
- (2)  $A$  believe that  $S$  intends  $A$  to believe that  $p$ ;
- (3)  $A$  believe that  $p$  on the basis of his believing that  $S$  intends (1) & (2).

I will continue to use ‘M-intention’ to pick out intentions of this kind.

This is a proposed analysis of *utterer’s* meaning, and since utterer’s meaning is what we are concerned with in considering *communication*, it is one’s acting with M-intentions that are meant to constitute one’s act as communicative—those intentions that I have called the *fundamental communicative intentions*. As such, on the Grician picture, in the absence of acting with M-intentions, the subject cannot be thought to be engaging in a communicative act at all.

This is a claim that I’ll end up rejecting, because it does not allow for rhetic acts to have the success conditions that they manifestly have. To help show this I want to say a couple of things, first, about how it is that

this Gricean conception of communication can be subsumed under the Austinian framework that I'm operating with. Having said a few things about the relationship between the rhetic act of saying things, and *what's said* with utterances in which one does that, I'll be able to say more exactly what I think is mistaken about Grice's picture.

#### VI. a.

#### Rhetic Acts & What's Said

If the rhetic acts typically performed by utterances of indicative sentences are acts of *saying*, then *what's said* will be picked out by correct indirect speech reports of those utterances. For example, suppose that Galileo had uttered, just once, "Si muove la terra" in the course of his conversation with Bellarmine. We can correctly report (some of) what Galileo did there, by uttering "Galileo said that the earth moves", to say that Galileo said that the earth moves. Given this, we can infer that one of the things said by Galileo was that the earth moves. I will now make a few remarks about what we might think those things are. On the basis of this, I'll be able to more accurately express one of the key problems that I have with Grice's account. But the conception of the things that are said that I'll be working with here will also have a role to play later in the thesis, so I'll take this opportunity to set it out in some detail.<sup>59</sup> I'll first briefly describe one particular way of accounting for indirect speech reports that was first proposed by Donald Davidson (1969). Given problems that that view faces, I'll then consider some amendments,

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<sup>59</sup> See Chapter 4, §§IV-V; Chapter 5, §V.



which tie the things that are said very closely with the rhetic acts of saying, as they are here being conceived.

One of the main things that I want to suggest is that, since rhetic acts of *saying* something are tied inextricably to the communicative *intentions* of speakers, *the things that are said* are also tied to the intentions of speakers. And given the role that rhetic acts have to play in our communicative economy, that determines that *the things that are said* are not wholly determined by the literal meaning of the sentences used to say those things. So *the things that are said* will be conceived of as standing in a one-to-one relationship with the rhetic acts of *saying*. I'll then turn to the issue of *which* speaker's intentions are said to determine the things that they say.

I am going to rely on some elements of an account of how rhetic acts of saying something relate to the things that are said in performing them that has is suggested by some things that David Wiggins (1992) and Ian Rumfitt (1993) have claimed about indirect speech reports. Wiggins and Rumfitt employ something close to Davidson's paratactic account of (indirect) reports of what's said.<sup>60</sup> We have already seen the character of an account of this kind as applied to utterances of non-indicative sentences, and why that account is lacking. But things stand differently with regards to indirect speech reports—at least for cases of indirect reports of what someone *says*. The account in this context runs, roughly, as follows. When it is uttered, "Galileo said that the earth moves", to

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<sup>60</sup> Davidson 1969; for further discussion of some of the problematic consequences of the view that Davidson articulates here, and why something similar to Wiggins' solution is called for to avoid them, see Burge 1986.

report what Galileo once said, what is really happening here (according to the paratactic account) is that there is an utterance of *two* type sentences. The first is “Galileo said that.”, where the “that” demonstrates something—it is up for grabs just *what* is demonstrated—that is represented by, or manifest in, the production of the next type sentence “The earth moves” by the one doing the reporting.

Davidson’s own idea was that when a reporter does this, they are attributing to some speaker their production of an *utterance*: that is, the first utterance of “Galileo said that.” is a demonstration of an utterance (the following “The earth moves”) to which Galileo bears a certain relation. This allows him to construe the claim made by “Galileo said that.” as expressing a relation that holds between Galileo’s utterance and another *event*—namely, the next utterance of “The earth moves”. This is a relation that obtains just in case that utterance, and Galileo’s utterance of the sentence, “Si muove la terra” make ‘samesayers’ of the reporter and Galileo.

There are many advantages to Davidson’s account, but it has come into some disrepute, because it has become clear that what’s putatively demonstrated with the first three words of the report cannot be an *utterance*. That’s because this leads, in more than one way, to paradox.

Perhaps the most straightforward articulation of why this view has paradoxical consequences is brought out by Ian McFetridge (1975), in

what has come to be known as ‘the counting problem’.<sup>61</sup> Galileo said, just once, “Si muove la terra” in the course of his conversation with Bellarmine. If reports such as “Galileo said that the earth moves” do involve a demonstration in something like the way Davidson suggests, and what is demonstrated were an utterance—that is a datable, non-repeatable *action*—then we would get the result that, in a case in which some speaker says, twice, “the earth moves”, on the first occasion their audience could truly say “that’s something that Galileo said”, and on the second occasion of utterance their audience could truly say “that’s *another* thing that Galileo said”. But that is absurd—Galileo, any way we cut it, said just one thing on the occasion of his conversation with Bellarmine.

The desired result is that on both occasions the speaker saying the *self same* thing that Galileo said when he uttered the words, “Si muove la terra”. McFetridge thinks that to accommodate this we should employ Quine’s notion of ‘deferred ostension’ and conceive of the putative demonstration in the report as a kind of ‘deferred ostension’ to something that those utterances are related to in the right kind of way.<sup>62</sup> Deferred ostension, generally, is commonplace. When I point to my copy of *How To Do Things With Words*, and say “that’s a strange book”, I

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<sup>61</sup> See Wiggins 1992, fn. 32. For further discussion of McFetridge’s argument, Rumfitt 1993, pp. 446-9; for a reply to McFetridge’s objection of Davidson’s behalf, see Holton 1996 (with a counter-reply from Rumfitt 1996). There have been many other problems raised for Davidson’s view. See, for example, Higginbotham (1986) and Schiffer (1987). For a survey of some of the standard objections to this element of Davidson, as well as some responses to these objections by way of amendments to Davidson’s account, see Lepore & Ludwig, 2007, pp. 246-61. Rumfitt (1993) also amends Davidson’s account to deal with objections from Higginbotham and Schiffer.

<sup>62</sup> As it happens, for McFetridge this turns out to be the *set* of utterances of which Galileo’s is a member. There are some problems in doing so; see Rumfitt 1993, pp. 447-8.

am not saying of my copy of that text that *it* is strange. I am, rather, to be understood as predicating strangeness to the book-type that my token copy instantiates. This suggests that what is needed in this context is not a particular, but something more like a property. And this we have already seen is how rhetic acts should be thought of. Accordingly, Wiggins writes, “what my ‘Galileo said that ...’ harks forward to is something that the coming utterance of ‘the earth moves’ itself exemplifies” (Wiggins 1992, p. 82); what is being “harked forward to” is not the action (i.e. the utterance) but something close to the (rhetic) *act* of saying that the earth moves:

[W]hen I say “Galileo said that the earth moves” and I produce my token of “the earth moves”, what I display or exemplify is not my own particular utterance or my particular token of “the earth moves” but some act of saying, a narrowly drawn specific rhetic act (but not a speech *action*, for that is a particular), an act that one who can interpret English speech will know issues in truth if and only if the earth moves.

(ibid., p.83)

What Wiggins is suggesting is that we could think of the putative demonstration enacted by the uttering of “Galileo said that...” as a case of deferred ostentation to something closely related to the rhetic act that Galileo performed. In saying that Galileo said that the earth moves we are, roughly, saying that Galileo does the same thing we do when we perform the following act of saying: The earth moves.

I've hedged in saying that reports of what's said involve deferred ostentation to *something closely related* to the rhetic act of saying that is performed with the utterance. That's because we can't think of the putative demonstration involved in indirect speech reports of sayings as pointing to the (rhetic) *act* of saying such-and-such itself.<sup>63</sup> What is demonstrated is *what's said* in the course of the speaker producing their utterance, but what's said by one who produces a declarative utterance can't be *identical* to the thing done. The thing done is the speaker's *saying that so-and-so is the case*, whereas what's said is *that so-and-so is the case*.

This points to one way in which we might think of what's said, and its relation to the rhetic acts performed. The things that are said will be something that stands in a one-to-one relation to rhetic acts of saying. For ease of expression, let's call the things that are said, *propositions*. So conceived, we can think of propositions, with Wiggins, the following way. If we have some proposition, *p*, associated with some rhetic act *r*, and some proposition *p'*, associated with some rhetoric act *r'*, then,  $p = p'$  if and only if  $r = r'$ . If, and only if, to do *r* is to do *r'* will  $r = r'$ , and so will the associated propositions (*p* and *p'*) be identical.<sup>64</sup>

The idea is that what bears truth here are the acts (*r* and *r'*), so to do *r* is to do *r'* just in case *r* and *r'* are recognisable as acts of saying something, and they are both true under the very same conditions. To get some

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<sup>63</sup> Though it should probably be noted that attempts have been made to tie *propositions* to types that are here being called 'acts'; see Dummett (1996) and Hanks (2011).

<sup>64</sup> Wiggins, 1992, p. 88. Wiggins does suggest that one may think of the rhetic act performed as tied to the literal meaning meaning, but given that I have tied the notion of the rhetic thing done with the fundamental communicative intentions of speakers, I cannot follow him here. For an argument, see §IV. b.

traction on this (see Chapter 5), we can think in these terms: one who understands the utterance as an act of saying, will take the utterance to be true under certain conditions, and the very same act of saying is performed just when one who understands (possibly distinct) utterance as an act of saying, will take that utterance to be true under the very same conditions. That is, one who understands an utterance in which  $r$  is performed will take things to be some way ( $p$ ) when they take the utterance to be true, and if, on understanding an utterance in with which the speaker performed  $r'$  they would take things to be the very same way on the supposition that that utterance is true, then to do  $r$  is to do  $r'$ . So thinking of *the things that are said* allows for them to cut as finely as one chooses. An appeal to *speakers taking things to be some way* on understanding the utterance, allows propositions to be conceived of as ‘Russelian’—i.e. carving only as finely as reference—or as ‘non-Russelian’—i.e. carving finer than reference.<sup>65</sup>

#### IV. b.

#### What’s Said & Literal Meaning

According to Grice’s account, we can think of the propositions expressed, so conceived, as determined in one of two ways. Either they are determined by the literal meaning of the words that make up the sentences we utter, and their modes of combination, or they are determined by the fundamental communicative intentions with which speakers utter their words (conceived of as M-intentions). Neither will

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<sup>65</sup> See Rumfitt (1993) for an elaboration of this conception of propositions that falls into the latter category.

do. I'll first set out why propositions expressed can't be thought to be determined by literal meaning, then, in the next section, I'll say why they can't be determined by the kinds of intentions he appeals to.

It is important that the rhetic things done by uttering a sentence can diverge from what might be thought to be determined by the conventional meanings that words bear, when combined into sentences, and uttered on occasions. If we accept that the rhetic acts speakers perform are determined by the conventional meanings that the words of the sentence, combined in the ways that they are, then rhetic acts cannot play the fundamental role that I have assigned to them in communication. That's for reasons already advertised: what's said has got to line up in the right way with rhetic intentions, and the literal meaning of sentences used by speakers need not line up with their intentions.

Suppose I say that "Jim's pallet is colourful", intending to say that Jim's palette is colourful. My audience might recognise that I'm intending to refer to Jim's artist's palette with my use of the word 'pallet'. However, what I (apparently) literally referred to was a wooden platform. But if what I did is determined by the literal meaning of the words I employed, then I can succeed in doing what I do, irrespective of the intentions that I had in producing those words. Since it is both necessary and sufficient for the success of one's performing a rhetic act that one's audience recognise one's rhetic intentions, that means that, if one's words can function in this way, independent of one's communicative intentions, their so functioning cannot be identified with the rhetic act one performs. That is, if we allow for literal meaning to determine the rhetic

things done, then one will be able to perform some rhetic act in the absence of it being recognised what rhetic act one intends to perform. As such, rhetic acts, so conceived couldn't play the role of being the basic communicative acts.

That is not to say that literal meaning is not important to our successfully performing rhetic acts. It has a vital role in making manifest one's rhetic intentions to others who are similarly habituated. What literal meaning does is, amongst other things, facilitate the recognition of our rhetic intentions—most of the time our rhetic intentions *do* line up with what the words we employ to manifest them literally mean. It will only be possible, in many circumstances, to succeed in achieving one's rhetic aims when one uses the right words in the right constructions. But there will be circumstances in which one need not do this. And when one doesn't, that may or may not be a bar to one's succeeding, depending on whether circumstances conspire to allow for one's intentions to nonetheless be recognised by one's audience. That just goes to show that the rhetic acts one performs are not wholly determined by the literal meaning of the words, in their constructions, that one uses.

#### VI. c.

#### What's Said & M-Intentions

A second problem with the Gricean picture concerns the kinds of counterexamples that I raised in the last chapter against Moran's account. If Grice is right that the fundamental communicative intentions are to induce in others beliefs of the kind he isolates, and rhetic intentions are



the fundamental communicative intentions, then the utterances with which one voices knowledge will necessarily involve intentions of this kind. But then the counterexamples that I raised against Moran's view would also be counterexamples to my own.

I rejected Moran's account of telling (chapter 2, §III) on the grounds that it required speakers to intend to induce certain kinds of beliefs in their audience in order to make available testimonial knowledge to them. This, I argued, is mistaken because one can make available testimonial knowledge in the absence of acting with those intentions. But if Grice is right, then any communicative act whatsoever involves acting with intentions of this kind—including those communicative acts with which one makes available testimonial knowledge. In that case my account would be no less vulnerable to the putative counterexamples that I mobilised against Moran.

But there are problems facing this way of taking the Gricean proposal. To get them properly in view, we need to have a closer look at Austin's category of *perlocutionary* acts performed. The way that Austin introduces the notion of the perlocutionary things done with utterances, is by telling us that they are those things that are less basic than the acts that Searle thinks have his extraordinary properties: "what we bring about or achieve *by* saying something, such as convincing, persuading, deterring, and even, say, surprising or misleading" (Austin 1962, p.

109).<sup>66</sup> And, in fact, one thing that serves to distinguish the perlocutionary acts performed when one utters something from the kinds of acts that are more basic than them, is that they don't have Searle's extraordinary properties. I may mean to persuade you that there are counterexamples to Leibniz's Law, and you may recognise this, but, for all that, you fail to be persuaded. Indeed, such recognition can be an obstacle to one's achieving that end. We might then say that one of the perlocutionary effects that my telling somebody something might have is to persuade them that things are as I told them to be.

Of course, in the last section, we saw that there are some reasons to doubt that what are usually thought to be *illocutionary* acts are always subject to the success conditions that follow from the sufficiency claim in Searle's articulation of his extraordinary properties. But, at least, it is clear that perlocutionary acts are not going to be subject to success conditions of this kind. This means that a speaker's meaning to be performing some perlocutionary act cannot play the role of underpinning the relevant expectation of the speaker, if the recognition of what the speaker is expecting suffices for the expectation to be met. And we have already seen that the relevant expectation just is one which is met by one who recognises what the speaker is expecting of their audience.

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<sup>66</sup> Austin tried to devise a test for determining which acts are illocutionary and which acts are perlocutionary according to whether one does something *in* saying something, or one does something *by* saying something. That looks like it probably can't be made to work (see Hornsby 1994, pp. 189-90), but what's important here is the examples that Austin gives us—examples of acts that are less basic than those we have been considering so far.

Searle argued a long time ago that the Gricean analysis of *speaker meaning* is mistaken because the kind of act that Grice associates with a speaker meaning something is a perlocutionary act:

the account says that saying something and meaning it is a matter of intending to perform a perlocutionary act. In the examples Grice gives, the effects cited are invariable perlocutionary. [But] saying something and meaning it is a matter of intending to perform an illocutionary act.

(Searle 1969, p. 46)

Is Searle right? Is acting with the aim of inducing a belief that things are as one believes them to be a perlocutionary act? When things go well (that is, when communication occurs) speaker and audience are both aware of (at least some of) what the speaker's intentions are in uttering what they do. Since communication as such is the publication of intentions, once it is known by the audience what the speakers intentions are, at least some basic form of communication will have been achieved. If this is right, then these communicative intentions will have Searle's extraordinary properties.

Now, when these intentions are conceived of as intentions to induce in one's audience certain beliefs, that idea amounts to this: that both the speaker and her audience are aware that the speaker intends to induce in the audience those beliefs. But one striking feature of this is that the audience could come to recognise this intention of the speaker—the intention to induce in them a certain belief—and the speaker not achieve what they intended to achieve (i.e. the audience could fail to form the

relevant belief). The problem with this is it divorces the fulfilment of the putative Gricean communicative intention from the mutual awareness of that intention. That means that it cannot be that for one to meaningfully utter something, in the course of attempting to communicate, that one must intend to induce in one's audience a belief of this kind. And the feature that gives rise to this problem is a hallmark of the perlocutionary.

## VII.

### McDowell's Communicative Intentions

John McDowell has employed the reasoning I've just rehearsed (1980, pp. 40-2) to argue for a certain claim about how to understand speaker's basic communicative intentions. McDowell draws the conclusion that the only kinds of intentions that do have the right success conditions are those that employ semantical notions within the scope of the speaker's propositional attitudes—for example, the intention *to say such-and-such* (as opposed to the intention *to induce such-and-such a belief in one's audience (by way of their recognising that intention)*).

McDowell seems to think that the only intention that does have these success conditions are intentions to say such-and-such. For, just before his remarks concerning the nature of speech-acts as publications of intentions, he tells us that “the primary communicative intention [in assertoric discourse] is the intention [...] to say such-and-such to the audience”. If that is the right way of reading McDowell here, that would suggest that there is no other intention that could do the job. That is,

there is nothing more to say about what that intention is an intention to do, that would serve these purposes. And why should we think that there must be? As Charles Travis remarks, in this connection,

[W]hy should to intend *X* be, in the nature of the concepts, to intend *Y*, *Y* distinct from *X*? Why should intending (one's words) to say *X* be just the same as intending anything *else*?

