COMMITMENTS AND SPEECH ACTS

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ABSTRACT

The utterance of a sentence in a context is not sufficient for the performance of a speech act. Theories of speech acts can be organized in terms of what must be added. Roughly Austinian theories add rules (or conventions) which govern an utterance in the performance of a speech act, and are shared by hearers in communication. Roughly Gricean theories add the expression of intentional states of speakers, and their recognition in communication by hearers. Gricean and Austinian theories have their respective strengths and weaknesses. Recently, Alston has proposed an interesting variant in the Austinan tradition, a theory which emphasizes the "normative stance" taken by a speaker with respect to the utterance of the sentence. Alston thinks that this notion can replace the expression of intentional states of the Gricean tradition. At least three explications of such a normative stance have been offered, including Alston's. Only one of these is promising and it is possible to argue that on that construal, expressing an intentional state in uttering something and taking a normative stance in uttering something, are equivalent notions. The really hard work is determining what undertaking a commitment or responsibility amounts to. That we must leave to another occasion.

1. Introduction

Frege (1892, 1918) suggested that assertoric sentences (as well as yes-no questions) contain a "force" and express a "thought". The thought expressed is the result of fitting argument names with their attendant senses to function-names with their attendant senses. Assertoric force is the manifestation of a judgment that the thought expressed is true. Both assertoric and question force is "contained" in the form of the sentence, and is manifested when speaking "with the requisite seriousness". Frege also extended this idea to wh-questions and imperatives (which express "commands"), but these areas remained undeveloped, probably because

such sentences, for Frege, do not express thoughts.[1] Non-assertoric sentences and their uses dropped out of philosophy of language during the period of Logical Atomism (middle Russell, early Wittgenstein) and Logical Positivism, and interest in them may be traced to when Wittgenstein exchanged the picture theory of representation for the idea that speaking a language is importantly similar to making moves in "language games" (1933/1958), as well as his later (1953) discussion of "uses of language" and "meaning as use". There are two major traditions in philosophical approaches to speech act theory. First there are the more or less "Austinian" approaches, which rely on rules and/or conventions. Here we find Searle (1969, 1979), Searle and Vanderveken (1985), Vanderveken (1990), and Alston (2000). Second, there are the more or less "Gricean" approaches, which rely on propositional attitudes. Here we find Strawson (1964), Schiffer (1972), Holdcroft (1979), Bach and Harnish (1979).[2]

2. The Austinian Paradigm

For Austin (1962), the target of analysis was "the total speech act in the total speech situation". He had a lot more to say about the former than the latter. Although for Austin, speech acts are both events of producing pieces of language, "vocables" (speaking), and types of full-fledged doings (actions), Austin (1962) had almost nothing novel or constructive to say about speaking, beyond vague allusions to speech sounds, traditional grammar, and even more obscurely, meaning, sense and reference. He also had almost nothing to say about the nature of successful communication (or how it is achieved) beyond some brief remarks on illocutionary "uptake". Indeed, the impression left is that communicative uses of language figure less prominently in Austin's theorizing than ceremonial uses of language. It was the description of the

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[1] See Harnish (2001) for further discussion.

[2] Actually, Bach and Harnish are a mixed case. Though the central theme is Gricean, there are Austinian notes, such as the retention of the locutionary-ilocutionary distinction, and the recognition of heavily "conventional" illocutionary acts.

speech event at various levels of abstraction and interaction (the various senses in which "saying is doing") that fascinated him, especially the levels of the illocutionary and the perlocutionary.[3] He never satisfactorily distinguished these categories, and could not even come up with a slogan for the illocutionary.[4] He resorted instead to giving examples, some generalizations, and a few difficult-to-interpret comments such as "a judge could tell", "performed by conforming to a convention", "can be made explicit by the performative formula". Perhaps the closest he came to characterizing illocutionary acts in general is with his doctrine of "felicity conditions", originally fashioned for the performative side of the performative-constative distinction. But even here only "misfires" capture conditions necessary for the successful performance of the acts, "abuses" merely render the act defective. And beyond a few illocutionary acts such as assertion and promising, Austin had little to say about success conditions on illocutionary acts.[5] Austin, in fact, gives at least the appearance of being more concerned with speech acts *as acts*, embedded in social and physical contexts, than *as speech*. These short-comings indicate why some speech act theorists turned away from the Austinian paradigm.

3. Problems with the Austinian Paradigm

In the Austinian paradigm:
1. (From above) There was no analysis of a "convention" that could ground the Austinian conception of an illocutionary act (and so

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[3] Originally of course at the level of the performative vs the constative, before the former swallowed the latter.

[4] Locutions were characterized in terms of "saying in the full normal sense of saying" and in terms of being produced with a "definite sense and reference". Perlocutions were characterized in terms of the "effects on the thoughts and feelings" of the participants.