(Travis 1991, p. 259)

I have already given an argument that *rhetic* intentions have Seattle's extraordinary properties. And that might be thought to vindicate McDowell's conclusion: since the rhetic act performed by any given illocutionary act typically performed by an utterance of an indicative sentence is *saying* something (in the thin sense), the intentions distinctive of performance of acts of those kinds might be thought to be intentions *to say* such-and-such. But I'm going to conclude this chapter with a few remarks about what more there is to say here.

What is being sought by the speaker, according to the McDowellian thought, is that for which mutual awareness on the part of the speaker and hearer allows for communication to have occurred between them. What the speaker expects is that their audience will achieve such awareness—whatever it comes to—on the occasion of their producing a particular utterance in the circumstances of speaking. So the meeting the expectation by their audience just is what is aimed at by the speaker. What is expected, and what is needed to meet it in such a way that the primary requirement of success is fulfilled, is this mutual awareness.

What more there is to say here will come from what we are able to say about what such awareness would amount to.

McDowell is surely right that they will both be aware of what the speaker intended to be saying. But in being aware of that, the audience will be able to make use of what the speaker has done in some distinctive ways. This can translate over to the nature of the expectation that the speaker has. For, what it is, at least in part, to expect that one's audience be aware of what one intended to be doing here is that they will be able to so take what they have done, and themselves make use of it in those distinctive ways. And plausibly, the use they can put it to will be different for the different kind of rhetic acts that are performed in the course of speakers uttering things. For example, one who is aware of what rhetic thing the speaker is trying to do in producing an utterance to assert something will be able to draw the conclusion that things must be a certain way if the speaker uttered truth. So one of the things that the speaker will expect is that certain conclusions will be made by their audience if they come to believe that they have uttered truth.

This is reflected in the conception of propositions that I have borrowed from Wiggins and Rumfitt. I said that we could get a grip on when speakers perform the same rhetic acts by appeal one who understands the utterance as an act of saying taking it to be true under the very same conditions. We can understand this—and here I am prefiguring some of the central themes that I'll be exploring in the next couple of chapters—in terms of one who understands an utterance in which  $r$  is performed taking things to be some way ( $p$ ) when they take the utterance to be true.

That means, the same inferences between  $p$  (and  $\neg p$ ) and  $r$ 's truth (and falsity), will be licensed for one who possesses rhetic understanding of any of the utterances in which  $r$  is performed. Their being so capable of performing such inferences can then provide some explanation of what it is that the speaker is intending to be do.

When it comes to an utterance with which the speaker issues an order, things will stand a little differently. At least in the paradigm cases of speakers doing such a thing in producing their utterance, the awareness that their audience will have to achieve for the primary requirement of success to fulfilled is that they are capable of discerning what would happen if the order issued is to be obeyed. As such, a speaker performing the rhetic act of 'ordering' (in a suitably thin sense appropriate for specifying the rhetic thing done) will expect that their audience will be capable this. And when it comes to performing (at least certain kinds of) interrogative rhetic acts, they will expect their audience to be capable of discerning what sort of thing would provide what is lacking when the speaker asks certain kinds of questions. In general, then, an explanation of what it is that the speakers mean to be doing, in such a way that they expect that their audience will recognise this, is an expectation that can be met by their audience being capable of doing those things which are necessary for the success of the illocutionary acts they mean to be performing—namely, their succeeding in performing the rhetic acts by which they do these illocutionary things.

## VIII.

### Conclusion

McDowell is right in saying that basic communicative success is secured when a speaker's audience recognises what the speaker intends at the rhetic level. When one intends to *say* something, recognition of that intention at least suffices for one's saying that. But we can say more about what one who achieves such recognition is capable of. They are capable of discerning how things stand in the world, according to different statuses that the utterances in which those things are said can bear. In the next chapter I'm going to consider a view that the kind of recognition, or knowledge, that one associates with one's understanding the utterances at others, at least at the rhetic level, is *constituted* by one's possessing capacities of this sort. It is a view that has been put forward recently by Ian Rumfitt, and it is a view that I will end up endorsing.

Let me end with a brief recap of various threads that I've been following in this chapter. In the first half, I set out my understanding of the distinctions that Austin draws between some of the different kinds of determinable acts that one can perform in speaking. I have tried to make plausible the claim that what falls under the category of the rhetic things done are the basic communicative act. I said that the primary requirement of success in performing these basic communicative acts are that one's intention to be performing them is recognised. I then set out a conception of rhetic acts, following Hornbsy's interpretation, that was reflected in the moods that sentences typically used to perform them can bear. I argued that rhetic acts display Searle's extraordinary properties,



which meant that we cannot conceive of the rhetic acts performed as either determined by literal meaning or by M-intentions. I ended by examining McDowell's suggestion that we should conceive of these intentions as simply intentions to perform rhetic acts, and indicated what more we might be able to say about what it is for one to intend so much, and what is required of audience's to count as having recognised them.

## 4.

# Rumfitt's Proposal

### I.

#### Introduction

A speaker makes available testimonial knowledge when she voices knowledge. She voices knowledge only when she says something because she knows it (or someone in her testimonial chain does). Her audience comes to be in possession of that knowledge, only if they meet certain expectations that she has of them. In the last chapter I focused on this last point, and said that to meet the relevant expectations of the speaker is for her audience to come to recognise what rhetic act she meant to perform. She succeeds in performing the rhetic act that she was meaning to perform, when these intentions are recognised by her audience; that is, when these expectations are met. At the end of the last chapter I gave some indication of what sort of thing the audience needs to be capable of doing, in order to count as meeting this expectation—namely, capable of performing kinds of inferences peculiar to the rhetic thing the speaker meant to do. For example, one who is aware of what rhetic thing the speaker is trying to do in producing an utterance to say something will be

able to draw the conclusion that things must be a certain way if the speaker uttered truth. A view identifying states of rhetic understanding with one's being capable of making these kinds of inferences was first proposed in some recent work by Ian Rumfitt. I will be looking in detail at that proposal in this chapter, assessing its motivations and considering some objections.

In the next section, I will briefly discuss, in very general terms, the relationship between the capacities we possess and the knowledge that putatively constitutes such capacities. Given that, in general, we need not think of capacities we possess as necessarily constituted by our possessing knowledge of some proposition, it is an open question whether the capacities to make the kinds of inferences discussed at the end of the last chapter should be understood in terms of one possessing such knowledge. In §III I set out the barebones of Rumfitt's account of rhetic understanding that gives a negative answer to that open question. In §IV I elaborate on the proposal by way of a comparison with our inferential capacities more generally, and continue, in §V, with a discussion of what conception of linguistic competence will attend Rumfitt's proposal. Here we find an explanation of the systematic productivity that we display in our understanding the utterances of others. At the end of the chapter I look at two objections. In §VI I consider at some length an objection that has been raised by Guy Longworth and in §VII I consider a line of reasoning to the effect that Rumfitt's proposal commits us to a form of reductionism in the epistemology of testimony. I reply to both of these objections. In so doing, I'll provide a more complete picture of what the audience needs to

do to acquire distinctively testimonial knowledge than the one I gave in Chapter 2. §VIII concludes.

## II.

### Knowledge and Capacities

Given what I have said, it looks like to meet the relevant expectation of a speaker involves the audience doing at least two things: first, recognising something that the speaker means to be doing, and, second, being capable of performing certain inferences. It might be tempting to put an order of priority on these cognitive achievements, and take it that it is in virtue of one's recognising what the speaker means to be doing, that one possesses the capacities that one is said here to have.

Take the relatively straightforward case of the speaker performing a rhetic act of saying that the Foreign Secretary has resigned in which she tells her audience that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. What the speaker expects is that, by uttering the sentence "the Foreign Secretary has resigned" in those circumstances, her audience will recognise that she means to be saying that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. To meet this expectation, I suggested, the audience must at least be capable of discerning how things stand in the world, given either the truth or the falsity of the utterance.<sup>67</sup> The temptation might then be to suppose that an audience comes to be in possession of such a capacity *in virtue* of their

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<sup>67</sup> As will be come clear when I turn to look at Rumfitt's view, they will also be capable of discerning what truth-value the utterance will have, given the way things stand in the world (from the claim that the Foreign secretary has resigned, conclude that the utterance is true)

recognising what it is that the speaker means to be doing with her utterance. That is, where the natural interpretation of what that recognition comes to, is one's possessing knowledge that ..., where the gap is filled by whatever proposition properly captures what it is that the speaker means to be doing.

There are reasons to be wary of making the judgement that, in general, for any capacity we choose, one's possession of that capacity is equivalent to one's knowing some proposition. Gilbert Ryle is credited with bringing to the contemporary philosophical foreground an issue about whether one kind of knowledge—a kind that is meant to be picked out by the locution 'knowing how (to)'—can be reduced to propositional knowledge, or knowledge that is meant to be picked out with the locution 'knowing that'. For example, on at least some usages of 'knowing how (to)', what is being attributed to a subject is a capacity; your knowing how to touch-type is your possessing a capacity to touch-type, (something like) a capacity to transfer what words you see or hear onto the page via your fingers without looking at your keyboard. And it is an open question whether, for any attribution of a *capacity* to a subject, that attribution can be fully captured by a distinct attribution of knowledge that such-and-such is the case (for example, knowledge that so-and-so is a way of doing the thing the subject is capable of doing). What this shows is that it is at least an open question whether any given capacity that one has is itself to be identified with some state of knowing some proposition. Certainly some capacities we possess might be best explained in terms of our possessing knowledge that such-and-such, but, for some capacities we possess, this form of explanation is not obviously

appropriate. When it comes to one's capacity to touch-type, especially if the capacity to do it has been acquired purely by practice, it is not obvious that there is any proposition, knowledge of which is equivalent to one's possessing this capacity.

All that I mean to be pointing out is that since it is an open question whether any given capacity, *qua* capacity, is constituted by knowledge of a proposition, it is, likewise, an open question whether the capacity to make the relevant inferences that one possesses on achieving rhetic understanding of an utterance should be fundamentally understood in terms of one being in a propositional attitude state.<sup>68</sup> The topic of this chapter is a proposal that returns a negative answer to that question, and identifies states of rhetic understanding with one's possessing the capacity to conduct the relevant set of inferences of a kind similar to those I have been gesturing towards. It is an account proposed by Ian Rumfitt (2005). I now turn to setting out Rumfitt's proposal in detail.

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<sup>68</sup> An analogous question would still be open, even for those views that attempt to establish that the kind of knowledge that is meant to constitute the kinds of capacities that one attributes to subjects in ascribing 'know how' to them is 'a species' of propositional knowledge. For, on such views, there is still a distinction to be made between that propositional knowledge that is practical in character, and that which is not. The much discussed view of Stanley and Williamson (2001) invokes 'practical modes of presentation' to mark this distinction; that propositional knowledge that is practical in character is knowledge that, for some way of doing something, *w*, one knows how to do that thing by knowing of *w* that it is a way of doing it, and entertaining *w* under a practical mode of presentation. Assuming that the capacity in question would be thought of as knowledge of the way to do things one is thereby capable of under a practical mode of presentation, then, on this approach, the present question could be recast as: does the knowledge that is central to our utterance understanding of a proposition need to be 'entertained under a practical mode of presentation' or not?

### III. The Proposal

What Rumfitt proposes is a view according to which rhetic understanding is constituted by one's possessing a particular kind of capacity, where possession of that capacity is not perspicuously captured by an attribution of propositional knowledge.<sup>69</sup> What this does is reverse the order of priority that I said one might be tempted to impose on what's needed to meet the relevant expectations of the speaker. The recognition of what rhetic thing the speaker means to be doing can itself be thought to be constituted by the audience's possessing the capacity in question.

This runs against orthodoxy. Something that might legitimately be regarded as the received view is that utterance understanding, and by extension rhetic understanding, is a matter of possessing propositional knowledge. When it comes to utterances of indicative sentences with which a speaker performs an illocutionary act of asserting (by saying something), the proposition known will be what it is that the speaker said. As we shall see, the perennially popular elaboration on the received view is that this will involve propositional knowledge of a truth-condition for the utterance in question. So, on that view, one's possessing the capacity to make the relevant inferences will be equivalent

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<sup>69</sup> It is not captured by an attribution of 'knowledge how (to)' either. Which goes to show that there is non-propositional knowledge that is practical in character, that can constitute one's possessing a capacity, but is not an instance of 'knowledge how (to)', if it really is true that such a locution picks out a kind of knowledge.

to one's knowing a proposition concerning the conditions under which the utterance is true.

It will be the opposition between the received view, so elaborated, and Rumfitt's proposal that will occupy me for the rest of the thesis. But the account that Rumfitt proposes does have some baseline agreement with the received view. For example, even though there is no presumption that rhetic understanding is a matter of possessing propositional knowledge, it is still thought to be a cognitive state. It is a state whose object is the rhetic act performed; what I've been calling a state of *rhetic understanding*. With respect to an utterance,  $u$ , of a speaker with which the rhetic act of saying that  $p$  is done,

[We can] represent a subject's state of rhetic understanding of a saying as a quartet of quasi-inference rules in the form

From the premiss or hypothesis that  $u$  is true, infer that  $P$ , and vice versa

and

From the premiss or hypothesis that  $u$  is false, infer that it is not the case that  $P$ , and vice versa.

(Rumfitt 2005, p. 449)

Such states have certain epistemologically interesting characteristics:

- (a) it gives me reason to believe that  $P$ , in the event of my having reason to take  $u$  to be true;



- (b) it gives me reason to take  $u$  to be true, in the event of my having reason to believe that  $P$ ;
- (c) it gives me reason to believe that not  $P$ , in the event of my having reason to take  $u$  to be false;
- (d) it gives me reason to take  $u$  to be false, in the event of my having reason to believe that not  $P$ .

(Rumfitt, 2005, pp. 442-3)

Rumfitt continues:

What goes for reasons for belief also goes, *pari passu*, for knowledge. My understanding an utterance  $u$  as saying that  $P$  puts me in a position

- (a) to know that  $P$ , in the event of my coming to know that  $u$  is true;
- (b) to know that  $u$  is true, in the event of my coming to know that  $P$ ;
- (c) to know that  $u$  is false, in the event of my coming to know that not  $P$ ; and
- (d) to know that not  $P$ , in the event of my coming to know that  $u$  is false.

For now, I'm going to concentrate on states of rhetic understanding appropriate to rhetic acts of saying something.<sup>70</sup> Such states of rhetic

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<sup>70</sup> I will later discuss some of the remarks that Rumfitt makes concerning states of rhetic understanding appropriate to rhetic acts of different kinds too (in §V of this chapter). Such states—such as those appropriate to rhetic acts of ordering (in some thin sense), or asking (whether, why, where etc.)—have interestingly different characterisations.

understanding are here being conceived of as states of possession of a capacity to move back and forth between making a semantic assessment of an utterance, such as the assessment of it as true, and conclusions about how things stand in the world. It is a capacity whose exercise, when successful, can be codified in the way Rumfitt expresses in the first quotation I gave.

Rumfitt uses the language of constitution to express the mildly radical nature of the proposal which puts it in opposition to the received view:

we should take a person's possessing such a capacity as *constituting* his enjoying a rhetic understanding of an utterance. On the view I am recommending, then, a state of rhetic understanding is a way of gaining new knowledge (or new reasons for belief) from old. [...] [R]hetic understanding may be classified as a second-order cognitive capacity: one who possesses it is in a position to gain new knowledge from old.

(Rumfitt 2005, p. 444, emphasis added)

The natural, pre-theoretic way of expressing what it is to achieve rhetic understanding of an utterance with which a speaker says something, is that one comes to know what it is that the speaker says. This provides the intuitive support for the received view. But according to Rumfitt's proposal, one counts as possessing the relevant knowledge—being in the relevant cognitive state—only if one is capable of reasoning, or thinking,

in accordance with the rules that govern the ‘quasi-inferences’ appropriate to acts of this kind.<sup>71</sup>

I’ve said that Rumfitt’s proposal inverts the standard ordering of the primacy of these kinds of cognitive states. Instead of thinking, as is standard, that one possesses a capacity of this kind *in virtue* of possessing knowledge of what the speaker says, the knowledge that we are inclined to attribute to subjects who achieve rhetic understanding is here being thought of as constituted by the possession of a cognitive capacity, one whose exercise accords with what the rules prescribe. And it is to that extent counter-intuitive.

Rumfitt justifies the abandonment of what might seem intuitive here by, in effect, setting out a desideratum on our account of rhetic understanding and showing how his view meets it and how others fail to. The desideratum is that, for whatever account we choose, it must have the consequence that on entering a state of rhetic understanding, the subject is said to be capable of making the quasi-inferences that Rumfitt isolates. And there is certainly intuitive support for the claim that those

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<sup>71</sup> In the general statement of the rules that codify the exercising of the capacity, possession of which is to be identified with one’s understanding an (indicative) saying, Rumfitt describes these as ‘quasi-inference rules’. I will follow Rumfitt’s terminology here, and mark the distinction between, on the one hand, inferences and deductions as they feature in our everyday reasoning, and, on the other, the distinct kind of quasi-inferences and quasi-deductions that are putatively specific to our capacity for utterance understanding. They are *quasi*-inferences because they do not share all the properties of inferences—for example, the relations that they track are not relations of implication as such, but relations that hold between the truth of (utterances of) sentences and the state of things according to such utterances. Finally, and somewhat sloppily, I’ll use ‘inference’ and ‘deduction’ more or less interchangeably. On a distinction that can be drawn between inferences and deductions see Rumfitt 2011, pp. 337–40 and White 1971.

who achieve understanding of an utterance with which the speaker says something are capable of the things that Rumfitt concentrates on. If I know that you are trustworthy, serious and reliable about matters party political, when you say to me, “the Foreign Secretary has resigned”, my having understood you will mean that I can treat your uttering that in such a way as to have good reason to suppose that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. If I were unable to so treat your utterance, it is not clear in what sense I could count as having understood your utterance. That means that any account of understanding that we choose has got to explain how it is that we are capable of making these kinds of inferences, since, if our account does not have the consequence that we are so capable, then there is something missing in the account.