[5] In fact, Austin labors through parts of various chapters to find criteria to *distinguish* illocutionary from perlocutionary acts, and fails to his satisfaction.

differentiate it from perlocutionary acts), so there was no (theoretical) characterization of the illocution.

2. There was no coherent, principled taxonomy of illocutionary acts based on their nature.

3. There was no integration of illocutionary acts with the nature of successful linguistic communication.

4. Related to this, there was no explanation (or even an explanation schema) of why speakers would utter what they utter, given what they wanted to communicate, or how hearer's could understand speakers, given what they utter and the context in which they utter it.

5. There was no serious attempt to relate illocutionary acts to the detailed structure of a language,[6] hence no explanation of how speakers could perform (and hearers could understand) an unbounded number of novel illocutionary acts.[7]

From Austin (and Austinians) to Grice (and Griceans) there was a change in the *focus* of concern with speech acts. It was now not as *interesting* whether or not marriage is infelicitous if the groom doesn't kiss the bride. What *is* interesting is how communicating with language works when illocutionary acts are involved; how we *explain* facts of language use, not just *describe* them. And given that the paradigm of psychological explanation at the time was "belief-desire" psychology[8], the stage was set for Griceans. Griceans thought they could overcome the limitations of the Austinian paradigm in a principled way; they thought that the various limitations were not accidental, but connected, and they attempted to formulate a conception of language, illocutionary acts, and communication that would avoid those inadequacies.

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[6] Lecture VI contains some informal remarks on various "primitive devices in speech", such as mood, tone of voice, connecting particles, whose role has been usurped by the explicit performative.

[7] On the present usage an illocutionary *act* consists of an illocutionary *force* plus a (usually propositional) *content*.

[8] Perhaps better described as "propositional attitude" or "intentional state" psychology.

4. The Gricean Paradigm: Expressed Attitude Theory of Illocutionary Acts (EA-TIA)

Griceans dealt with the above inadequacies by going "internal" (each in their own way).[9] One version of the Gricean paradigm, due to Bach and Harnish (1979), argues that Grice is roughly right that communicative intentions can be analyzed in terms of having (and if successful, recognizing) complex propositional attitudes. Suppose a central class of illocutionary acts is communicative in nature, and suppose that the performance of illocutionary acts in this class can be defined in terms of the propositional attitude expressed by the speaker, and the understanding of such communicative acts can be defined as the recognition of such propositional attitudes by the hearer. Finally, suppose that the recognition of such expressed propositional attitudes on the part of the hearer is guided by a shared system of inference strategies, presumptions, and contextual information, all stated in terms of propositional attitudes. Given this, the way is at least open to accomplish some of the things alluded to in 1-5 above:

1'. Illocutionary acts can be defined, and so differentiated in principle, from perlocutionary acts.

2'. Kinds of (communicative) illocutionary acts can be defined in terms of the kinds of attitude(s) expressed, and so be based on their nature.

3'. Successful illocutionary communication can be characterized as the recognition of the expressed propositional attitude, and the intention to communicate is having that recognition intended.

4'. Psychological explanations, which connect peoples beliefs and desires to their intentions to act, could now be applied to illocutionary communication.

5'. Linguistic structure can be seen as encoding certain pieces of information relevant to, though not usually determinative of, illocutionary force and content. Given (mutually believed) contextual information, the hearer can unify language and context to inductively

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[9] We borrow the terminological contrast "external" vs "internal" from the theory of content, but we are applying it here strictly to the theory of force. We find certain forms of externalism with respect to content quite plausible.

infer the speakers communicative intent and hence the (communicative) illocutionary act performed.

These are not insignificant virtues, especially to philosophers. Again, if (communicative) speech act theory could be stated in the vocabulary of propositional attitudes, that would have a "metaphysical" benefit – no commitment to high-level entities and concepts such as "conventions". And it would have a concomitant "epistemological" benefit – putting communicative uses of language within the reach of traditional psychological explanations.

5. Expressing-the-Belief-that *P*

The notion of expressing a belief that we have been working with is a (philosophically) intuitive one. We have not attempted to analyze it. The notion has appeared in speech act theory as a "generalization" about speech acts (Searle 1969, Harnish 1976), as a specific category of speech acts (Searle 1975, Alston 2000), and as the basic relation between language and (communicative) illocutionary acts (Bach and Harnish 1979, Kemmerling 2002).