The manner in which Rumfitt attempts to motivate his own proposal over certain rivals is by claiming that only a view of the kind he suggests meets this desideratum. In particular, the received view—the view that rhetic understanding is a matter of possessing knowledge of a proposition—fails because “no proposition presents itself, knowledge of which is equivalent to possessing the cognitive state described” (p. 444). That is going to be a contentious claim—one that I’ll have reason to assess at greater length in the next chapter. But it is worth quickly setting out Rumfitt’s stated reasons for saying this now, and we can postpone, in the main, our assessment of his argument until then.

The most obvious candidate proposition, knowledge of which, one might think, will put one in the cognitive position that Rumfitt describes, is propositional knowledge with the appropriate *truth-condition* as content.

If one knew the conditions under which an utterance is true, then it looks like one would then know that things are a certain way—the way things would be were those conditions fulfilled—in knowing that the utterance is true. But what, precisely, would that proposition be? Rumfitt claims (pp. 447-8) that it cannot be a straightforward proposition of the form ‘ $u$  is true iff  $p$ ’, where the ‘iff’ is construed as the material biconditional. That is because the proposition proposed would be equivalent to ‘(either  $\neg(u$  is true) or  $p$ ) and (either  $u$  is true or  $\neg p$ )’. And it is perfectly possible for one to know that proposition, and fail to understand the utterance in question. Precisely what is missing, or so says Rumfitt, is one’s being capable of making the inferences of the kind he isolates. As such, knowing this proposition is not equivalent to possessing the cognitive state described.

So what is required is some way of interpreting the biconditional in the statement of truth-conditions in such a way that knowledge of that proposition would put one in the cognitive position that Rumfitt describes. Whether there is any suitable candidate proposition is something, as I’ve said, that I’ll have to give a more extended treatment of in the next chapter.<sup>72</sup> But for now we can retreat to a weaker position than that occupied by Rumfitt and allow that it is a desideratum on our

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<sup>72</sup> Rumfitt is convinced that so-called ‘Foster problems’ present an insurmountable difficulty to attempts to employ truth-conditions with the restrictions placed on their construction by Davidson. I’ll explore Davidson’s proposal later. An oddity in that proposal is that Davidson himself makes no attempt to say what one who achieves (rhetic) understanding knows, only what one could know that would suffice for one to achieve such understanding. Ways of patching up Davidson’s account for the present purposes themselves face problems. The propositions that are isolated are such that, attributions of knowledge of them to those who achieve rhetic understanding fail to be at all explanatory. I pick up on these themes in Chapter 5; see esp. §IV.

account of rhetic understanding that one who possesses it is capable of making Rumfitt's 'quasi-inferences'. And what Rumfitt has provided us with is at least one candidate view concerning the nature of rhetic understanding; one according to which one's possessing rhetic understanding of an utterance is constituted by one's possessing the capacity to make these quasi-inferences.

#### IV.

#### Understanding and Inference

In allowing Rumfitt's view to at least be one candidate account of rhetic understanding amongst many, I am making two assumptions. The first is that it is an open question whether one's possession of a capacity, in general, is to be identified with some state of propositional knowledge. The second is that a state of rhetic understanding could be a state of capacity possession of the kind that is not to be so identified. The question that I want to turn to, given these assumptions, is this: are there any *positive* reasons why should we think that being in a state of rhetic understanding of an utterance is constituted by our occupying a state of possessing a capacity of this kind?

If achieving rhetic understanding of an utterance is to enter into a cognitive state of this, one would expect there to be marked similarities between those who achieve states of rhetic understanding, and those who are in different cognitive states of the same kind (that is, the kind of states of possession of other capacities that are not identified with a state of knowing a proposition). I'm going to look at one such putative

similarity that Rumfitt emphasises; a putative similarity between our state of rhetic understanding and our possession of the capacity, or capacities, to make inferences in standard deductive reasoning.

We are perhaps more used to the idea that one can conceive of our inferential, or deductive, capacities as capacities that are not themselves identified with further propositional knowledge. That's because, if we conceive of one's possessing such a capacity as one's possessing some propositional knowledge, then a familiar problem, first discussed in Lewis Carroll's (1895) fable, 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles', can be thought to arise. A certain family of solutions to the problems raised by Carroll provide close analogies what Rumfitt is proposing about rhetic understanding.

Carroll tells us a story in which a tortoise engages in sophistry with his interlocutor, Achilles. The sophistry he engages in seems to render Achilles unable to impel him to accept some claim, on the basis of others, that we would have thought that the tortoise was compelled to accept. There are a number of ways to uncover the tortoise's sophistry for what it is. I will follow J. F. Thomson's (1960) treatment of the story.<sup>73</sup>

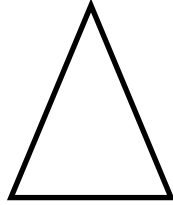
Here is a claim:

(A) Things that are equal to the same are equal to each other;

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<sup>73</sup> For a view of reasoning of this kind that takes it that our capacity for such reasoning can be understood in terms of propositional knowledge see Valaris (2014).

Now consider this (isosceles) triangle, and the subsequent claim that is true of it:



- (B) The two sides of this triangle are things that are equal to the same;

From (A) and (B) we can infer,

- (Z) The two sides of this triangle are equal to each other

But, according to Carroll's fable, this is not so. What the Tortoise tells Achilles is that he accepts (A) and (B), but does not accept the further claim:

- (C) If things that are equal to the same are equal to each other, and if the two sides of this triangle are equal to the same, then the two sides of this triangle are equal to each other.

Only with (C) in place, such is the tortoise's thought, could (Z) be inferred from (A) and (B). But then a regress starts. If (C) is needed to make the inference from (A) and (B) to (Z), then isn't a further claim, (D)—I won't spell it out—needed to make the inference (A), (B) and (C)



to (Z)? And so, then, isn't (E) needed to make the inference from (A), (B), (C) and (D) to (Z)? (And so on.) The answer, of course, is no. Here is Thompson's diagnosis:

The Tortoise represents himself as someone who accepts (A) and (B) but not (C) and he says that, being in this position, he is not *as yet* under any logical necessity to accept (Z). This is wrong. Whether or not he accepts (C), it is logically true. That means that the argument from (A) and (B) to (Z) is logically valid and that the Tortoise in accepting (A) and (B) commits himself to accepting (Z).

(Thompson 1960, p. 98)

The central point, at least for current purposes, is that our capacity to infer (Z) from (A) and (B) shouldn't be thought of as consisting in our knowing a proposition like (C). Rather, we should think of it in terms of our appreciating the relation of implication that holds between claims (A) and (B), and the conclusion, (Z). That relation of implication holding is what means that the tortoise is committed to accepting (Z), once he accepts (A) and (B). That appreciation of that relation is codified in terms of the rules that govern inferences. In the example we've been using, (A) is an expression of the transitivity of identity in general, and (B) is a statement of something specific that stands in structurally appropriate relations (that is, relations of identity). In which case we can apply the rule to the specific instance without needing a further premise that the rule applies in this case. It just does. Appreciating so much is not another step in the inference, it is just what

it is to perform the inference in question.<sup>74</sup> Our capacity to infer (Z) from (A) and (B) should be thought of just in terms of one's possessing the capacity to draw conclusions that follow from one's premises. As Rumfitt points out in a number of places, it is a capacity to gain new knowledge from old; in these simple cases of deduction, it is just such a capacity (and nothing else), one whose exercise accords with the relevant rule.

When it comes to our possessing rhetic understanding, it is not relations of implication that are at issue, but relations of *quasi*-implication. Relations of implication and relations of quasi-implication differ in so far as relations of quasi-implication do not pertain to logical validity, as Thompson suggests that relations of implication do, but to the kind of relations that hold between states of the world, and utterances of sentences that represent them. Either way, for claims that stand in relations of this kind, one incurs certain commitments about each of the relata, by accepting either one of the claims. The idea is that there is some relation, not unlike implication in this respect, between the truth (or falsity) of an utterance and the world's being some way, such that, in the event of one's possessing reasons to suppose the one, one has reason to suppose the other—at least one does so, once one appreciates the connection between the relata.

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<sup>74</sup> One may want to demur from the present claims as the correct diagnosis of what is going on in Carroll's fable. I don't wish to foreclose debate on this. The present interpretation is owed to a significant degree to Rumfitt's own (2011) discussion of logical competence. But this is apposite in the current context since this discussion is meant to be illustrative of Rumfitt's account of utterance understanding, which he thinks has many interesting similarities to our capacity for making inferences so conceived.

These remarks are nothing more than suggestive in the direction for supposing that there is some structural similarities between states of rhetic understanding and states of possessing certain inferential capacities. For the comparison to be one that speaks in favour of Rumfitt's view, it must be able to sustain a view of rhetic understanding that meets certain important desiderata that, it is universally agreed, any such theory must meet. It is to whether Rumfitt's view can do this that I now turn.

## V.

### Linguistic Competence

If Rumfitt's proposal is to be at all plausible it must possess the resources to accommodate the productivity that we display in our linguistic behaviour—that is, the fact that with a finite stock of words and modes of combining those words, there is a potential infinity of distinct sentences to be uttered, each of which we are, at least in principle, capable of understanding. That means that, when uttered, each of them can be used in the service of doing any of the indefinitely many things to be done in speaking, each of which can (in principle) be discerned by the competent. To do this we need some explanation of the capacity we have that enables us to possess rhetic understanding of any given utterance—that is, what it is, on this view to understand a *language*.

I think its helpful here to have a look back to one of Rumfitt's earlier papers, where he makes some remarks about linguistic competence,

though the view he articulates does not have the current proposal as a constituent. But showing how his view has changed I think will help to shed light on what the relationship is between our capacity for utterance understanding, and the state achieved by way of an exercise of that capacity, according to the current proposal. This relationship is important because it will be where we can locate the explanation of the productivity, of the kind I just mentioned, that manifestly occurs in our comprehension of speech.

In his 2001 paper, ‘Semantic Theory and Necessary Truth’, Rumfitt makes a number of remarks about *logical* competence that bear a striking similarity to current proposal concerning utterance understanding. He says,

A logical competence is a competence to gain new propositional knowledge from old; it is not, or not primarily, a matter of knowing logical propositions. And the task of the logician is to codify this competence by explicitly formulating the rules in accordance with which a logically competent thinker reasons.

(Rumfitt, 2001, pp. 302–3)

In the context of this remark, it is clear that Rumfitt thinks there are interesting parallels between our logical competence and our *linguistic competence*. ‘Linguistic competence’, as that phrase applies here, picks out our capacity *for* utterance understanding—that is, the capacity we have to enter states of rhetic understanding of particular utterances. Taking seriously the analogy with the conception of logical competence

just quoted, then, what emerges is the view that linguistic competence is a capacity to acquire *propositional knowledge*. The proposition that is allegedly known is one with a truth condition as content. Where claim *T* is the claim that the utterance by the German speaker, Kurt, of ‘Schnee ist weiss’ is true iff snow is white,

if Peter has an ordinary sort of training in German, he will know that the word ‘Schnee’ denotes snow, and that the predicate ‘\_\_\_\_\_ ist weiss’ is true of an object iff it is white; and this propositional knowledge can help to account for his knowing *T*. [...] Peter should be able to combine the propositional knowledge that he has concerning Kurt’s words to attain further propositional knowledge about Kurt’s complete sentences.

(ibid., p. 302)

Even though, at this point, Rumfitt seems to squarely endorse a version of the received view that he would later come to cast doubt on, not everything he says here is in conflict with the proposal we’re considering. Because he then goes on to say, that “as in the logical case, though, there is no reason to identify possession of this ability with possession of any propositional knowledge: the ability in question can equally well be codified by (properly) semantical *rules*.” The ability he speaks of will still be codified in terms of semantical rules, but in more recent work, Rumfitt has returned to the notion of logical competence in a way that is instructive as to the shift in his thinking about utterance understanding since 2001. There he says,

logical competence [...] is a higher order intellectual capacity: its application yields new deductive capacities from old. [As such,] logical rules are generally applicable rules for forming new deductions from old, not rules that regulate the activity of specifically logical deduction.

(Rumfitt 2011, pp. 347-8)

Regardless of whether one agrees with Rumfitt that this is the best way to understand logical competence, this helps clarify the claim that a state of utterance understanding is a state of possessing a capacity to gain new knowledge from old, and not fundamentally a state of propositional knowledge. Like logical competence, we should think of our capacity for utterance understanding—our linguistic competence—in terms of its application yielding new quasi-deductive capacities from old. Indicative quasi-deductive capacities are capacities that allow one to track quasi-implicative relations between the semantic properties of an utterance, and what way the world is, or would be, according to it (at least, for sayings).

What does this mean? It means that what linguistic competence yields is the second-order cognitive capacity of the kind Rumfitt sets out with respect to particular utterances. And it is at this point that we get some indication of how the proposal handles productivity as manifest in our understanding. Given the various parallels that he draws between our linguistic competence and our logical competence, it is perhaps hardly surprising that such an explanation will take its cue from productivity in logical reasoning: “the relation between derived and primitive rules in a

logical system may be a helpful model as we describe how our rhetoric understanding of complete sayings depends upon our understanding of their parts” (Rumfitt 2005, p. 445).

To take a very simple example, our linguistic competence with English will (typically) involve competence with proper names—like ‘Jim’—and competence with predicates—like ‘\_\_\_\_ smokes’. This contributes to our possessing the capacity to understand a given utterance, by *S*, of “Jim smokes” (on some occasion). According to Rumfitt’s view, then, when we understand that utterance, we have quasi-deductive capacities with respect to (utterances of) these words.<sup>75</sup> For ‘Jim’ we will have something like the following rule of quasi-deduction: for an utterance, *u*, that makes reference to a particular (perhaps (partially) contextually determined) individual, Jim,

From the premise or hypothesis that *u* is true, infer that some utterance of a predicate, *v*, is true of Jim, and vice versa.

and

From the premise or hypothesis that *u* is false, infer that some utterance of a predicate, *v*, is false of Jim, and vice versa.

What is *v* here? It is an utterance of some incomplete expression. In our example, it will be an utterance of the predicate expression ‘\_\_\_\_ smokes’. Rumfitt draws on certain views about how to best think of

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<sup>75</sup> The essentials of this element of the account can be found in Rumfitt 2005, pp. 449–451.

WH-questions in order to account for predication. Considering a slightly different, but importantly similar, view, he says,

To a first approximation, the utterance of a WH-question may be understood as an utterance of an incomplete expression, together with a request to supply something of which the incomplete expression is true. Thus an utterance of “Who killed Cock Robin?” may be understood as an utterance of the predicative expression “ $\xi$  killed Cock Robin”, together with a request to name or describe something of which that incomplete expression is true.<sup>76</sup>

(*ibid.*, p. 440-1)

Extrapolating from this we can formulate the relevant rule that handles predication in sayings. There will be a (relatively) primitive rule for ‘\_\_\_\_ smokes’, that might run as follows:

From the premise or hypothesis that  $v$  is true of  $x$ , infer that  $x$  smokes, and vice versa

and

From the premise or hypothesis that  $v$  is false of  $x$ , infer that  $x$  does not smoke, and vice versa.

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<sup>76</sup> Rumfitt says this in the context of a discussion of ‘Wittgenstein’s dictum’ that to understand a declarative utterance in use is to know what is the case if it is true. He adapts this dictum for other kinds of rhetic acts, and though he does not endorse these pronouncements as they stand, it is from these that he derives his own claims about what it is to achieve rhetic understanding of such utterances.



Where ‘ $x$ ’ is whatever it is that could complete the expression such that a predication of ‘\_\_\_\_ smokes’ of it, will result in an utterance of the completed expression having one of the truth-values it is hypothesised to have. We then have the resources to give the rule governing the utterance of the complete expression ‘Jim smokes’, by combining the two more primitive rules that I have just given.

In reasoning in accordance with each of these rules, when the one completes the one expression with the other, we then get the following, which is the rule in accordance with which we are capable of reasoning with respect to the utterance of the complete expression “Jim smokes”:

From the premise or hypothesis that  $u$  is true, infer that Jim smokes, and vice versa;

and

From the premise or hypothesis that  $u$  is false, infer that it is not the case that Jim smokes, and vice versa.

In this way, we get an explanation of how we possess the capacity, utterance understanding of the utterance, by  $S$ , of “Jim smokes”, by appeal to more basic capacities to utterance understand utterances of their parts.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> There is the added advantage that the current proposal can easily accommodate the compositionality of natural language operators such as ‘it is necessarily the case that’, which motivates Rumfitt’s original appeal to semantical rules in 2001 (see also Rumfitt 2005, pp. 450–1).

Before moving on to consider some objections to the view, I want to mark one area in which there is more work to do with the proposal. When it comes to utterances of non-declaratives, there is a notable lack of unity in the account, in the sense that different kinds of rhetic acts call for different explanations of what it is to achieve rhetic understanding of utterances with which those things are done. This may provide the grounds for worries about the explanatory potential of the proposal. Because we expect our account of rhetic understanding to be where systematicity to be displayed in a way that reflects our productivity in understanding. And we may suppose that such productivity occurs *across* the kinds of rhetic acts that speakers perform.

Let me introduce a thin notion of ‘ordering’ which picks out what the imperatival rhetic thing to be done in speaking (Hornsby’s “saying imperitively”, see Chapter 3, §IV. b, & Hornsby 1988, pp. 42-4). Just as there is a thin sense of saying, picking out the rhetic thing typically done with utterances of indicative sentences, I am using ‘enjoining’ in an analogous way for the rhetic things typically done with utterances of sentences in the imperative mood. Rumfitt is explicit about what set of quasi-inferences are those who one possessing rhetic understanding of an order is capable of. He offers the following schematic pair:

if I understand the utterance  $u$  as an order, directed to  $x$ , to  $\varphi$ , I shall

- (a) have reason to believe that  $x$  has  $\varphi$ 'd, in the event that I have reason to believe that  $u$  has been obeyed; and

- (b) have reason to believe that  $x$  has not  $\varphi$ 'd, in the event that  
I have reason to believe that  $u$  has been disobeyed.

(Rumfitt 2005, p. 443)

Converting this into what I take to be the most basic expression of the rules governing the quasi-inferences one who is possession of rhetic understanding of an ordering of something, we get,

From the premise or hypothesis that  $u$  has been obeyed, infer that  
 $x$  has  $\varphi$ 'd;

and

From the premise or hypothesis that  $u$  has been disobeyed, infer  
that  $x$  has not  $\varphi$ 'd.

The rules governing rhetic understanding of an order only licences two quasi-inferences as opposed to the four that one who is in possession of rhetic understanding of a saying is capable of. (We don't get a quartet of quasi-inferences because understanding issuing of an order does not allow one to conclude that an order has been obeyed by someone acting in a particular way. They may have done that off their own accord). So one's achieving rhetic understanding of an utterance in which an order is issued is to enter into a state of a markedly different character to that of rhetic understanding of a saying.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> There will be different kinds quasi-inference rules for the other kinds of rhetic acts too, such as exclamative rhetic acts and interrogative rhetic acts of the various kinds (e.g. yes-no questions and WH-questions).

But we should expect that utterances of sentences with which different kinds of rhetic act are performed concerning the same objects and predicates to have something in common. And we might reasonably expect our account of rhetic understanding to reflect this fact. For example, we should expect some common explanation for our rhetic understanding an utterance of “the gate is shut” (with which the rhetic act of saying to someone that the gate is shut is performed), and our rhetic understanding of “shut the gate!” (with which the rhetic act of enjoining someone to shut the gate is performed).

This marks a lacuna in the account, but it need not be a problem for the account *per se*—in fact, this feature may in the end turn out to be an *advantage* of the account. Recall that in Chapter 3 I set out some considerations, first put forward by Hornsby, in favour of a conception of the rhetic things done by speakers cannot all be reduced to, or assimilated by, acts that one typically performs in uttering indicative sentences. This should be reflected in our account of rhetic understanding, since that is meant to be understood in terms of when one would count as recognising the rhetic thing a speaker means to be doing with their utterance. What this goes to show is that the view will require of audiences that they recognise the kind of rhetic thing that the speaker means to be doing, in order to utilise the appropriate relatively primitive rules governing complete rhetic acts, in its explanation of productivity of our rhetic understanding. The work to be done moving forward, then, is to produce a suitable explanation of how rhetic understanding of utterances with which different kinds of rhetic acts are

performed themselves display the productivity that it is plausible we employ when such utterances contain the same predicates. There is no reason to suppose, at this stage, that such an explanation cannot be given. But assessment of the full viability of the account will have to wait until that work has been done.

Moving forward, I'll return to concentrating on rhetic understanding of utterances with which speakers say things, because it is in terms of our rhetic understanding of these things done that the objections I'll be considering are formulated.

## VI.

### Longworth's Objection

I'll start by considering a worry that has been raised by Guy Longworth. It is one of a number of objections to Rumfitt's proposal that can be found in Longworth (2009) & (2010). I will consider what I take the most pressing of these, that, I take it, is given its canonical expression in the latter of these papers.<sup>79</sup>

This objection to is spread over a number of pages of that paper. I'll provide some quotations that I take to be where the core of the objection is located. Then I'll give a reading of that argument that can be found

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<sup>79</sup> The main objection to Rumfitt's view that Longworth raises in that earlier paper is an ancestor of the objection that I treat in this section, though it is formulated in different terms (those worries can be found at Longworth 2009, pp. 155-7). There is, also, a slightly different emphasis. Though I think that the reply I give on Rumfitt's behalf can deal with some of the key elements of that objection, there are other claims of Longworth's which are not touched by the response I give here.

there—a reading to which I’ll be attempting to reply, on Rumfitt’s behalf, in §VI. b..

VI. a.  
Objection

I take the essence of Longworth’s objection to be contained in the following passage:

[Rumfitt’s proposal] makes no immediate demands on first-order stative cognition. To a good first approximation, the crucial difference between first- and second-order stative cognition is that only the former has an immediate bearing on occurrent awareness, including the capacity to entertain, and to make judgements about, expressed content. In order for second-order stative cognition to determine such occurrent awareness it must first issue in first-order stative cognition. According to [Rumfitt’s proposal], then, a subject can understand someone’s saying *p* in the absence of awareness of the saying or its content—in the absence, that is, of a capacity immediately to entertain, or to judge competently about, its content. First-order cognition only emerges, if it emerges at all, where the subject acquires knowledge of, or takes a cognitive stand concerning, either the truth of the utterance or the content the utterance was in fact used to express.

(Longworth 2010, pp. 28-9)

Longworth takes this to have two unwanted consequences. First, it is false to the *phenomenology of understanding*, and second, it is

“incompatible with central features of the normal epistemological situation of those who might benefit from testimony”. I take the second supposed consequence to be more pressing than the first, so I’ll concentrate on that in the main in what follows. At the end of this section, though, I will say something about the phenomenological point.

In what way, then, is Rumfitt’s account supposed to be incompatible with what Longworth says are the central features of testimonial situations for audiences? I think the crux is found in the following:

[A]wareness of what a speaker says furnishes access to what one will immediately become committed to if one accepts what they say. [...] a minimal requirement on rational acceptance of presented information [is that] it involves prior cognisance of what one is thereby accepting.

(ibid., p. 30)

The “central problem” with the view, Longworth tells us, is that Rumfitt’s account fails to provide anything that can fulfil this ‘minimal requirement’ because,

it makes one’s first-order cognition of what was said in an utterance depend upon one’s taking a particular stand concerning the subject matter of what was said, either accepting or rejecting that the subject matter is as it is said to be in the utterance.

(ibid., pp. 31-2)

The diagnosis, and so where a solution is to be located, is that,

What is wanted is precisely what [Rumfitt's proposal] refuses to offer, a form of first-order cognition that can serve as neutral input to rational acceptance or rejection.

(*ibid.*, p. 33)

This is how I read Longworth's objection. Longworth thinks that, though Rumfitt has identified some important features of what it is to understand some particular utterance, he has not identified what fundamentally constitutes this understanding. That is because the state as described by Rumfitt lacks certain features that any state that does constitute such understanding must have. Those features that such states must have fall under the banner what Longworth calls "awareness of expressed content". The overall objection is that one can be in the state that Rumfitt describes, and fail to possess "awareness of expressed content"—that is, be in a state that fails to have features that states of utterance understanding must have. Since utterance understanding requires such awareness, occupying the cognitive position that Rumfitt describes cannot be, fundamentally, what it is to achieve utterance understanding.

This state of "awareness of expressed content" has three features: (i) it involves "the capacity to entertain, and to make judgements about, expressed content" (Longworth 2010, p. 29); (ii) it "can serve as a neutral input to rational acceptance or rejection" that things are as they are said to be (p. 33); and (iii) it is an instance of "first-order stative



cognition” (p. 29). So the objection is that the state Rumfitt identifies does not have these features. What Rumfitt has described is, rather, a capacity we possess in achieving utterance understanding, one that itself is grounded in some further cognitive state with these features. And it is that further state which, for Longworth, is properly to be identified with a state of utterance understanding.

I think there is a response that Rumfitt could make to this objection. It takes the form of conceding to Longworth that two of the features of “awareness of expressed content” are features that a state of rhetic understanding must possess, but denying that third feature is a feature that states of rhetic understanding must have. The two features that states of rhetic understanding do have are (i) that those who are in possession of it are able to make judgements about expressed content, and (ii) that it is a state that serves as a neutral input into rational acceptance and rejection. The third feature that such states need not possess (or so I’ll argue) is that its being a ‘first-order’ or ‘occurrent’ state in the relevant sense. I think that there are arguments available for the claim that the state that Rumfitt isolates can have these first two features without having the third. Since this third feature is not a feature that states of understanding must have, there is no objection to taking the state that constitutes our rhetic understanding to be of the kind that Rumfitt proposes.

I’ll go through each of these features in turn; first setting out why Longworth thinks that states of understanding must have these features, why he thinks the state that Rumfitt isolates cannot have them. I’ll then

say why I think Rumfitt's state can accommodate the first two features, and in so doing I will show why it need not accommodate the third. I'll end by acknowledging the phenomenological oddities that Longworth points out, but I don't take this to be a decisive reason to reject the proposal.

#### IV. b.

#### Reply

- (i) *Rhetic Understanding involves "the capacity to entertain, and to make judgements about expressed content".*

To make a judgement as to whether Rumfitt's proposal can account for the fact—if it is a fact—that rhetic understanding involves a capacity “to entertain, and make judgements about expressed content” we need to know, first, what Longworth means to be picking out with the notion of “entertaining expressed content”. I'm not entirely sure what this comes to, but it definitely seems right that rhetic understanding must bring with it a capacity to make judgements about the things that are said to us. I think that there is a way that we can interpret the requirement that rhetic understanding necessarily involves the capacity to make judgements about expressed content in such a way that Rumfitt's proposal meets it. Whether this interpretation of the requirement is a suitable one will turn on the manner in which Rumfitt's proposal can accommodate the second feature of “awareness of expressed content”—namely, how we can conceive of the state he isolates as serving as a neutral input into acceptance or rejection.

In Chapter 3 (§IV. a.) we saw what “expressed content” might come to. At least when it comes to utterances in which speakers perform the rhetic act of saying something, it is that thing that is said in the course of their producing that utterance. I called these things ‘propositions’. Propositions are individuated by the rhetic acts that they are associated with. For rhetic acts of saying something, *the things that are said* (i.e. the propositions) are individuated by the rhetic acts performed with a speaker’s utterance. Propositions stand in a one-to-one relation with rhetic acts of saying something. What a speaker says is determined by their rhetic intentions, so the proposition that is the thing that they said is likewise determined by the speaker’s rhetic intentions.

So the requirement is that rhetic understanding brings with it the capacity to ‘entertain’ propositions so understood, if ‘expressed content’ can be equated with propositions. Elsewhere, Longworth uses the notion of “entertaining a thought” or a content and, in a footnote, tells us that he is employing the term in such a way that it picks out “the most general determinable of determinate propositional attitude states. So knowing *p*, believing *p*, supposing *p*, hoping *p*, etc., are each particular ways of entertaining *p*”.<sup>80</sup> So understood, entertaining a thought is not anything over and above one’s holding such attitudes (cf. my discussion of the determinate/determinable distinction in Chapter 3, §IV. b.). Transposed into talk of propositions, as that talk is being understood here, that is to hold one of the kinds of determinate attitudes that Longworth lists concerning that thing that stands in the relevant relation

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<sup>80</sup> Longworth 2008, fn. 10.

to the rhetic act the speaker performed. Of course, Longworth may be working here with a different notion of “entertaining”, but if he isn’t, then entertaining the proposition is to have a propositional attitude with the proposition associated with the rhetic act the speaker performed as content.

As it stands, it is not clear why Rumfitt would accept this requirement, since enforcing it would beg the question against his proposal in favour of the received view (i.e. that rhetic understanding is a propositional attitude state—most likely, propositional *knowledge*). Since his view is just a denial of a conception of rhetic understanding as a propositional attitude state in general (and a state of propositional knowledge in particular), unless we have independent reason to suppose it must be a state of this kind (namely, a propositional one), it cannot antecedently be a requirement that it is. As we’ll see, I think that Longworth takes himself to have such reasons, but it is no objection to Rumfitt’s view that the state he identifies is not a propositional attitude absent those reasons.

I’ll leave, then, the idea of rhetic understanding requiring those who achieve it to “entertain expressed content” to one side (at least for the time being. I will concentrate, instead, on the claim that “awareness of expressed content” involves possessing the capacity to make judgements about the things that are said (with utterances in which the speaker says something)

Something that rhetic understanding has got to involve is one’s being capable of distinguishing utterances according to the rhetic things done

with them. Distinguishing one rhetic thing done from another would involve being in a cognitive state whose discernible character depends on the particular rhetic thing that the speaker has done. Rumfit's proposal allows those who attain rhetic understanding to do this, since rhetic understanding is a state of being capable of making the relevant inferences particular to the rhetic things the speaker has done, one who enters this state, so conceived, is able to distinguish utterances by the rhetic things done with them: what inferences they will be capable of will vary with the rhetic thing done (indeed, I used this thought to show how we might distinguish between doings of rhetic things when I first discussed propositions—see Chapter 3, §IV. b. & §VIII).

But rhetic understanding must involve more than this. Longworth's claim that utterance understanding must furnish us with the capacity to *make judgements* about the proposition expressed by an utterance is extremely plausible. That's borne out by the fact that rhetic understanding enables audiences to provide reports of what's said with an utterance. Suppose I can understand French, but you cannot. Pierre utters, "Jim fume". I understand Pierre's utterance, and you do not. You ask me what Pierre said, and I tell you that Pierre said that Jim smokes. The explanation of my capacity to do this will make appeal to my rhetic understanding, because that is what will have furnished me with the capacity to make judgements about the rhetic thing that Pierre did. It is on account of understanding his utterance that I am able to make this report; that is, I was able to make a judgement as to what the content of his utterance was.

It may initially seem puzzling how rhetic understanding on its own, according to Rumfitt's proposal, can allow for this, given that it eschews a conception of rhetic understanding as a propositional attitude state. That puzzlement might come from how it could be that anything but the received view could have the resources to account for this—the judgements in question here just are judgements about what propositional content the utterance has. And if rhetic understanding enables us to make such judgements, then it has got to supply what it is that is being judged: what proposition the speaker expressed in uttering what they did. But if understanding is not a propositional state, how is it that we could make judgements of this kind on the basis of entering that state?

One who achieves rhetic understanding on Rumfitt's proposal has (amongst other things) the capacity to make quasi-inferences from hypotheses about the utterance's truth. Let's suppose that one who achieves this is also capable of reporting what it is that they are capable of inferring. If they were to exercise these capacities in tandem, they could report what would be the case under the supposition that the utterance is true. Such a report is tantamount to their reporting what's said. That's because what's said is the proposition that is associated with the rhetic act of saying they perform when they produce an indicative utterance to that end. Propositions, recall are determined by whether they are true under just the same conditions, because propositions stand in one-to-one relations with rhetic acts of saying. Acts of saying are identical if to say the one thing is to say the other, and we can tell when that happens if

one says truth with the one under just the same (possibly fine-grained) conditions.

The idea is that by conducting the (quasi-)inferences in question, they can be in a position to report what they have inferred from premises about the truth or falsity of the utterance—that is, report the things that are said. Being in that position necessarily involves the capacity to make judgements about the proposition associated with the rhetic act performed, that is making a judgement as to what is quasi-implied by one's premises. Given the current focus on utterances with which rhetic acts of saying are performed, reporting what one is capable of inferring here is to report how things are said to be by one who produces the utterance in question. And, given the way that expressed content, understood as *the thing that is said*, depends on what one who understands the utterance in question is capable of inferring from the premise that it is true, one who conducts the relevant inference will be capable of reporting the thing that is said. We thus have an explanation of the capacity that audience's have to make judgements about the expressed content of sayings.

In this way, then, Rumfitt's proposal can be said to involve that element of "awareness of expressed content" which Longworth picks out with the idea that it furnishes us with the "capacity [...] to make judgements about expressed content". The issue now is whether this conception of how our rhetic understanding furnishes us with this comes at any costs. I take it that Longworth thinks that it does. It is now time to turn to the

second putative feature of the “awareness of expressed content” that utterance understanding is supposed to furnish us with.

(ii) *Rhetic understanding can “serve as a neutral input to rational acceptance and rejection” of the utterance.*

If the above remarks indicate the right way to account for our capacity to report what’s said under Rumfitt’s proposal, then one striking feature of the view is that the reports cannot be made until the relevant (quasi-)inferences have been made. So it looks like Rumfitt will have to appeal to an *exercise* of the capacity whose mere *possession* is meant to be what rhetic understanding is constituted by. He needs to do this in order to allow for the view to accommodate the ability of one who achieves rhetic understanding to report what rhetic thing a speaker has done.

It seems to be a thought along these lines that drives Longworth’s claim that there is something amiss in Rumfitt’s proposal, when he says that the state Rumfitt isolates is not one that can serve as a “neutral input into rational acceptance or rejection”. He takes it that, in order to make a judgement about what the expressed content of an utterance is, the proposal requires that we exercise the capacity that putatively constitutes our rhetic understanding. But, in requiring an exercise of this capacity to generate such judgements, rhetic understanding cannot then be thought of as the neutral input into such judgements. Longworth seems to think that an exercise of this capacity necessarily involves non-rationally taking a stand on either the utterance’s truth-value, or the state of the world:



[t]he central problem with [Rumfitt's proposal] is that it makes one's first-order cognition of what was said in an utterance depend upon one's taking a particular stand concerning the subject matter of what was said, either accepting or rejecting that the subject matter is as it is said to be in the utterance.

(Longworth 2010, p. 32)

If that is right, then it cannot serve, as it should, as a neutral input into one's acceptance or rejection of what's said. Judgements about what's said are meant to be the basis on which rational deliberations about what to accept are conducted. It looks like, though, Rumfitt's account requires of us a form of acceptance or rejection prior to rational deliberation, if Longworth is right. As such, the view entails that rhetic understanding cannot serve as a neutral input into such rational deliberation as it should.

If there is a problem here, it cannot be *quite* as Longworth states it to be. That's because Longworth thinks that, according to the proposal, an exercise of the capacity that putatively constitutes one's rhetic understanding involves taking a stand on the utterance's truth, or the relevant state of the world. But it does not. An exercise of Rumfitt's second-order cognitive capacity (with respect to sayings) need not involve non-rational acceptance or rejection. An exercise of this capacity, rather, can be conducted with *hypotheses* concerning the truth or falsity of utterance. And one can hypothesise that *p* without taking a stand on whether *p*. So it doesn't follow that an exercise of the capacity that rhetic understanding of a saying furnishes us with inevitably involves

acceptance or rejection. As such, *if* a capacity to judge the content of a saying requires an exercise of the capacity that rhetoric understanding consists in, then it does not follow that non-rational acceptance or rejection is required to make a judgement about what rhetoric thing the speaker did (e.g. what she said).