Searle
Searle (1969) contains one of the first appearances of the notion of 'expressing an attitude' in speech act theory, here formulated within the framework of his constitutive-rule theory of speech acts:

(E-GEN) "Whenever there is a psychological state specified in the sincerity condition, the performance of the act counts as an *expression* of that psychological state." (ibid, 65)

Harnish
Harnish (1976) discusses generalization (E-GEN) and attempts to formulate a conception of "expressing" that does not rely on the "counts as" locution, in part because "counts as" might trivialize the claim, by turning it into a contextual definition of "expressing", or it might make expressing a matter of convention. Harnish notes (footnote 57) that there

is an "achievement" and a "non-achievement" use of "express".[10] On the achievement use in general, expressing is making "outer", overt, or manifest, something that is otherwise "inner" – as when one might express one's anger[11], or desire for chocolate. Logically, expressing an attitude on the achievement use entails having the attitude. On the non-achievement use, the entailment does not obtain, and one need not have the attitude one expresses. The notion Harnish was trying to capture was the non-achievement, non-entailing use.[12] Harnish (1976) offers the following (Gricean) reconstruction of (E-GEN):[13]

(E-GEN')   [where Φ is a speech act and Ψ is a propositional attitude] If there is a psychological state Ψ mentioned in the sincerity conditions of Φ-ing, then Φ-ing *expresses* that state Ψ if S Φ-s and:
(i) If H were aware that S had Φ-ed, then
(ii) Probably H would conclude that S was in Ψ, at least partly on the basis of the awareness in (i). (380)

How might (E-GEN') have come about, how might it be sustained? Harnish proposes the following possible reconstruction (380-1). First suppose that a certain generalization is true in a community:

(G)   People usually believe (want, intend to do, ... Ψ ...) what they state (request, promise, ... Φ ...) (381)

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[10] See Vendler (1967) for further discussion of this and related distinctions.

[11] Notice that with some (mostly negative?) attitudes we have special words, such as to "vent" one's emotions, which signal the entailment. If one vents one's anger (at the fact that P), frustration (with the fact that P) etc. one must be angry, frustrated etc.. The noun meaning of "vent" – a conduit for air from inside a building to outside – makes the verbal extension fairly natural. Interestingly, we cannot "vent" our beliefs, intentions or desires (though this latter is borderline).

[12] We might, following Alston (2000), distinguish expressing *the* belief that P (no entailment), from expressing *one's* belief that P (entailment).

[13] In Harnish (1976) it is called (EXP').

Suppose also that the following principle holds:

(P)   If Ψ is an immediate consequence of Φ and one is aware that Φ, then one will probably conclude that Ψ.[14] (380)

Given these generalizations, (E-GEN') could be sustained by the reasoning:

[1]   Suppose that S has Φ-ed.[15]
[2]   Suppose H were aware that S had Φ-ed.
[3]   Suppose S believed (G).
[4]   Then H would probably conclude that S was in Ψ, at least partly on the basis of 2 (from above, (P) and (G)).
[5]   So we have it that given (P) and (G), then if 2, then 4.
[6]   But this is sufficient for (E-GEN').

One limitation of (E-GEN') is, of course, that it is an attempted reduction of Searle to naturalist Gricean notions of propositional attitudes and rationality, and is only an analysis of *expressing* simpliciter given those assumptions.

Bach and Harnish
Bach and Harnish (1979) give a preliminary characterization of "expressing" an attitude in terms of an utterance providing reasons for believing S has the relevant attitude (Where "R-intend" is "reflexively intend" i.e. intend that the intention be recognized):[16]

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[14] "For the purposes of the argument it is sufficient that Q is an immediate consequence of P if Q is a logical consequence of P, and Q may be inferred from P by a single intuitively correct principle of inference (like simplification or *modus ponens*)." (380)

[15] We assume this includes supposing the speech act Φ has the relevant sincerity condition.

[16] See Carr (1980), Bach (1981) and Siebel (2003) for further discussion of this proposal.

> For *S* to *express* an attitude is for *S* to R-intend the hearer to take *S*'s utterance as reason to think *S* has that attitude. (ibid, 15)

As we will see, the Bach and Harnish notion of express*ing* (a general relation between a speaker and a propositional attitude) should not be confused with the particular illocutionary category of express*ives* to be found in Searle and Alston.

Malcolm
According to Malcolm (1991), contra Searle (and Bach and Harnish) it is far from generally true that if one makes an assertion that *P* one expresses "a" belief that *P* – it *can* be true, but "it depends on the circumstances" (160). Where Searle, or Bach and Harnish might want to say that in asserting e.g. "It is raining" the speaker expresses the belief that it is raining, Malcolm wants to say things like this [suppose John is looking forward to a family picnic]:

> On the appointed day he looks out the window and exclaims 'It's raining'. His utterance would be an expression of bitter disappointment ... (160)

Likewise:

> If a man in a queue says to his neighbor 'You're standing on my foot' his words would probably express indignation. (160)
> If a person says 'My neighbors are constantly spying on me' that would in certain circumstances be an expression of paranoia ... (161)