This observation, I think, suffices to deal with the letter of that part of Longworth's objection that suggests that Rumfitt cannot provide a neutral input to acceptance and rejection. However, I think that the likely response here will be that it fails to deal with its spirit, and properly recast, an equally problematic consequence can be derived from this articulation of the second-order state that Rumfitt proposes as that which constitutes our rhetoric understanding of an utterance. I think this, ultimately, relies on Longworth's claim that states of understanding must be *first-order* cognitive states. I think that this claim can be rejected, and it is to this final part of the objection that I now turn.

(iii) *Rhetoric understanding is an instance of "first-order stative cognition"*

The diagnosis that Longworth offers for why Rumfitt's proposal is susceptible to the problems that he thinks beset it is that the state that Rumfitt appeals to is not of the right kind. The problems emerge, at root from the *second-order* character of the state that Rumfitt relies upon. It is this feature of the state that, for Longworth, I think, ultimately precludes it from allowing us to make judgements concerning what's said without prior non-rational commitment.

In the following passage, it looks like Longworth seems to see a link between a state's eligibility as this kind of neutral input he is looking for, and its being a first-order, or occurrent state:

[O]ne's acceptance [of an utterance] is [...] a rational response to what one immediately takes in through hearing and understanding. And that requires that one can take something in through hearing and understanding whilst remaining neutral about its alethic status. [...] What is wanted is precisely what [Rumfitt's proposal] refuses to offer, *a form of first order cognition* that can serve as neutral input to rational acceptance or rejection. I conclude that the claim that [Rumfitt's proposal] models our most fundamental engagement with what is said should not be accepted.

(ibid., p. 33, emphasis added)

The thought then seems to be that, because Rumfitt's proposal is one that attributes only a *second-order* state to those who achieve rhetic understanding, it simply fails to have the resources needed to supply the required neutral state that could serve as the basis of judgements concerning what's said that are rationally made.

If the problem here is really a consequence of the metaphysics of the mental states that Rumfitt isolates, we should expect that a similar problem will reemerge for view, in light of the response I gave to *(ii)*. The problem would not be so much that making judgements about expressed content requires a form of *acceptance or rejection* (it doesn't), but rather the problem concerns whether judgements about what's said should involve an exercise of this second-order cognitive capacity at all, if

mere possession of it is meant to be what constitutes our rhetic understanding. For we might suppose that it is not really a good response to the initial worry, to fall back on the need to hypothesise about the truth value of the utterance, or the state of the world, so that such judgements can be made rationally. That this is needed, we might suppose, is no more plausible than if things are as Longworth represents them (where non-rational acceptance or rejection is needed to make such judgements). That is, even if it is conceded that Rumfitt's proposal does not require non-rational acceptance or rejection, it still does require hypothetical acceptance and rejection. And since judgments about what rhetic things have been done by a speaker, on the basis of one attaining rhetic understanding of their utterance, can be made without making these hypotheses, the conclusion still follows: Rumfitt's proposal does not model our most fundamental engagement with what is said.

It is not clear to me that the conclusion does follow on the amended argument. What gives the original objection bite is precisely that one needs to non-rationally take stand on the utterances of others to come to rationally take a stand on them. And that would be a problematic consequence.<sup>81</sup> But there is nothing particularly problematic, in general, with one's making hypotheses, and on the basis of working out the consequences of that hypothesis being true or false, making conclusions about the truth-values of the hypothesis. When we consider, again, some everyday inferences, from which Rumfitt draws inspiration, this turns out to be a rather *good* explanation of what is going on: suppose I know that Jim is either in Bournemouth or Scunthorpe. I think, "suppose Jim's

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<sup>81</sup> Longworth makes a compelling case for this at pp. 30-33.

not in Bournemouth”. Having thought that, I can infer that, on that supposition, he is in Scunthorpe. I can then think, “suppose Jim’s not in Scunthorpe”. Having thought that, I can infer that, on that supposition, he is in Bournemouth. I can then make a rational judgement as to Jim’s whereabouts given other information that I have.

If that is correct, then this shows why one’s state of rhetic understanding, according to Rumfitt’s proposal, is able to allow those who possess it to make judgements about the rhetic things done, and do so in a way that does not involve non-rational stand taking on the status of the utterance in question. The proposal’s being able to do this provides the grounds on which we can reject Longworth’s claim that rhetic understanding involves the third feature of “awareness of expressed content”—that it is a first-order occurrent state. The point is that Longworth’s diagnosis about what was going wrong in Rumfitt’s account is that it made appeal to a second-order cognitive capacity, when what was needed was a first order occurrent state. But nothing of the kind has been needed to account for the rationality of acceptance and rejection on the basis of the hypotheses that are actually appealed to in the most fundamental expression of the capacity that Rumfitt appeals to. But in the absence of such reasons to accept that our account of rhetic understanding must appeal to a first-order occurrent state, to insist that rhetic understanding is a state of this kind is, as before, to beg the question against Rumfitt’s proposal.

(iv) *Rumfitt's proposal is false to the phenomenology of utterance understanding.*

The final element of Longworth's case against Rumfitt's proposal that I have not looked at is the accusation that Rumfitt's account fails to fit well with the phenomenology of understanding. It strikes me that this claim—that Rumfitt's proposal is false to the phenomenology of linguistic understanding—is perhaps playing an important role for Longworth here. That's because it might be on these grounds that one could find motivation for the putative desideratum that I said begs the question against Rumfitt.

There is certainly some intuitive strangeness to where we end up with Rumfitt's proposal. There are at least two *prima facie* oddities with it. First, one may reasonably feel that it is implausible to suppose that our rational acceptance and rejection of utterances requires the complex psychological processes of quasi-inferences from hypotheses about the semantic properties of speakers' utterances. Secondly, one tends to pre-theoretically conceive of one's understanding an utterance as a kind of occurrent state—a state like perception, perhaps, that has as its object the thing that the speaker said, and is occurrent for the time during which the speaker is uttering something, or just after.

On the first point, I think that some the impression of over-intellectualisation of rhetic understanding's role in rational acceptance can be dispelled, at least to some degree, by noting that the view is consistent with the plausible claim that acceptance is often automatic. In

such cases, we can suppose, no such prior hypothesising occurs, and may only be called into question some time after the utterance, once reasons emerge to doubt whether what has been said to one is acceptable. That requires an allowance of accepting that things are as the speaker says that they are, in the absence of one's embarking on a considered assessment of its merits. That, though, strikes me as a relatively common thing. In most cases, we tend accept what is said to us without deliberation, and only when what we have accepted runs up against our other commitments, do we reconsider our position. In the next section, I will say more about the automaticity of acceptance, and its import for enabling the acquisition of irreducible testimonial knowledge.

When acceptance *isn't* automatic, it will usually be because one has antecedent reason to consider whether what someone says to one more closely. And it does not strike me as totally implausible that something like the reasoning from hypotheses that I have said is required for rational acceptance and rejection is an accurate description of what one does in the course of one's deliberations about whether to take things to be as a speaker said that they are.

On the second point, I admit that I do have some of the same intuitions that underpin the phenomenological claim. However, I do want to cast doubt on how decisive such intuitions could be. There are two considerations that I think serve to, at least to some degree, mitigate the seriousness of the worry. The first is that it is unclear, to me at least, just *what* the phenomenology characteristic of utterance understanding is. So it is not entirely clear what intuitive data needs to be accounted for. It is

a point, I suppose, that I am in agreement on with the Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* when he casts doubt on the idea that there is something that we can discern in all cases of understanding, despite what we might be inclined to say before investigating the putative phenomena (see, for example §§152-154). The second consideration is that, if we can find some adequate description of the phenomenology at work here, there seems to be no reason, in principle, why it could not be explained away, in way consistent with Rumfitt's proposal, by other accompanying factors that occur when we engage in conversation. But in the absence of a more concrete conception of what the relevant phenomenological facts are, I cannot make good on this optimism.

In essence, I think that if these phenomenological considerations are the extent of the objection to Rumfitt, it strikes me that they are indecisive; such phenomenological claims alone, I think, are insufficient to rule out the view, and I take myself to have shown that the considerations that *would* rule it out, if Rumfitt's proposal could not accommodate them, can be accommodated by the proposal.

## VII.

### Rumfitt's Proposal & Testimonial Knowledge

I want to finally turn to the interaction between rhetic understanding and our capacity to acquire testimonial knowledge. In the last chapter I argued that, what was needed for a speaker's audience to come to possess the testimonial knowledge that they made available by voicing knowledge, is for them to meet an expectation that the speaker had that



they recognise what they (the speaker) meant to be saying (what rhetic thing they meant to be doing) in uttering what they did. According to Rumfitt's proposal, what, then, audiences need to do in order to meet this expectation is to be capable of conducting the particular sets of quasi-inferences peculiar to the rhetic act that the speaker meant to perform. This means that being so capable has got to enable one to acquire testimonial knowledge from a speaker voicing knowledge, when one believes that the speaker is uttering the truth.

I'm going to consider a worry that Rumfitt's proposal implies a reductionist account of how we acquire knowledge from what others tell us. If that worry is well founded, that constitutes a decisive reason, in the present dialectical context, to reject Rumfitt's proposal. That's because the claim that we can acquire testimonial knowledge from a speaker voicing knowledge in the way I have claimed is inconsistent with reductionism.

I don't think Rumfitt's account does commit him to reductionism. The reply I offer to the argument that I consider, I think, illuminates how some of the structures I have been appealing to throughout this thesis can work together to yield the result I want: that rhetic understanding, under Rumfitt's proposal, unproblematically allows for those who achieve it to acquire testimonial knowledge from a speaker who voices knowledge.

VII. a.  
Objection

Reductionist accounts deny that there is any testimonial knowledge that is distinctive in kind, where its distinctiveness derives from the fact that it is generally true of knowledge of that kind that the speaker, or someone in her testimonial chain, is in possession of it. What this tends to mean is that, according to reductionism, we can only acquire knowledge from what others tell us when we have sufficient evidence to support an inductive argument strong enough to support one's claim to knowing that the speaker has uttered the truth. It is then supposed to be (only) on this basis that we can conclude that things are as the speaker said them to be.

The reason that one might think that Rumfitt's proposal implies an account of this kind is because of what he says are the epistemically significant characteristics of states of rhetic understanding of sayings. When he turns his attention to knowledge, with respect to an utterance, *u*, with which the speaker says that *p*, he tells us that rhetic understanding puts us in a position to know that *p* in the event of our knowing that *u* is true and *vice versa*. In other words, since rhetic understanding is supposed to be a second-order cognitive capacity that allows us to gain new knowledge from old, it looks like the way that we get knowledge *via* achieving rhetic understanding of a saying, is by *antecedently* knowing that the speaker uttered truth. And this is exactly what reductionism requires. Rhetic understanding, for the reductionist, must furnish us with the capacity to covert our knowledge in this way.

So conceived, understanding enables the transition from knowledge that the speaker uttered truth (that we acquire on inductive grounds) to knowledge that things are as they said them to be. And, for reductionism, there is *no other* way to acquire knowledge that things are as the speaker says them to be, from their having told us so much.

The objection would be, then, that since Rumfitt's proposal *only* allows for knowledge acquisition from what others say in the above way, his account cannot sustain the acquisition of distinctively testimonial knowledge in the way it should—that is, in the absence of antecedent knowledge that the speaker has uttered truth.

The point can be brought out, again, by way of analogy with our inferential capacities. The possibility of one's acquiring *knowledge* that Jim is in Scunthorpe, by way of the kind deduction I set out earlier, requires *knowledge* that either Jim is in Scunthorpe or Bournemouth and *knowledge* that Jim is not in Bournemouth. Only once in possession of that knowledge, can an exercise our inferential capacity yield further knowledge concerning Jim's whereabouts. In the absence of it, one is only capable of discerning what one would be committed to in the event of one's possessing other hypothetical commitments. The parallel idea would be that in order to come by *knowledge* that Jim smokes, one needs *knowledge* that the speaker uttered truth in uttering "Jim smokes". In the absence of that knowledge, one is only capable of discerning hypothetical commitments. If that is right, then Rumfitt's proposal commits us to thinking that this is the only way in which our rhetic understanding can contribute to our acquisition of knowledge from what others tell us.

## VII. b.

### Reply

The argument is a bad one. Plainly, it fails to recognise that the proposal entails only that the above way of acquiring knowledge from what others tell us is a *sufficient* but not necessary way that rhetic understanding can put us in a position to acquire knowledge from what someone tells us.<sup>82</sup> The objection goes through only if the proposal precludes knowledge acquisition in any other way. But the proposal does no such thing. When Rumfitt gives expression to some of the epistemologically interesting characteristics of states of rhetic understanding, all we are, in effect, told about is just *one way* of acquiring knowledge from others; that one way of coming to know that  $p$  from what someone tells one is that, when we are possession knowledge that the utterance is true, we can conduct the relevant quasi-inferences to gain that knowledge.

Even though the argument is bad, it is still interesting because it raises the question: what *other* ways can we acquire knowledge from what

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<sup>82</sup> I should probably make it clear that, at this point, I'm moving beyond anything that Rumfitt provides us in the papers I've been considering. At one point, Rumfitt does express sympathy with a broadly reliabilist account of knowledge (see Rumfitt 2011, p. 352), and this may well be in conflict with the account of how we acquire knowledge from others that I have been promoting. However, this isn't important for my purposes: I want to know whether Rumfitt's proposal about rhetic understanding coheres with my preferred epistemology of testimony. That investigation can be conducted independently of considerations about Rumfitt's own views about knowledge.

others say on the basis of having understood their utterances?<sup>83</sup> Answering that question will help to bring out the different roles that rhetic understanding can play in our acquiring knowledge from others. In particular, it allows us to see what role it plays in our acquisition of irreducibly testimonial knowledge; that is, a kind of knowledge we can acquire from what others say, when we are *not* in possession of antecedent knowledge that they have uttered truth. For my own purposes, I am particularly interested in what role we can say it plays when we come to acquire distinctively testimonial knowledge from a speaker who voices knowledge, that is, when the relevant knowledge plays the appropriate role in the causal explanation of their producing a particular utterance.

Consider a case in which, on some occasion, you utter, “the Foreign Secretary has resigned”, because you know that the Foreign Secretary has resigned, with the expectation that I will recognise that you were trying to say that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. In understanding your utterance, I am able to infer that the Foreign Secretary has resigned from the claim that you uttered truth. For that understanding to result in my committing to the claim that the Foreign Secretary has resigned, it must be paired with *acceptance*. Acceptance might come in two forms: either I

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<sup>83</sup> This is a point that I emphasised when I offered my own account of how we acquire distinctively testimonial knowledge from someone who voices knowledge; I am not committed to denying that the method of knowledge acquisition that features in the objection is a way of acquiring knowledge from what others say. The view I have been defending is one according to which it is, likewise, only *one way* in which we can acquire knowledge from others is by understanding and accepting an utterance with which they voice knowledge. So all that leaves it open whether we could also acquire knowledge from someone by engaging in the kind of inductive reasoning typically appealed to by the reductionist too; any number of ways for us to acquire knowledge from what someone tells us are, therefore, still open.

believe that you uttered truth, or I believe that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. If the former, then one of the things that rhetic understanding allows me to do is infer (that is, come to believe) that the Foreign Secretary has resigned. If acceptance comes in the latter form, it allows me to infer (believe) that your utterance of “the Foreign Secretary has resigned” is a true one.

I want to suggest that one way in which I can come by the relevant knowledge in such a case is by exercising the capacity that constitutes my rhetic understanding, where such an exercise can be seen to be a form of acceptance. If that is to be a way of my coming by the knowledge that you gave voice to, then in exercising that capacity, I must be able to come to have access to what it is that you know—that is, the knowledge you possess that features in the causal explanation of why you uttered that sentence. In other words, an exercise of my capacity that constitutes my rhetic understanding of your saying something must furnish me with access to the *proposition* that is the content of the rhetic act you performed.

I have already shown, in my reply to Longworth's objection, how rhetic understanding under Rumfitt's proposal can rationally supply this. A recap: consider a proposition,  $p$ , that is associated with a rhetic act  $r$ , and  $p'$  that is associated with a rhetic act  $r'$ .  $p = p'$  if, and only if,  $r = r'$ , and  $r = r'$  if, and only if, to do  $r$  is to do  $r'$ . To do  $r$  is to do  $r'$  if, and only if, one who achieves rhetic understanding the utterance,  $u$ , with which the speaker performs  $r$  is capable of conducting the very same quasi-inferences as one who achieves rhetic understanding an utterance,  $u'$ ,

with which a speaker performs  $r'$ . The idea is that in exercising this capacity with respect to the utterance with which the rhetic act in question is performed, one comes to have access to the proposition expressed by the utterance (one that can be expressed by another utterance with which the same rhetic act is performed). One can do this by exercising one's capacity under the supposition that the utterance in question is true. When this is paired with acceptance, then one comes to believe that  $p$  on the basis of accepting that  $u$  is true, or else comes to believe that  $u$  is true, on the basis of accepting  $p$ .

In accepting that things are as I can infer them to be on that basis, I thereby avail myself of that knowledge that you gave voice to. That's because the exercise of my capacity has furnished me with access to the very thing that you know, and intended to convey with your utterance. By working through a supposition, one can alight upon its consequences, and either accept those consequences or not. That can happen, too, for the quasi-inferential relations that hold between utterances and states of the world. Once one accepts those consequences in cases in which knowledge is voiced, one's uptake of the utterance with which the speaker did this constitutes an act of deference. As a result the epistemic support that the speaker has for what she conveys is what constitutes the epistemic support for what one's understanding has given one access to. What explains why one comes to have knowledge in such cases is not the grounds one had for believing that you uttered truth, but whatever grounds the speaker had for taking things to be as she conveyed them to be. What rhetic understanding allows access to is the very thing that the speaker thereby conveyed.

So, one's initial access to that which is known by the speaker may be by way of exercising one's capacity on the basis of a supposition concerning the truth value of the utterance. But one need not come by such knowledge by going via such a supposition. One can come to exercise the capacity one has on the basis of the reasons one has to believe that the utterance is true. However bad or indecisive they might be, an exercise of it on this basis still furnishes us with access to the thing that the speaker intends to be conveying. As such, even on poor grounds, by doing so one also comes to have access to the knowledge in question, when what the speaker intends to convey is backed up by knowledge in the appropriate way. When this happens, what I can thereby acquire can outstrip what is that I drew on to accept that you uttered truth.

In allowing understanding to contribute to testimonial knowledge acquisition in this second way, I think that the account can accommodate the immediacy of acceptance as a way of coming by knowledge. That is, I can agree with Dummett when he says,

If someone tells me the way to the railway station, or asks me whether I've heard that the Foreign Secretary has just resigned, or informs me that the museum is closed today, I go through no process of reasoning, however shift, to arrive at the conclusion that he has spoken aright: my understanding of his utterance and my acceptance of his assertion are one; I simply add what he has told me to my stock of information.

(Dummett, 1993, p. 419)



It is important to note that Dummett's point is an *epistemic* one, not just a psychological one:

[I]f the concept of knowledge is to be of any use at all, and if we are to be held to know anything resembling the body of truths we normally take ourselves to know, the non-inferential character of our acceptance of what others tell us must be acknowledged as an epistemological principle, rather than a mere psychological phenomenon.

(ibid. p. 422)

The point is that by accepting what we are told *automatically*, we can still come by knowledge. What that automaticity, in the present context, amounts to, is an acquisition of the premise that the utterance is true, which, on the basis of what understanding provides, allows one to conclude that things are a certain way—in propitious circumstances, the way that the speaker knows that things are.

We have already seen why I think we should allow this in Chapter 1, when I considered Dummett's arguments against reductionism. In requiring knowledge that the speaker uttered truth antecedently to one's accessing knowledge that is voiced, we are forced to accept that we know a lot less than we ordinarily think that we do. Accepting Dummett's point allows for one's taking the speaker to have uttered truth to beget knowledge in the absence of one's antecedently knowing that they have uttered truth. I've been suggesting that the grounds one has for

accepting that the speaker uttered truth are epistemically inert when it comes to considerations about whether one acquires distinctively testimonial knowledge. Even if I have very poor grounds for believing your utterance is true, or even good grounds for believing that your utterance is false, so long as I end up believing that you uttered truth, that allows for my exercise of the capacity that constitutes my rhetic understanding to make available knowledge to me.<sup>84</sup> Allowing for testimonial knowledge acquisition in this way is just another way of saying that, so long as one accepts that the utterance of the speaker is true, in conjunction with one's understanding that utterance, one can come to know that things are as the speaker said them to be, when she voices knowledge. And this is precisely the view that I defended in Chapter 2.

## VIII.

### Conclusion

Over the course of the last few chapters I have been trying to defend part of an account of what it is to come to understand a particular utterance of a speaker (what I called *utterance understanding*). Utterance understanding essentially involves possessing *rhetic* understanding of an utterance—that is, one's coming to recognise what rhetic thing a speaker does in producing her utterance. In achieving rhetic understanding of an

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<sup>84</sup> Of course, not *just* rhetic understanding is needed of the utterance in question, for one to be in a position to avail oneself of the knowledge that is made available by a speaker voicing knowledge. One will need to take the utterance in question to have been produced sincerely, so as to be in a frame of mind to accept it. That is, one will have to take it, for example, that the speaker is not being ironic, or uttering what they are in jest.

utterance, I have said that one is meeting an expectation that a speaker has of one, when one is their audience; an expectation that is met by one's being capable of conducting kinds of inferences specific to the rhetic act that the speaker means to be performing with their utterance. I have provided a response to Longworth's objection, where I tried to show that rhetic understanding, under the proposal I have suggested that a view of this kind is able to sustain the epistemology of testimony that I presented and motivated over the course of the first couple of chapters.

I am now going to move on to apply this picture of understanding to some debates outside the epistemology of testimony. I do so in an attempt to display the wider explanatory potential that such a view has.

# Chapter 5

## Understanding & Meaning Theory

### I.

#### Introduction

In recent philosophical theorising about language, the notion of understanding has not tended to attract very much philosophical attention in its own right. It is, rather, usually appealed to for the sake of elucidating a notion that might be of more fundamental concern: *meaning*. The appeal to understanding in the course of theorising about meaning has been made because it has been a preoccupation of philosophers of language of a particular stripe to provide specifications of what expressions, as used by speakers, mean—or rather, what speakers do in uttering those expressions. And an appeal to understanding, in some form, has often been made in the course of the explanations that they have given of what it would be to do that adequately.

I want to now try to bring to bear the foregoing on some of the considerations that are appealed to in the course of conducting this kind of meaning theoretic project. I am going to conceive of that project as one in which the theory is ultimately concerned with what speakers do,

and I shall concentrate, in the main but not exclusively, on how we might go about theoretically specifying what speakers *say*, in the rhetic sense, when they produce particular utterances on occasions. I want to start making a case for the claim that the account of rhetic understanding that I have been defending has the potential to provide some of what may be thought to be lacking in what I called in the last chapter the *received view*. With respect to utterances with which the speaker performs the rhetic act of saying something, the received view is that rhetic understanding of such an utterance is one's knowing a proposition—a proposition that adequately captures the content of what rhetic thing the speaker has done. When this is replaced with Rumfitt's account—namely, the view that rhetic understanding consists in one's possessing the right kinds of quasi-inferential capacities—the explanatory resources of the theory are increased, or so I'll argue.

In the next section I will introduce one way of conceiving of the explanatory project that the provision of meaning theories is meant to contribute to. Then, in §III, I'll outline a particular family of approaches to meaning theory construction that rely centrally on the notion of (rhetic) understanding. I call approaches of this sort 'Cognitive Semantics'. §IV is concerned with a subset of cognitive semantical approaches that make use of truth-conditions to provide the relevant specifications that feature in the meaning theory. The idea is that those who achieve rhetic understanding know the truth-conditions of the utterances in question. By appealing to what it is that those who understand these utterances know, we can provide specifications of what is said by those who produce these utterances. But in order to specify

what it is about the conditions for truth and falsity of such utterances, the knowledge of which is relevant to one's understanding, such accounts must stipulate that it is that which is relevant to what it is that the speaker is saying. This generates a kind of circularity in the kinds of explanation that such accounts can provide. By plugging in, in §V, Rumfitt's proposal concerning understanding, I try to show what explanatory advantages such an account has over its rivals, despite its failure to be non-circular. §VI concludes.

## II.

### The Purpose of a Meaning Theory

I said that it has been a preoccupation of certain kinds of philosophers of language to provide specifications of what potential utterance of the expressions of a language say, or ask, or order, or etc. I want to ultimately say something about how Rumfitt's conception of understanding can help in carrying through such a project, but to do that, I need to first say something about why it is that one should engage in a project of this kind at all. That is, I need to say something about what purpose such specifications are meant to serve.

One of the perplexing features of our linguistic behaviour is that, just by making certain sounds, or inscribing certain marks, we can perform acts with a certain kind of complex significance. Our making these sounds can somehow make manifest to others some of our beliefs and some of our desires. They can prompt others to provide us with information that we need, and they can induce others to act in the ways that we want

them to. We've also seen that others performing such actions can provide us with knowledge, and our performing them can be a means of imparting what we know to others. So one of the fundamental questions in this area is: how can such strings of sounds, and inscriptions of marks, have this significance?

An adequate meaning theory is meant to contribute to the answer to this question by pairing up utterances with, ultimately, propositional attitude ascriptions. Speaking is a manifestation of mind, so an explanation of the significance of some instance of speech will have to eventually say what of the mindful it is a manifestation of. Part of what is needed to do this, is an association of these utterances with assignments of content. This will have to be done in such a way that makes perspicuous how it is that the contents associated with utterances of whole sentences are dependent on the associations that occur in the parts that compose the sentence. That's because we want our meaning theory to be able to account for what Chomsky calls "creative" language use—that is, the productivity that we display in our linguistic behaviour. The theory will need to show how we are able, with a finite stock of words and modes of combining those words, to utter a potential infinity of distinct and meaningful sentences. When they are uttered, each of them can be used in the service of doing any of the indefinitely many things to be done in speaking. And, correlatively, each of those things that speakers can do can be understood to have been done by them, by one who is similarly competent in the language being spoken.

We may, here, be inclined to appeal to a *practice* of language use to help explain this; practices allow for otherwise insignificant actions can come to have the complex significance of the kind that our utterances in fact have. In the absence of the practice of playing chess, the movement of a piece of carved bone across a checkered board does not have the significance it does within that practice. In the absence of a practice of language use, our mutterings do not do the sorts of things we intend of them within the practice. The appeal to the practice of language use makes it intelligible how complex and significant acts can be performed in doing more basic things; how it is, most centrally, that we can say things, or ask things, or command things, or ... (etc.), by making certain sounds. It is because there is such a practice for us to engage in that these less basic acts emerge out of the more basic ones. What a meaning theory can therefore be thought to help to contribute to is an explanation of the significance of certain actions as being those that contribute to achieving the ends of those participants in the practice. It would do so by making intelligible the behaviour of participants of the practice of language use, as participants in that practice. The kinds of activities that would be attributed to them would, ultimately, be the panoply of illocutionary acts that there are to be performed in speaking, where these acts are made sense of as such, by virtue of the contributions that they make to the goals of the participants.

To get anywhere close to this ultimate explanation, meaning theories must contend, first, with a less ambitious aim. Given the speech-act theoretic framework imported from Austin, it would have to do so *via* attributions of rhetic things done by speakers producing the strings of



sounds that they do. If it could be shown that certain kinds of outward behaviour manifestly and systematically line up with intentional states of the kind appropriate to performances of acts of these rhetic kinds, then at least part of what significance that behaviour has would be on display. Given the structure that that framework imposes on our speech-action, this is the foundation on which a more comprehensive linguistic theory will have to be based. That is, since these more complex linguistic activities must be enacted by way of the performance of rhetic acts (see Chapter 3, esp. §III), any account that fully makes intelligible the behaviour of language speakers will have to reflect this fact. What is sought, then, is a way of reading off intentional states of the kind appropriate to performance of rhetic acts, from the potential behaviour—centrally, *linguistic* behaviour—of actual participants in the relevant practice. A meaning theory is meant to provide us with the tools required to do this. It will do this in such a way that accounts for the fact that finite creatures like us in fact engage in a practice as described by the theory.

### III.

#### Cognitive Semantics

I'm going to focus on one particular family of approaches to constructing meaning theories that seek to provide explanations of this sort. The theories that I have in mind are those that approach the task of systematically specifying the rhetic things to be done in potential utterances of expressions of a language by appealing to the *knowledge* of the language's practitioners. Call theorists of this stripe *cognitive*

*semanticists*. Cognitive semanticists take specifications of the requisitely explanatory kind to be, at least in part, achieved by specifying certain features of actual, potential, or possible knowledge states of those capable of achieving rhetic understanding of utterances of sentences of a shared public language. The kind of relationship that is thought to hold between (some of) the things done with utterances and the states of those who are capable of understanding those utterances is meant to have the requisite explanatory potential. It is from this that the cognitive semantical approach is supposed to derive its appeal.

Michael Dummett consistently insisted that a ‘theory of meaning’ for some language is at the same time a ‘theory of understanding’. A theory of understanding, as Dummett conceives of it, is a theory that specifies what it is that someone knows when she understands particular utterances of sentences of the language.<sup>85</sup> Dummett, then, is an archetypal cognitive semanticist, because he thinks that a meaning theory would have to specify what it is that a subject knows when they understand a particular utterance.

In bringing in the notion of the *practice* of language use, I was channeling Dummett, and it is in these terms that he recently gave expression to what he thought would be needed from such a theory in order for it to provide an explanation of the kind he sought:

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<sup>85</sup> See, for example, Dummett 1975/1993, p. 3. There he talks of ‘knowledge of language’ and ‘knowing what expressions mean’. In the current context that would be to specify that which one knows that *enables* utterance understanding. This would not yet be quite what is wanted from a meaning theory, if what is wanted is an explanation of what speakers are doing, on some occasion, in uttering the things that they do.

The use of a language is a practice. To engage in the practice, you must know the meanings of the words. In what do their meanings consist, and what is it to know them? [...] A theory of meaning attempts to answer the question in what the meanings of a sentence, and of a word of any particular kind, consist, and either to explain what it is to understand a sentence or a word, or to provide the materials from which such an explanation can be constructed.

(Dummett 2007, p. 370)

Dummett here tells us that at least two things are required of the theory. Though he expresses things in terms of the meaning of words, he is explicit that what is really at issue is *utterances* (p. 367). Transposing what he says here to that domain, constrained to acts of saying, we can read the requirements he places on a meaning theory as, first, demanding that it specify in virtue of what utterances of (indicative) sentences say what they do, and, second, that it at least contributes to an explanation of what it is to understand an utterance, where this is conceived of as possessing knowledge of what is said with it. The justification for insisting on this second requirement is that, if we were to provide a theory that failed to make this kind of contribution, though ostensibly provided assignments of the things that are said, then it “would do little to make explicit the practice of using the language” (ibid.). This—the making explicit the practice of using the language—is our ultimate aim as meaning theorists, or so says Dummett. He gives us a suggestion as to how this is to be done: “to make that explicit, the theory must show how the use of sentences in converse flows, or is derivable, from the meaning

that the theory assigns to them” (pp. 370-1). Transposing once again, this amounts to the idea that what the theory provides is information from which one can derive descriptions of at least some of the things the speaker has done, in uttering what they have.

Given that our starting place is the rhetic acts performed by speakers, the first thing the theory has got to do is derive specifications of such acts. It needs to do so in such a way that not vacuous. It is natural, then, to think that the specifications that it provides will take us from some description of the activities of speakers that is devoid of information about the significance of their speech-behaviour to descriptions that provide that information. In the operative Austinian idiom, that would be understood to be taking us from descriptions of the phatic acts performed to the rhetic one’s performed. Or, as Jennifer Hornsby puts it,

A theory of locution should provide one with all that is necessary to move systematically from reports of the phonetic acts that utterances are of, to reports of the rhetic acts they are of; from an instance of (P) to the correct instance of (R).

- (P) An *L* speaker made these sounds: – – – –
- (R) The *L* speaker said that \*\*\*\*

(Hornsby 1988, p. 38)

Hornsby here speaks of the input of the theory being a description of the *phonetic* things done, but we can substitute in *phatic* here without affecting the main point. In so doing we will get (P)’ instead of (P),

(P)' An *L* speaker said the words: #####

And the 'theory of locution', conceived of as a component part of a complete meaning theory, would provide one with all that is necessary to move systematically from an instance of (P)' to the correct instance of (R). It will have to do so in such a way that meets that key desideratum that a cognitive semantical approach of the kind imposes on such theories: show how the component parts of the phatic things done, and their mode of combination, determine the contributions to rhetic things done by so combining those elements. By doing that *via* an appeal to what one who achieves rhetic understanding knows, the theory will then show how it is that we are capable of the productivity that we exhibit in speaking and understanding. That is, by employing a compositional theory in setting out what those who understand utterances know, it would be able to show how finite knowledge of the contributions that the words, and their modes of combination, make to the rhetic things done, can yield a capacity to perform, and understand, a potential infinity of stand alone rhetic acts. This is one way in which the appeal to understanding can help serve the purposes to which, I have said, meaning theories are put.

But, ultimately, more than this will be needed, if Dummett's full ambitions for such a theory are to be realised. That's because we will be leaving something out of the account if all our theory does is provide specifications of the rhetic things done by speakers producing their utterances. What participating in the practice of language use allows for

is not just the doing of rhetic things, but also for the doing of all sorts of *illocutionary* things. A full explanation of what speakers are doing in producing their utterances will have to include an explanation of their doing these illocutionary things.

It has been standard to partition theoretical responsibility for such explanations in the following way: a 'theory of sense' will output specifications, of the right systematic kind, of the rhetic things done on the basis of the phatic things done; a 'theory of force' will output specifications of the illocutionary things done on the basis of the rhetic things done. What the theory of force is typically thought to do is allow for utterances in different moods, employed to perform acts of different illocutionary kinds, to be redescribed in such a way as to be amenable to treatment by the theory of sense. Since the theory of sense has typically been constructed for indicative sentences, used to say things, the transformations that the theory of force effects will be from utterances of non-indicative sentences, used to perform acts other than assertion-like sayings, to utterances of indicative sentences used to perform such sayings (and leave the indicative ones untouched). McDowell expresses how this is usually thought to be achieved:

If the object language has more than one mood, a theory competent to impose interpreting descriptions on all possible utterances in it will need to be able to classify utterances as performances of speech acts of this or that kind (assertion, question, command, or whatever). We can require the principles that effect this classification to be written in such a way that, in the case of a non-assertoric utterance, besides enabling us to identify

the kind of speech act performed, they also equip us with an indicative sentence, related to the sentence uttered in such a way that [it can] serve (perhaps with minor syntactic modification) to express the content of the non-assertoric speech act performed by utterance a non-indicative counterpart.