From these we can see two things. First, Malcolm is reluctant to count beliefs and other cognitive or intentional states as what is expressed, preferring instead to limit expressing to emotional states or mental disorders. Second, Malcolm seems willing to hold that "expressing" something, e.g. a belief, entails having that belief:

> If Paul does not believe that *P*, then stating that *P* is not an expression of *his* belief that *P*. Searle has run afoul of the ordinary use of 'express' and 'expression'." (163, emphasis added)

But Malcolm recognizes only the achievement sense of "express" (as marked above in Harnish, 1976), whereas in the sense in which constating "expresses" belief it is *the* belief that *P*, not *the speaker's* belief that *P*. Likewise for the general case of expressing *an* attitude, that than expressing *the speaker's* attitude. We return to this issue later.

Kemmerling
Kemmerling (2002) also takes up Searle's notion of expressing a belief.[17] He too wants to analyze the non-achievement use of "express", "but it should be stronger than the concept of merely producing evidence." (84) Kemmerling does not argue for this condition, but proceeds to try to supply such an analysis:

> (1) In doing x S expresses the Ψ that P = In doing x, S does something which is (incontestably) *cp*-analytical of his Ψ-ing that P. (84)

What is it to be '*cp*-analytical'[18]? Kemmerling elaborates as follows:

> Consider a generalization like the following:
> (UG) For all subjects y of a population P, if y performs an action of type X, then y Ψ-s that P.
> I shall call such an unqualified generalization *cp*-analytical if it is false as it stands but can be turned into a conceptual truth by adding nothing but a bunch of normality qualifications. So (UG) is *cp*-analytical if the following or something like it (something containing even more normality qualifications, but nothing else) is a conceptual truth:
> (QG) If a normal person in normal circumstances performs an action of type X, then *ceteris paribus* he Φ-s that P. (84)

Kemmerling goes on:

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[17] He does not cite any of the previous discussion and in particular he does not cite the closely related proposal of Bach and Harnish (1979).

[18] He does not explicitly say what "cp" abbreviates, but it is probably *ceteris paribus* – see below.

> Let's go back to the right side of (1). So if *S* is a normal person ...
> then he produces ... *cp*-analytical evidence. To the extent in which
> everything relevant can be assumed to be normal, *cp*-analytical
> evidence is more forceful than evidence that is merely empirical ...
> But it still is defeasible evidence, as long as it is considered a
> possibility that something relevant may not be normal. (84)

This is not an advance on Bach and Harnish (1979). What is "normal"?
Kemmerling gives as an example:

> *S* says 'It may easily rain today'. If *S* is a normal speaker of English,
> then in making this utterance he produces *cp*-analytical evidence of
> his believing that it may easily rain today. (85)

But surely this is open to dispute. *S* could be a perfectly normal speaker
of English and be lying, speaking sarcastically (he lives in Arizona) or
testing a microphone (performing just an utterance act). None of these
activities are non-normal in any normal sense of 'normal', and there is
probably an unlimited number of further conditions that might disconnect
S's doing *x* from *S*'s Ψ-ing that *P*. "Normal" will not carry this weight (to
say nothing of the fact that what is normal can change, actually or
counterfactually).[19] Later Kemmerling adds:

> The best possible evidence ... for our ascribing to *S* the belief that
> it is raining is any old speech act on *S*'s part by which he expresses
> this belief ... [e.g.] ... 'It's raining' or 'I believe that its raining' ... he
> does the best anybody can do to express the belief that its raining.
> (86)

This may be the best *S* can do, but it is not good enough to make
Kemmerling's point, since *S* may be lying, sarcastic or performing merely
an utterance act. So again we do not have *cp*-analytical evidence, and if
this is the "best case" then we don't *ever* have *cp*-analytical evidence for

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[19] Although it violates Kemmerling's wording, perhaps it is "situations of
utterance" that are supposed to be normal, not the speakers. This might work
provided the above situations (lying, nonliteral, utterance act) *and any other
counterexample situation* could be ruled out as "non-normal". How does one do
that non-circularly, or short of stipulation?

expressing an attitude, and Kemmerling's analysis collapses into something "empirical" like Bach and Harnish (1979). In light of this negative result, we will continue to assume an intuitive notion of "expressing" a belief, with the Bach and Harnish (1979) explication in the background. It is still an open question whether or not a "reasons" analysis of expressing is, or can be made, strong enough (but without the unwanted entailment).

6. Problems with Expressed Attitude Theory of Illocutionary Acts (EA-TIA)

A number of theorists have doubts about the character of Gricean theories in general and (EA-TIA) in particular. Here are some worries:
1. That the notion of what is said is not necessary for the analysis of what illocutionary act is being performed (Alston 2000)[20].
2. That many "communicative" illocutionary acts can in principle be performed non-communicatively, and in fact that non-communicative uses are "basic" and communicative uses involve an additional communicative intention (Searle 1983, 1986; Alston 2000).
3. That not all illocutionary acts, at least as ordinarily understood, can be analyzed in terms merely of expressing a propositional attitude (Searle 1975; Alston 2000).
4. The notion of an illocutionary act is intuitively a single category, not a spectrum or disjunction of categories. That is, Austin (1962), Searle (1975) and Alston (2000) all present homogeneous theories of illocutionary acts, analyses of all illocutionary acts that draw on the same pool of concepts, and no distinction is drawn between those that are in some way "communicative" and those that are "institutional".[21] Strawson

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[20] Note that what is said plays a role in the communicative inference, according to Bach and Harnish (1979), but not in the characterization of (communicative) illocutionary acts.

[21] This needs a short qualification. Searle's "Declarations" have the distinction of two directions of fit and no sincerity condition, and in Alston's "Exercitives" the illocutionary act is merely "purported".

(1964) suggested a spectrum of conventionality, and Bach and Harnish (1979) sharply distinguished the two categories.

5. The notion of an illocutionary act sometimes (Searle) or always (Alston) involves normative notions such as "commitment", "taking responsibility for", etc., and these notions are not captured by expressed attitudes.

However, if expressing an attitude does not individuate (communicative) illocutionary acts, what does?

7. Normative Theory of Illocutionary Acts (N-TIA)

We will call any theory using notions from the family of concepts including "commitment", "responsibility", "blameworthy" etc. a *normative* theory of illocutionary acts (N-TIA). Normative theories of illocutionary acts involve the notion of *commitment*, or *taking responsibility* that certain conditions are satisfied. (In what follows we use these two versions of normative talk interchangeably). Notice that if illocutionary acts could be analyzed in terms of such commitments, that could solve all of the above problems:

1. It could bypass the notion of "what is said".
2. It is not essentially communicative.
3. Each illocutionary act might be analyzable in terms of conditions one is committed to.
4. The class of illocutionary acts might be unified by the notion of (undertaking a) commitment in uttering something, and distinguished from other acts by exactly what conditions one is committed to.

A major disadvantage of (N-TIA) is that the notion of commitment is a very high-level concept, one that is not easy to place in the scientific scheme of things, and for those with reductive urges, this is movement in the wrong direction.[22]

One prominent theory of illocutionary acts that places the notion of commitment center stage is contained in the work of Alston,

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[22] In a related context Alston suggests "resisting the seductive pull of reductionism", though such attempts would be "a great achievement ... [and] would make for greater ontological economy", these "have failed badly". (161)

summarized in his recent book (Alston 2000).[23] Whereas Searle (1969, 1975) invoked the notion of commitment in the analysis of some but not other illocutionary acts[24], Alston applies it across the board, generalizing it to the notion of a speaker taking a "normative stance" towards an utterance, and unpacking this in terms of "taking responsibility for" the satisfaction of a condition that *P* ('R-ing that *P*' for short). Ultimately:

> The utterance is made the illocutionary act it is ... not by any 'natural' facts about the speaker – his beliefs, perlocutionary intentions or whatever – but by a 'normative' fact about the speaker – the fact that he has changed his normative position in a certain way by laying himself open to the possibility of censure, correction, or the like in case the conditions in question are not satisfied ... An utterance is most basically made into an IA of a certain type by virtue of a normative stance on the part of the speaker. (70-1)

We will want to see if this claim can be sustained by pursuing such questions as: how is the normative stance related to expressing a propositional attitude and how are we to understand such a stance?

8. Three Accounts of Normativity: Desire-Independent-Reasons-For-Action, Taking-Responsibility-For, and Rule-Subjection

So far we have not questioned normative terms such as "commitment", "take responsibility for" and related notions.

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[23] This book is the culmination of about forty years of work on illocutionary acts. See for instance Alston (1964), (1974), (1987), and (1994).

[24] Searle (2001) sees such commitments everywhere: "just about every kind of speech act involves a *commitment* of some kind or other." (147) "It seems to be that we create desire-independent reasons pretty much whenever we open our mouths to talk" (168). "... in fact all of the standard forms of speech acts with whole propositional contents involve the creation of desire-independent reasons for action ..." (174).

Searle

Searle (2001, chapter 6) takes up the issue of the nature and creation of commitments etc. under the label of being a desire-independent reason for action (dira). He offers six conditions on an adequate account of being a dira, which include (170):

1. Giving a naturalistic account of what a dira is,
2. Specifying the apparatus that enables people to create a dira,
3. Saying how, within this apparatus, people do create such a dira,
4. Saying how rationality alone makes those reasons binding on the agent.