(McDowell 1980, p. 33)

(To be clear: here McDowell is considering a theory for a language that is significantly less complex than a natural language. What he is articulating is what a theory of the kind under consideration would look like, if it could be adapted to serve as a theory of sense for a language with some of the features of a natural language like English. There is obvious optimism, though, that, at least in principle, this could be extended to accommodate all those features that natural languages have). So conceived, we can take the theory of sense to take as input the phatic thing done, and output the rhetic thing done; the theory of force will take as input a specification of the rhetic thing done, and outputs a specification the illocutionary thing done (or at least something relatively close to such a specification).<sup>86</sup>

I want to flag one issue about this conception of the role of the theory of force, before considering some concrete proposals. In Chapter 3, we saw that the prospects were bleak for accounts that attempted to assimilate

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<sup>86</sup> The qualification is inserted here because there are those who find it doubtful that the illocutionary as such is something that could be subject to the systematic theoretical treatment that might be suggested by the idea that we could have a *bona fide* theory that takes as input specifications of the rhetic things done and outputs specifications of the illocutionary things done. Whether one thinks this or not, right now, not much hangs on it.

non-indicatives into the indicatives (i.e. that the rhetic things typically done with utterances of non-indicative sentences could be shown to be equivalent to one's doing some indicative rhetic thing, or combination of such rhetic things).<sup>87</sup> The upshot of this was that in our account of the rhetic act performed, there would be an ineliminable appeal to some elements of the speech that the above picture would associate with its force. That is, in specifying any given rhetic thing done, some appeal to categories demarcated by distinctions in mood was needed to capture a speaker's performing such acts. So, when it comes to an utterance in which a command is given, for example, a specification of the rhetic thing done would have to show in some way that the speaker is enjoining something; it cannot rely on the theory of force to transform specifications of things *said* into specifications of the command issued. If that is right, then the clean division of duties represented in the McDowell quotation cannot be made. This would be a significant concession, if it has to be made. But for all that, I'll leave these important issues to one side, in the main, and I'll concentrate on the construction of meaning theories for the indicative sentences used to effect assertion-like sayings. I will briefly, however, pick up on this issue again at the very end of the chapter.

#### IV.

#### Truth Conditional Cognitive Semantics

Perhaps the most straightforward way to conduct a cognitive semantical program is to take as a baseline assumption the claim that what a speaker

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<sup>87</sup> Chapter 3, §IV. b.



says in uttering something is the content of the knowledge state of one who possesses rhetic understanding of their utterance. As such, if we specify what it is that those who achieve rhetic understanding of an utterance know, then we will have thereby specified what rhetic thing the speaker did with their utterance.

The received view—the view that rhetic understanding is a matter of possessing knowledge of some proposition—emerges when the knowledge state in question is thought to be propositional knowledge, and with that in place, it can make it seem as though the cognitive semantical project must take a particular shape. Given the assumption that one who achieves rhetic understanding of some particular utterance knows that ..., where the ‘...’ is filled by whatever it is that they know, the meaning theory will output propositions that are the content of the knowledge states of those who achieve rhetic understanding of the utterance.

Within this way of thinking, then, one of the primary tasks of meaning theory construction is to find the appropriate propositions to fill the gap. In order to do so, the cognitive semanticist that subscribes to the received view must find a way of deciding between candidate propositions—that is, saying under what conditions a candidate proposition will be suitable for their purposes. A candidate proposition will only be suitable if knowledge of that proposition puts one in the cognitive position occupied by one who achieves rhetic understanding of the target utterance. We have already seen that one who understands an utterance must be capable of making certain kinds of inferences. For example,

when it comes of an utterance,  $u$ , with which the speaker says that  $p$ , they must be capable of inferring that  $p$  from the claim that  $u$  is true, that  $u$  is true from the claim that  $p$ , that it is not the case that  $p$  from the claim that  $u$  is false, and that  $u$  is false from the claim that  $p$  is not the case. So one way to decide between propositions is to see whether knowledge of the candidate propositions provides one with the capacity to conduct these inferences.

Of course, these are the set of inferences that lie at the heart of Rumfitt's proposal. You may recall that Rumfitt expressed pessimism about whether there is a proposition, knowledge of which would put one in the cognitive position he describes.<sup>88</sup> As we'll see, he does so primarily for reasons that emanate from Foster's (1976) criticisms of the Davidsonian program (I discuss these below in §IV b.). It is now time to look at that claim he takes such criticisms to support more closely. Because the obvious candidate body of knowledge that would put one in the cognitive position that Rumfitt describes, is knowledge of the conditions under which the utterance in question is true. Under the received view, that is a proposition which states these conditions. Call this 'the truth-conditional approach'.

#### IV. a.

#### Davidson's 'Cognitive Semantics'

The truth-conditional approach has tended to take a particular form. Inspired by Donald Davidson's employment of Tarskian truth-theories in

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<sup>88</sup> See Chapter 4, § III. That pessimism is voiced at Rumfitt 2005, p. 444.

the course of providing his own brand of meaning theory, others have sought to incorporate a number of elements of Davidson's project for their own purposes. But Davidson's own way of employing truth-theories cannot be incorporated wholesale into the cognitive semantical project, given its stated explanatory ambitions.

Davidson sets himself the task of specifying that which, were it known, would suffice for interpreting the speakers of a language. This is a crucially distinct ambition to that which I said characterised cognitive semantics—that of saying what knowledge one who achieves rhetic understanding of the utterances under investigation possesses. As such, the kind of theory Davidson is after does not attempt to provide one of the key things that is supposed to be required of a meaning theory, since it makes no attempt to say anything about what is known by those who understand the utterances under consideration. In point of fact, Davidson doesn't even commit to the claim that those who achieve so much possess any knowledge at all that plays any role in their successfully understanding the utterances of others (see, for example, Davidson 1973, p. 125).<sup>89</sup> For all that, he thinks that the approach he favours can provide some explanation of the kind that I said the cognitive semanticist seeks. We will see that there are serious doubts about whether Davidson is right about this.

Davidson thinks that the kind of thing that will provide the answers *he* seeks is a theoretical assignment of meanings to sentences, from a finite

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<sup>89</sup> Davidson says there that "it is not altogether obvious that there is anything we actually know which plays an essential role in interpretation."

set of axioms, that are all, and only, those assignments that are 'empirically' confirmable. The assignments in question are those which would be made by a hypothetical *interpreter*. Interpreters engage in interpretation; interpretation is a method of redescribing one set of facts in terms of another. In this case, the facts that are being redescribed are facts about the behaviour of the speaker, both linguistic and non-linguistic, from a starting point of almost total ignorance about the intentional states that tend to accompany that behaviour. The ambition is to redescribe these facts, from this starting point, in intentional terms. These descriptions are 'empirically' confirmed only if they cohere with both the publicly accessible facts about their behaviour and the assignments of intentional states that the theory itself provides (this second point allows for the assignments, at first provisional, to become less provisional as more and more of its assignments are confirmed by the evidence, and the growing assignments of the theory).

The kind of interpretation that Davidson is interested in is what he calls *radical* interpretation. This is a program of redescription that is carried out by hypothetical interpreter, who is only permitted to engage in such interpretation according to a relatively small set of interpretive principles. These principles say what kind of assumptions can be made by the interpreter in assigning propositional attitudes to speakers on the basis of the outward, publicly accessible behaviour that they exhibit. That is in order to hold fixed, provisionally, something upon which the assignments of meaning can be made, and such assignments will, if correct, be confirmed by the behaviour of the target speakers in conjunction with

the other assignments that have been entered into the theory (see for example Davidson 1973, p. 137).

In addition to these 'empirical' constraints, there are formal constraints on the theory. These are constraints that derive from considerations about the composition of sentences by repeatable elements, in repeatable modes of combination, and exploiting this fact in connection with the desideratum that the theory entail a truth of the form exhibited by theorems of a Tarskian truth-theory for every sentence of the language under investigation. That is, theorems of the form: '*s* is true if and only if *p*', where '*s*' is replaced by a structural description of a sentence in the object language, and '*p*' picks out a sentence of the metalanguage that meets the condition laid down by the application of the truth predicate.<sup>90</sup> As such, the assignments that the theory makes to the component parts have got to themselves fit with the evidence when combined in *other* constructions.

With these restrictions in place, Davidson claims that what someone could know that would suffice to endow them with the relevant interpretive capacity is knowledge that a truth-theory, for some language, states that ..., where the '...' is replaced by an actual truth-theory, suitably constrained. Knowing so much is said to suffice on the grounds that it would entail knowledge of the theorems of the theory, each of which states that a particular sentence, as uttered on an occasion, is true just in case a certain condition is met. The idea is that knowing under

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<sup>90</sup> The '*s*' here, from the current outlook that is concerned with the things that people do with their utterances might better be replaced with '*u*', where this describes an utterance of such a sentence in terms of the phatic thing done with it.

what conditions the truth-predicate, so applied, would yield true theorems of this form is enough to be able to interpret the utterances in question.

This is only a brief sketch of Davidson's whole view of the matter, and I have left out much that is central to it.<sup>91</sup> But enough has been said to demonstrate one point in particular. It a point made by Barry Smith (1992) when he points out that there is an odd upshot of the axiomatic nature of the theory Davidson put forward, that results from the imposition of the formal constraints that I've just described. The oddity in the proposal is that a meaning theory that meets the formal constraints that Davidson imposes possesses explanatory potential which Davidson is precluded from exploiting.

We saw that one of the things that our meaning theory should be explaining is the productivity that we display in our speech and our understanding. And compositional theories of the kind that Davidson appeals to are ideally suited to being employed for such explanatory purposes. They are suited to this because, were such a theory known, it would provide the basis of an explanation of how we are capable of producing and understanding utterances of a potential infinity of distinct sentences. But, as I've mentioned, the theories that Davidson describes say *nothing* about what those who understand languages know. All they try to output are propositions, the knowledge of which would suffice for interpretation of their speech-behaviour; all it states is (at best) something that, were it known by an interpreter, would enable them to

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<sup>91</sup> I have said very little, for example, about Davidson's holism.

correctly assign (for Davidson's purposes—he permits a level of indeterminacy here) propositional attitudes to practitioners of the language that would make their behaviour intelligible. The oddity, in other words, is that one of the chief virtues of a theory of the kind that Davidson provides us with—that is, a *compositional* theory—is meant to be that it can be employed to explain the productivity and creativity that ordinary speakers are capable of in their (linguistic) behaviour. But, as employed by Davidson, it cannot provide such an explanation.

What this all goes to show is that Davidson has not really provided a 'cognitive semantics' of the kind that I'm interested in. That's because Davidson's approach does not so much as constitute an *attempt* at providing the kind of explanation that Dummett, and others, have thought that such theories should be providing—namely, what it is that is known by those who understand the utterances of speakers of the language in question.

#### IV. b.

##### Foster Problems

But even on its own terms, Davidson program faces serious difficulties. A point that has been made on more than one occasion, by more than one commentator, is that, since the theories that Davidson appeals to only speak about truth, there is a lacuna to be filled to get any such theory to say something about *meaning* (or rather, what speaker's say, or ask, or ... etc.). In other words, not any true equivalence of the form '*u* is true if and only if *p*' is enough to show that whatever replaces '*u*' really

does say that  $p$ . What is needed is a way of replacing the ' $u$ ' and the ' $p$ ' in such a way that the thing that replaces ' $p$ ' really does capture of the thing that is said with what replaces ' $u$ '.

The true extent of this problem for Davidson's account was first clearly identified by John Foster (1976).<sup>92</sup> We can call the truth-theorem, ' $u$  is true if and only if  $p$ ' *interpretive* when  $p$  is said in the production of  $u$ . The problem is that, even for Davidson's aim of specifying something, knowledge of which would suffice to know that an utterance of sentence says, an interpretive truth-theorem is not adequate for these purposes. That is because one may know an interpretive truth-theory for a language (a theory that contains all only only interpretive truth-theorems) and fail to know *that it is interpretive*. But it precisely this knowledge that is required, if one is to know what it is that the relevant utterance says (Foster 1976, pp. 19-20).

Suppose that I know that "snow" denotes snow, and know that "is white" is true of the white things, and know, on the basis of knowing these things that "snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white (i.e. the truth-condition of the complete sentence is *canonically* derived from the relevant axioms). The problem is that my knowing so much is consistent with the utterance of that sentence saying that snow is white and arithmetic is incomplete, if the 'if and only if' is construed as the material biconditional (as Davidson himself construes it). In essence, knowing the extensional truth conditions of an utterance of this kind is

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<sup>92</sup> Though similar problems had been raised before in Wiggins (1971), and Strawson (1971).



consistent with one's failing to know what is thereby said with it.<sup>93</sup> This shows that not only does Davidson's approach, as I've described it, not provide what the cognitive semanticist seeks, it doesn't yet provide what Davidson himself sought.

It is, for the most part, on account of this point that Rumfitt is pessimistic about finding a proposition, knowledge of which is equivalent to one's possessing rhetic understanding of an utterance. When something is said with the utterance, Rumfitt has told us that one's rhetic understanding is constituted by one's possessing the quasi-inferential capacities that I discussed at such length in the last chapter. He doubts whether there is any proposition, knowledge of which is equivalent to occupying the cognitive position that he describes. The above line of thought is supposed to give some indication of why. The most plausible candidate proposition is a statement of truth conditions, but when this is conceived of as a theorem of a truth-theory, we have a proposition that one could know, and, at the same time not be capable of making the relevant quasi-inferences. This is suggestive. What Rumfitt seems to have put his finger on is what, precisely, is missing for one who knows an interpretive truth-theory with regards to what the utterances it treats say. What such knowledge fails to provide one with is precisely the capacity to make the kinds of inferences that lie at the heart of Rumfitt's proposal.

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<sup>93</sup> The kind of problem raised by Foster has been thought to be a major problem for carrying out Davidson's program. For those who so regard it, see, for example, Foster (1976), Loar (1976), Evans and McDowell (1976), Soames (1989), (1992), Higginbotham (1992). For an influential response to Foster's objection to Davidson, see Lepore & Ludwig (2005, Ch. 8), who contend that Davidson never had the view Foster attributed to him.

Foster showed that something was missing from Davidson's proposal. What Rumfitt gives us is what that missing thing is.

#### IV. c.

#### McDowell's Cognitive Semantics

For all that, elements of Davidson's approach have been taken up by others who *have* sought to provide a form of cognitive semantics. It is to these approaches that I now turn. I'll first set out how they seek to implement the parts of Davidson's approach that they do. I'll then say something about how these accounts seek to avoid the kinds of problems Foster identified, and show why the manoeuvres such approaches employ result in a kind of circularity—a circularity that greatly concerned Dummett. In light of this, I'll conclude by saying why appealing to Rumfitt's proposal can yield explanatory dividends beyond those yielded by the truth-conditional approaches.

For Davidson's approach to count as constituting an attempt to provide the kinds of explanation that the cognitive semanticist is in the business of providing, the emphasis needs to shift to providing a theory whose theorems are at least candidate contents of the knowledge states of the practitioners of a language. Only then would we have a recognisably truth-conditional form of an explanatory cognitive semantics. For that portion of the practice of language use in which speaker's say things, an account of that kind is going to ideally be structured in the following way: (i) one who achieves rhetic understanding of an utterance with which a speaker performs an act of saying something has knowledge that

..., where the ‘...’ is filled by a proposition which states what is thereby said; (ii) what fills the gap is a statement of truth-conditions; and (iii) those statements can take the form of a suitably constrained truth-theory for the language.

The relevant constraints cannot be those that Davidson imposed, because, at any rate, there what was wanted was something different to what cognitive semantics seeks. Here the constraints have got to be such that the theory chosen reflects the knowledge possessed by one who achieves (rhetic) understanding of the utterance produced by the speaker. One philosopher who has taken up the challenge of setting out what these would be is John McDowell. McDowell, in setting out what a meaning theory, as he conceives it, needs (in part) to provide, tells us that,

Given a suitable non-interpreting description of any possible utterance in the language—a formulation of information available equally, on hearing the utterance, to someone who understands the language and to someone who does not—the theory would enable anyone who knew it to derive that interpreting description under which someone who understands the language would be capable of recognising the action performed.

(McDowell 1980, pp. 119-20)

What is needed, then, is something that can take a ‘non-interpreting’ description of the utterance as input and yield an ‘interpreting’ description as output. And interpreting description would be one that is

recognisable to those who understand the utterance in question. In effect, what is wanted is a way of deriving which less basic act was performed on the basis of knowing which more basic act was performed. The ‘non-interpreting’ description is a description of what the speaker does that does not make them intelligible in light of propositional attitude assignments, whereas the ‘interpreting’ description of what they do does make their behaviour so intelligible. What is needed, in other words, is a way of generating a description of the rhetic thing done, from a description of the phatic thing done with the utterance in question. The output description will be adequate if it is recognisable as a description of what the speaker did to someone who understands their utterance.

For cases in which a rhetic act of saying something is done, what this means is that “the theory would need [...] to make someone who knew it capable of specifying, for any indicative sentence in the language dealt with, the content of the saying which an utterance of the sentence would be taken to be by someone who understood the language” (ibid. p. 120) So one who understands an utterance with which a speaker says such-and-such, takes the speaker to say precisely that. And what the theory provides, is information that would allow one to specify what it is that one who understands the utterance takes the speaker to have said. What it, in effect, does, is specify what is known by one who knows what the speaker has said, on the basis of their knowing the phatic thing by which their saying that is done.

More generally, it is to specify what “propositional act”, with what “content”, has been performed by the speaker producing the utterance in question. Such knowledge is what is stated by a theorem a “bipartite theory” (McDowell 1976, p. 45); in other words a theory that is the combination of a *theory of sense* and a *theory of force* (see above). The idea is that a truth-theory of a kind similar to that appealed to be Davidson could serve as a theory of sense. If it can, then such theories could provide a way of generating a specification of the rhetic thing done by a speaker, from a specification of the phatic thing that they did. The question is, *can* truth-theories be devised to do this work—that is, serve as the ‘theory of sense’ part of the complete meaning theory? McDowell certainly thinks so. Here is how. McDowell begins with a claim about what form the specification, that a theory of sense will output, should take.<sup>94</sup> What is needed is a finitely axiomatisable theory that entails infinitely many theorems of the form ‘*s* ... *p*’. ‘*s*’ here is to be replaced by a canonical description of an object-language sentence in use (here understood as a description of the phatic act performed), and ‘*p*’ is replaced by a sentence of the metalanguage that fulfils the role of ‘giving the meaning’ of what replaces ‘*s*’. The ‘giving the meaning’ here, following Hornsby, can be interpreted as specifying what rhetic thing is done on the basis of one’s producing something for which the canonical description that replaces ‘*s*’ is true (i.e. the phatic thing).

What is wanted is that the theory chosen provides necessary and sufficient conditions for the satisfaction of a predicate which comes out true when the schematic letters have been filled in the way just specified.

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<sup>94</sup> See, for example, McDowell 1976, 1980 & 2007.