Searle summarizes his answers (179-80) as:

1'. What is a dira? Searle does not really say here. He just mentions its having:

> the capacity for second level intentionality where they can impose conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. (179)

Earlier, however, he did say that:[25]

> commitments are factive entities that meet our condition for reasons for action. A commitment has a propositional content and an upward direction of fit. (174)
>
> A commitment is the adoption of a course of action or policy (or another intentional content ...) where the nature of the adoption gives one a reason for pursuing the course. (175)

2'. "The apparatus we use for the creation of desire independent reasons for action is the set of constitutive rules for speech acts and their realization in the semantic structure of actual human languages." (179-80)

3'. "You create desire-independent reasons for action by imposing conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction." (180)

4'. "The commitments you undertake are binding on you because they are *your* commitments." (180)

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[25] It is not clear how a "factive entity with a direction of fit" can also be "the adoption of a course of action or policy". This looks like a category mistake – an entity being identified with an event.

These answers raise a number of questions that are not settled in the intervening discussion. We will just consider 3' as an answer to 3, and 2' as an answer to 2.[26] The basic point is probably 3', involving creating diras. Searle's illustration of this for language use is uttering "It is raining" intending to make the assertion that it is raining. Here most of the above pieces come into play:

> [1] But if he is ... actually *saying* that it is raining, if he actually *means* that it is raining, then he must intend that the utterance satisfy truth conditions ... the conditions of satisfaction ... that it is raining. (173)

> [2] That is, his meaning intention is to impose conditions of satisfaction (i.e. truth conditions) on conditions of satisfaction (the utterance). (173)
> And he is not neutral vis a vis truth or falsity, because his claim is a claim of truth. *That imposition of that sort of status function, of conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction, is already a commitment.* (173)

> [3] Why? Because the assertion was a free, intentional action of the speaker. He undertook the claim that it is raining and thus he is now committed to the truth of the asserted proposition. (173)

> [4] When he intentionally imposes conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction, in the manner of an assertion, he takes responsibility for those conditions being satisfied. *And that commitment is already a desire-independent reason for action.* (173)

> [5] All of these are the result of the constitutive rules for making assertions, and the speaker invokes those rules when he imposes conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction. The creation of the commitments creates desire-independent reasons for action, and the commitment is already built into the structure of the speech act ... But the commitment he makes will be satisfied only if the world really is the way he say it is, only if it is raining. (174-5)

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[26] We could well ask how 4' is even a shorthand answer to 4.

There are a number of puzzling features in this collection of ideas:

(i) Consider the recurrent phrase "(imposing) conditions of satisfaction on conditions of satisfaction" (cosocos), especially as it appears in [2]. The phrase "condition of truth (satisfaction)" appears to have two uses in this passage: as *truth-maker* (a piece of the world, the utterance) and as a *truth-requirement* (the truth condition that it is raining). If one attempts to impose the truth-making role on the truth-requirement, one gets the implausible result that the speaker's intention (in uttering "It is raining") is to impose the sate of affairs *that it is raining* on the utterance – whatever that would mean. We shall suppose that according to Searle, in imposing (cosocos) in this case involves imposing a certain *truth requirement* on the *utterance* of "It is raining", as when one utters it and says or means that it is raining.

(ii) But can even this be right? In what sense is a speaker "imposing" e.g. truth conditions on "It is raining"? Surely, as a piece of the language, it *has* the conditions of satisfaction it does as a function of its intrinsic meaning, context of utterance and (according to Searle at least) background information. What could an individual speaker *do* about that? This can be made more forceful by considering the case of sentences which are novel to the speaker and/or hearer. Suppose it is up to the speaker to impose such conditions, how would the hearer know what they are if they don't come from the publicly available information listed above? The upshot is that talk of "imposition" of (cosocos) is quasi-mysterious.

(iii) Exactly how does imposing (cosocos) create commitment? In [3] above we are just told that it *does*. This, in effect, just restates the problem.

(iv) Condition of adequacy 2 above requires specifying the "apparatus" that enables people to create diras, and 2' and [5] tell us that the relevant "apparatus" is the system of constitutive rules for speech acts. However, we are now in danger of an explanatory regress along the following lines: (a) in a normative theory of speech acts, we want to understand the (successful) performance of a speech act in terms of the speaker's commitment to certain conditions – that P – being satisfied. (b) So we want to know how such commitments get made in uttering something. (c) The answer is: they get made by performing the speech act in accordance with certain constitutive rules containing conditions that P. (d) But this just pushes the problem back to the question: how does speaking in

accordance with such rules to create a commitment to conditions that *P*?
Nothing in the above account answers that question.[27] One possibility,
which we will explore later, is that the very notion of *rule governed*
utterances brings with it the notion of commitment.

Our tentative conclusion is, then, that we do not *yet* have an
account of the nature of the commitment associated with a specific
speech act, nor an account of how that commitment is created in
performing a speech act.

Alston

Alston (2000) understands the "normative stance" mentioned earlier in
two related ways: as taking responsibility for a condition being satisfied
in making an utterance, and as subjecting an utterance to a rule. He gives
four candidate analyses:

D5   In uttering *S*, *U* R'd that *P* – In uttering *S*, *U* knowingly took on a
       liability to (laid herself open to) blame (censure, reproach, being
       taken to task, being called to account) in case of its not being that
       P. (55)

D6   In uttering *S*, *U* R'd that *P* – *U* recognized herself to be rightfully
       subject to blame, etc. in case of its not being that *P*. (55)

D7   In uttering *S*, *U* R'd that *P* – In uttering *S*, *U* knowingly took on a
       liability to being incorrect (wrong, out of order) in case of its not
       being that *P*. (57)

D8   *U* R'd that *P* in uttering *S* – in uttering *S*, *U* subjects his utterance
       to a rule that, in application to this case, implies that it is
       permissible for *U* to utter *S* only if *P*. (60)

Alston prefers D5 to D6 because: "it brings out that taking responsibility
for [its being the case that] *P* is something that one *does*." (55) Alston

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[27] One might suggest looking at the constitutive rules themselves for such
commitments. This works for some of Searle's analyses (e.g. promising and
perhaps asserting), but the notion of commitment does not appear in many other
sets of constitutive rules.

prefers D8 to D5-7 because it points to an answer to the question: what is required for the existence of a normative state of affairs? (58) According to Alston, normativity reduces to community acceptance:

(NCA) [T]he possibility of a normative state of affairs being initiated by *U*'s R'ing that *C* depends on the existence of a system of rules that is in force within a community that includes *U*. (58)

Such community-wide, "socially entrenched", rules are required if R'ing is to make certain kinds of reaction by others appropriate. (58) Alston sees D8 as "the most fundamental formulation" (63), and also as helping to bring out other aspects of R'ing, viz "I thereby ... 'represent' *P* as being the case ... in R'ing that *C*, I *purport to know that C*." (63) These are formulated as:

D9 *U* R's that *P* in uttering *S* – In uttering *S*, *U* purports to know that *P*. (63)

D10 *U* R's that *P* in uttering *S* – In uttering *S*, *U* represents the fact that *P* as being the case. (63)

In conclusion:

> Illocutionary acts are essentially what we may call *rule-subjection acts*, acts that essentially consist in subjecting a lower-level act to a certain rule. (63)

The important theoretical point here is that the notion of R'ing that *P* in uttering something (the "lower-level act") is being said to rest on (or be reduced to?) subjecting an utterance to a rule involving "*P*". We formulate this idea as Illocutionary Rule Subjection (IRS):

(IRS) *S* performed a certain illocutionary act (force + content) *F(P)* in uttering expression *e* iff *S* subjected his utterance to an illocutionary rule.

The big question now, of course, is: what kinds of rules are these? What do they look like? What would an example be? Alston defers these topics until the second half of his book. When one turns to the discussion of illocutionary rules, one finds that Alston wants them to do double-duty: (i) to provide a (normative) account of illocutionary acts and (ii) to provide an account of sentence meaning. Alston states such rules in terms of conditions on the utterance of particular sentences, having the form of Illocutionary Rules (IR):

(IR)   It is permissible to utter *e* iff *P*

Putting the above together we get the linking of normativity (taking responsibility) to rule subjection:

(NRS)   In uttering *e*, *S* takes responsibility for *C* iff, in uttering *e*, *S* subjects his utterance to a rule that implies that it is permissible for *S* to utter *e* only if *C* is the case. (ibid, 60)

Now, what does it mean to say that there is such an illocutionary rule? Alston realizes it cannot be that *S* consciously follows the rule, since nobody presently knows just what these rules are. These rules are "implicit" or "tacit" in some sense. Alston's Existence Criteria for such Implicit Rules relies on the notion of the behavior of the members of *S*'s community or society:

(ECIR)   [A] by-and-large regularity of doing *A* in circumstances *C* reflects the sway of a rule if and only if deviations from this regularity will generally evoke incorrectness judgments in members of the society who perceive it. (ibid, 258)