Davidson's idea was that an expression of the form 'is true if and only if' could replace '...', where the truth predicate is backed by a suitably constrained Tarskian truth-theory. McDowell agrees to this extent: the truth predicate is precisely one that can be used to fill the schematic gap such that true statements of necessary and sufficient conditions for that predicate to be satisfied will be theorems that will connect the replacements of '*s*' and '*p*' in the desired way.

The difference between Davidson and McDowell is that McDowell, unlike Davidson, builds in the guarantee that what is stated by the truth-theory also states what it is that is said with the utterances. In other words, he avoids Foster problems by stipulating the connection between the two "up front":

What we want is a truth theory for a language that is usable in making sense of the language's speakers, in a way exemplified by this condition: if a speaker were to utter a sentence in a stand-alone speech act intelligible as an assertion, her action would be intelligible as saying that ..., assertorically expressing the thought that ..., where what fills the blank is the specification of a truth condition that the theory yields.

(McDowell 2007, pp. 351-2)

The idea is that we choose our truth-theory precisely because it allows us to make the transitions from the phatic things done to the rhetic things done when a speaker produces their utterance. What this does is allow for one who knew the theory to be able to discern what rhetic thing has

been done on the basis of the phatic thing that has been done—precisely because they will know that it is theory serving that purpose. Because of this, such knowledge licences conclusions about what, in uttering what they did, the speaker *said* on the basis of the words they produced, in the manner of construction, in those circumstances.

There is, I think, an affiliation, and an instructive parallel, between the approach favoured by McDowell and a response to the worry about how to fill the lacuna left by the Davidsonian approach that is provided by James Higginbotham. The lacuna that needed to be filled was for the theory to say how it is that a truth theory could at one and the same time be a meaning theory. Higginbotham provided the following suggestion:

To a first approximation, the meaning of an expression is what you are expected, simply as a speaker, to know about its reference. As a speaker of English, you are expected, for example, to know that ‘snow is white’ is true if and only if snow is white; to that ‘snow’ refers to snow, and that ‘is white’ is true of just the white things; and to know quite generally that the result of combining a singular term noun phrase with a predicate in the form of an intransitive adjective is true just in case the predicate is true of the reference of the term. If, and only if, you know these things do you know that the sentence ‘snow is white’ means that snow is white.

(Higginbotham 1992, p. 5)

The task that Davidson faced was to show how it is that knowledge of truth-conditions, as specified by a suitably constrained Tarskian truth-

theory, could suffice for knowing what one who understands an utterance knows. The problem is that one could know such a theory, without knowing the meaning of any of the expressions that it treats (i.e. what utterances of those expressions *say*). This problem will, then, equally affect the truth-conditional form of cognitive semantics which tries to provide a meaning theory by specifying what it is that those who understand utterances know. The thought we get from Higginbotham is that by qualifying the knowledge that one attributes to those who understand the utterances to that knowledge that one is expected to have *simply as a speaker* of the language (concerning the conditions under which an utterance of that sentence is true), we close the gap between knowledge of truth-conditions and knowledge of what's said. As Rumfitt emphasises,

[T]he paranthetical qualifier 'simply as a speaker' is essential. Someone who knows what snow is at all may be expected to know that it is white. In particular an ordinary speaker of English may be expected to know this. Since, as Higginbotham says, he may also be expected to know that "snow is white" is true if and only if snow is white, he may further be expected to know that "snow is white" is true. But it is surely not part of the meaning of "snow is white" that it is true.

(Rumfitt 2005, p. 446)

The point is that we need the qualifier 'simply as a speaker' in order to isolate the knowledge concerning the conditions for truth and falsity that is relevant to our understanding. Absent the qualifier, we pick out



knowledge that is irrelevant to one's understanding any given utterance of the sentence "snow is white".

In both McDowell and Higginbotham, then, the idea is to restrict the propositions about the truth-conditions of the utterance to those that are relevant to understanding the utterance, but stipulating that it is propositions of that character that are being provided. Just as McDowell relies on the stipulation that the truth-theory whose theorems can fill the lacuna in the specifications of meaning is interpretive, Higginbotham stipulates that the knowledge of truth conditions one needs for achieving the requisite level of understanding is knowledge one comes to possess about them simply by being a speaker of the language of the sentences which are uttered. That is, the knowledge that one comes to possess by virtue of one's being capable of understanding the utterance.

What are we to make of this? With regards to Higginbotham's proposal, at any rate, Rumfitt concedes that, "while this claim is surely true, it throws little light on the nature of rhetic understanding" (ibid.). The concession of truth is not, it seems, a major one. The thought seems to be that, claims of this kind cannot really be rejected, since they say something that is close to truistic. But once we retreat to the truistic statements, it is unclear what contribution is now being made to the explanatory project that such statements were employed in the service of. So if there is more to be explaining to be done here, then we must be able to say *something* more than what McDowell and Higginbotham have provided us. To see what else there might be to say, and what explanatory significance it might be thought to have, I'll take a brief

diversion through a complaint that Dummett has made about truth-conditional accounts that is in the same spirit of the comment here made by Rumfitt.

## V.

### Circularity

Rumfitt's complaint against Higginbotham can be seen as a more general worry for the kinds of truth-conditional cognitive semantical approaches that I've been discussing. In one sense, circularity is quite blatantly abroad, since what speakers are doing—centrally, their *saying* things—is meant to be explained by appeal to what those who understand the utterances in which they do this know. But when that knowledge is said to be of *truth-conditions*, to isolate the relevant knowledge about them, we need to appeal to what they know, simply by virtue of knowing what it is that the speaker is saying.

Michael Dummett recently raised an objection against truth-conditional forms of cognitive semantics that, I think, in its essentials, is the same complaint that Rumfitt makes against Higginbotham. It occurs in a response to some criticisms that McDowell has of a different problem that Dummett thought he saw in the truth-conditional approach—again, one that locates in such an approach a vicious circularity, but of a slightly different character.

V. a.

### Dummett's Complaint

Dummett had originally complained that, to the question of what understanding consists in, truth-conditional approaches provide only specifications of propositional knowledge (see, for example, Dummett 1998). That is, to the question: “in what does understanding (an utterance of) a sentence consist?”, the truth conditional approach returns the answer, “it consists in knowledge that ...” (where the gap is filled by some proposition—one that suitably characterises the truth-condition of the (utterance of) the sentence in question). The issue here is not so much what fills the gap (as has been my primary concern in this chapter), but that the truth-conditional approach thinks that *this* is the gap that needs filling. What Dummett thinks is needed is an attribution of some kind of practical knowledge, ‘knowledge-how’ or capacities, in addition to whatever propositional knowledge is required to account for linguistic competence.<sup>95</sup> In the absence of the account providing such information it must rely on the idea that what the knowledge that one who understands an utterance possesses consists in, is their knowing that it is true under certain conditions, where grasp of what those conditions are already requires knowing what is said in the course of the utterance. As a result, the attributions of propositional knowledge that the truth-conditional account provide, according to Dummett, “beg the question spectacularly” (2007, p. 371). It is, for Dummett, an appeal to knowledge, the very possession of which is being attributed to one who achieves rhetic understanding; in other words, it is an attempted

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<sup>95</sup> This is, at any rate, the position that Dummett occupies from his (1993d) onwards.

explanation of something by way of an appeal to the very thing to be explained.

McDowell responds to this complaint by locating something that a theory of the kind he favours does say of practitioners of the practice of language use what they are able to do—namely, express thoughts:

[Dummett's] argument starts from the claim that a truth-conditional conception of meaning cannot equate understanding a sentence with being able to do anything. [...] But [...] the claim is false. [U]nderstanding a sentence can be equated with being able to use it to express a thought—the thought it is enabled to express, given the way the language works, by the expressions that compose the sentence and how they are put together.

(McDowell 2007, p. 356)

Since understanding an utterance of a sentence is, in part, to be able to use that sentence to express a thought, truth-conditional accounts do say something about what those who understand the language are able to do. Accordingly, the truth-conditional theorist need not rely on *purely* propositional knowledge in setting out what one who understands utterances knows. McDowell thinks that the appeal to such a capacity provides all that is needed to falsify *this* accusation of circularity.

It is Dummett's response to this retort that I'm interested in. Dummett thinks that what McDowell has really done here is make perspicuous how tight the circle is. Since (1) what understanding an utterance of an

indicative sentence is said to consist in is one's being capable of 'expressing a thought' with it, and (2) since what it is to express a thought with an indicative sentence is to utter the sentence knowing what it can be used to say, then (3) what understanding an (utterance of) a sentence consists in is knowing what it has been used to say. If *what is said* in uttering something was meant to be elucidated by appeal to what those who understand such utterances know, then the claim is, in effect, that *what is said* in uttering something is what one who knows what is said knows. Dummett remarks that "this is not the circle to which I was originally referring, but it shows just as well how truth-conditional theorists argue" (2007, p. 370).

Dummett's own reaction to this is to make some prodigious demands on cognitive semantical approaches, allowing very few conceptual resources to be employed in the metalanguage, in setting out what it is that speakers do in course of their uttering things. But I'm going to avoid entering into a discussion here of Dummett's own views on this point because what is interesting, at least from my point of view, is that, for all the similarities in the complaints the Dummett and Rumfitt raise, Rumfitt's proposal doesn't seem to move us any further in the explanatory project, *if* such a project is to be advanced by non-circular accounts of meaning (saying) and understanding. And that is despite the fact that what Rumfitt provides us with *is* a characterisation of a capacity that is supposed to say in what our understanding utterances consists. What, then, if any thing, does Rumfitt's account provide that the truth-conditional accounts cannot?

V. b.

Circular Explanation

If theories of truth can be employed in theories of locution then what they do is allow one to specify what rhetic things a speaker does on the basis of the phatic things that they do. Since, or so I've argued, the rhetic things that we do are tied to the rhetic intentions that accompany our performing our phatic acts, such specifications should allow for one to provide a description from which a speaker's rhetic intentions—their intentions *to say such-and-such*, in the indicative cases—can be derived. The manner in which the truth-conditional theorists, as I have represented them, attempt to do this, is by relying on the notion of an interpretive truth theory—namely, one that is suited to capturing what the speaker is saying. By then stipulating that understanding consists in one's possessing knowledge equivalent to one's knowing the theorems of an interpretive truth-theory, and knowing that it is interpretive—i.e. to know what one is expected to know, simply by virtue of understanding the utterance, about its conditions for truth and falsity—they secure the connection between knowledge of truth conditions and knowledge of what's said.

What Rumfitt's proposal can provide further information on is the basis upon which one is expected to know what one does about the conditions under which an utterance is true, simply by virtue of understanding it. Being capable of making the kinds of inferences that he isolates *is* what one is expected of one, simply by virtue of understanding the utterance. When one enjoys rhetic understanding of such an utterance, one is

expected to know what one does about its conditions for truth and falsity *because* there is an expectation that the speaker has, one met by one's being capable of making the quasi-inferences at the heart of Rumfitt's proposal. That is, one's being capable of (quasi-)inferring  $p$  from  $u$  is true,  $u$  is true from  $p$ ,  $\neg p$  from  $u$  is false, and  $u$  is false from  $\neg p$ , is what explains why it is interpretive truth theories that serve to capture what a speaker is saying, when they produce an utterance to that end.

The appeal to the schematic ' $p$ ' keeps us in Dummett's circle. That stands in place for what would usually be thought of as the content of the utterance, or the thought that it is used to express. There is a further question to be asked, namely, why does one who achieves rhetic understanding of an utterance possess *that* inferential capacity, as opposed to any other? That is, what explains the fact that one who understands an utterance,  $u$ , of a speaker in which they say that  $p$ , is capable of inferring  $p$  (rather than  $q$ ) from the premise that  $u$  is true? The answer that might be returned is that it is that one, as opposed to any other, because that is what the speaker said. Then, of course the circle has been closed again, because, when we try to explain what it is for a speaker to have said that  $p$ , we are relying on the idea that one who understands the utterance with which they do this, and that appeals to a capacity to infer precisely that things are as the speaker says them to be, from the premise that they have uttered truth (amongst the other things).

But circles are only a problem when they are vicious, and, one might suppose, the circle that is created by truth-conditional accounts is not vicious. That conclusion is borne out by the fact that the straight truth-

conditional approach is already able to boast of being capable of explaining the productivity that we display in our speech and understanding. By committing to the fact that the theory reflects the cognition of those capable of understanding the utterances, the view can allow for the compositional nature of the theory to serve the purpose it is ideally suited for—namely, showing how it is that we are capable of speaking and understanding a potential infinity of distinct sentences (used to do an indefinite number of things), from a finite stock of meaningful words and modes of combination of those words (something that, we saw, Davidson was unable to do).<sup>96</sup>

That suffices to show that *some* explanatory resources are provided, even if the account is circular at the point of specifying what's said in the course of a performance of given utterance of an indicative sentence (with which the speaker says something). The question is whether Rumfitt's proposal provides anything which the truth-conditional account does not.

What more might be gleaned from Rumfitt's proposal, I think, is something I have already gestured at, and can be brought out when we reconsider the Foster problems that beset Davidson's account. The McDowell/Higginbotham strategy for dealing with such problems is to retain the idea that truth-theories can be employed, but concede that truth-conditional accounts alone cannot provide what Foster showed is

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<sup>96</sup> The usual tactic is to appeal to something like 'tacit knowledge'. This is a notion that is often treated with not inconsiderable disregard, though, a plausible psychological explanation of what such attributions might come to can be found in Peacocke (1986) and Davies (1987).



missing. They then simply stipulate possession of the knowledge that is required for what is missing to be supplied. Rumfitt's response, on the other hand, is to locate what it is that missing from such accounts—that is, he locates what such stipulations provide us with, beyond what is provided by the interpretive truth-theories themselves—and tie understanding to that missing component. This is an important shift in emphasis, and provides added explanation of what it is to perform given acts with one's utterances.

What Rumfitt gives us is a statement of what it is about the truth and falsity of an utterance, with which a speaker says something, that we are expected to know, simply by virtue of understanding it. For any proposition that we choose, unless knowledge of that proposition results in one's being capable of making the kinds of quasi-inferences that concern Rumfitt, possessing that knowledge cannot be what understanding that utterance consists in. What that goes to show, is precisely that what our understanding consists in is our capacity to make inferences of the kind that Rumfitt isolates. In other words, it is in virtue of this that his proposal can be employed to explain is *why* it is that what is stated by an interpretive truth-theory, on its own, is not what one knows in understanding an utterance with which something is said by a speaker.

## VI. Conclusion

I have take myself to have shown that Rumfitt's proposal can provide explanation of what it is to understand others' utterances where its rivals cannot. Though a certain circularity remains in what we have ended up with, I hope to have borne out to some degree something that David Wiggins says, (actually in connection with an employment of truth-theories in the style of McDowell) when he says that "simple circularity as such is not inimical to philosophical enlightenment" (Wiggins 1992, p. 75). With this observation, together with a reminder that the approach serves to underpin a central way in which, I have argued, we acquire knowledge from what others tell us, I conclude my defence of the conception of rhetic understanding that Rumfitt's proposal provides.

# Conclusion

In Chapter 1 I argued that we should accept that there is such a thing as irreducibly testimonial knowledge; that is, a kind of knowledge that one can acquire from a knowledgeable source, even when one does not have a conclusive inductive argument for the belief that the speaker uttered truth. I showed that views that agree that we can acquire knowledge of this kind from what others tell us tend to accept what I called ‘the enabling principle’. This principle says that one must have a sufficiently epistemically supported belief that the speaker uttered truth in order for one to acquire the knowledge that a speaker can make available by speaking knowledgeably. I tried to show that the enabling principle is strictly optional; given the epistemic dependences that non-reductionism *as such* is committed to, further argument is needed to show that there are restrictions on our acquiring testimonial knowledge beyond whether knowledge has been present at some appropriate point in the testimonial chain. The absence of such an argument opens up the possibility that there are no restrictions of the kind imposed by the enabling principle on when we can acquire irreducibly testimonial knowledge.

In Chapter 2 I presented my own account of how it is that we can acquire knowledge from others that is not restricted by a substantive

enabling principle. I said that a speaker makes available irreducibly testimonial knowledge to their audience by *voicing knowledge*. One voices knowledge that  $p$  when knowledge that  $p$  (one's own, or another's) contributes in the required way in a causal explanation of why one produced one's utterance. I defended the claim that, so long as a speaker in fact voices knowledge that  $p$ , then their audience can come to know that  $p$  by believing the speaker, regardless of what reasons they initially had to think that the speaker uttered truth or falsity. I motivated this by critiquing Richard Moran's epistemology of testimony. I considered some possible objections, and offered some possible responses.

In Chapter 3 I showed that the causal explanation of a speaker's linguistic behaviour will also appeal to expectations that the speaker has of their audience; expectations that they will have understood what speaker has done in so speaking. Employing a framework given to us by Austin about what sorts of things we do in speaking, I gave an interpretation, modelled on the one given to us by Jennifer Hornsby, of what kinds of things his classifications pick out. I conceived of utterance understanding in terms of audiences meeting these expectations, where rhetic understanding is what is required for the primary requirement of success in our communicative endeavours to be met. One achieves rhetic understanding by recognising what rhetic thing the speaker thereby means to be doing. This means that rhetic acts are the basic communicative acts.

In Chapter 4 I defended Ian Rumfitt's proposal about what it is to achieve rhetic understanding, which conceives of it as a state of

possessing capacities to make inferences specific to the kinds of acts that speakers' (mean to) perform with their utterances. I responded to an objection that Guy Longworth has raised, showing how the account can accommodate the fact that rhetic understanding provides one with the capacity to make judgements about what is said in such a way that it does not require prior non-rational acceptance or rejection that things are the way the speaker says them to be. I ended by showing how it is that Rumfitt's proposal can sustain the epistemology of testimony that I defended in Chapter 2.

Finally, in Chapter 5, by applying this picture of understanding to some historic debates in which the notion has featured, I have highlighted its explanatory advantages over some rivals. In particular, I showed that what Rumfitt's proposal provides, where its rivals cannot, is an explanation of why it is that knowledge of interpretive truth-theories is insufficient for understanding what rhetic things speakers are doing with their utterances.

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