Before getting into problems with (NRS), note that we interpret (ECIR) as requiring that rule-governed behavior entails regular behavior. This, however, raises the problem of unuttered sentences – the problem that for unuttered sentences there is no regularity, hence either no rule can apply, or the notion of a rule is undefined. One way out would be to detach the notion of a rule (or its application) from the notion of a regularity, and allow a rule to be in place even when people do not act on it. Another way out is to associate each sentence with an illocutionary rule

primitively. This seems to be Alston's way, but it raises the problem of compositionality – how to explain our understanding of novel utterances, assuming (as Alston does) that understanding a sentence is grasping its meaning, and that the illocutionary rules give its meaning. Still another way is to try to define a "potential" regularity in terms of actual regularities. Perhaps a condition of the following form would be a start: one would utter x iff it were the case that P. Finally, perhaps most promising way out is to project regularities from uttered (parts of) sentences onto unuttered (whole) sentences containing them by means of principles of compositionality. This raises the question of what such compositionality principles might look like.[28]

In sum, Alston's project is to first (i) analyze illocutionary acts in terms of R-ing that P, then (ii) to analyze R-ing that P in terms of a socially characterized notion rule-subjection, and finally (iii) to propose a conception of those rules which can be both illocutionary and semantic. Both (ii) and (iii) have problems.[29]

To begin with, regarding (ii), the analysis of R-ing that P in terms of a socially characterized notion of rule-subjection, Alston's proposal runs up against numerous objections.[30] It seems possible to show that there are cases where S takes responsibility for a state of affairs, although there is no illocutionary rule in Alston's sense in virtue of which this is the case. There are at least two types of cases. *First*, conversational implicature (or nonliterality and indirection in general). Imagine a speaker, who by uttering "I will be in London" implies that he will not be able to attend a certain party. Now, in this situation, by uttering the sentence "I will be in London", S also takes responsibility for its being

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[28] This issue is taken up by Hawthorne (1990) and Lewis' (1992) reply. Lewis ends by adopting an "extrapolation" solution, similar in spirit to the above "compositionality" solution. Lewis notes Kripkenstein worries about alternative "bent" grammars, but seems to dismiss them, saying (in response to a worry of Schiffer's): "If not, then whenever we resort to extrapolation to answer questions about syntax and semantics we are engaged in risky speculation about the secret workings of the brain. This seems wrong" (1992, 110).

[29] We will not take up (i) here.

[30] See Plunze and Harnish (2004) for further discussion.

the case that he will not be able to attend the party. But there is surely no illocutionary rule to the effect that it is permissible to utter "I will be in London" only if S will not be able to attend the party, the reason being that it depends on the particular context of utterance whether S, by uttering this sentence, implicates conversationally that he will not be able to attend the party. Hence, if this context is not given, the truth of this state of affairs does not play a role. Therefore, there is no regularity to utter "I will be in London" only if it is the case that S will not be able to attend a certain party. So, even if one agrees that taking responsibility for something by uttering a certain sentence presupposes rules, it does not seem to follow that such rules are always illocutionary rules in Alston's sense. That is, of course, not to deny that taking responsibility for a conversationally implied state of affairs presupposes rules – perhaps the rule to mean that P only if P. *Second*, and more generally, it is not the case that taking responsibility for something implies a rule in the above "discriminative capacity" sense. Parents regularly and generally take responsibility for the feeding, housing and safety of their children. Does anybody think this has much to do with the disposition of members of one's society to make discriminative incorrectness judgements about them? Surely such judgments would be just symptoms of having undertaken a responsibility. We want to know what such undertakings amount to and in a way that the case of illocutionary acts can be seen to be a special case of acts in general. In contrast to what Alston wants to conclude, he was closer to the truth at the beginning. A speaker does not take responsibility for a certain set of conditions because his sentential act is subject to an illocutionary rule requiring it. Rather, S performs a certain illocutionary act because he takes responsibility for those conditions being the case.

Finally, regarding (iii) – Alston's conception of rules as both illocutionary and semantic – there are also problems.[31] There is a tension between these two roles, which Alston never successfully resolves, involving the "specificity" of most illocutionary acts and the "nonspecificity" of much sentence meaning.[32] Because of this, Alston's

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[31] See Harnish and Plunze (2006) for further discussion.

[32] Alston makes use of the construct "matching illocutionary act potential" to handle this tension.

illocutionary rules, where adequate to meaning, are too general to characterize most actual illocutionary acts, and where adequate to most illocutionary acts, are too specific for meaning.[33] Thus, D8 does not seem to be true, and the notion of R'ing that P is not reducible to illocutionary rule (a la Alston) submission. This of course leaves open the possibility that some other notion of illocutionary rule, one not tied to a theory of sentence meaning, might ground R'ing that P. But we do not have such a theory.

In light of these problems one might want to go back to D7 as the beginnings of an explication of the notion of taking responsibility for its being the case that P in the performance of an illocutionary act.

9. Expressing-the-Belief-that P and Taking-Responsibility-for its being the case that P

Although (EA-TIA) analyzes all (communicative) illocutionary acts in terms of expressing an attitude (and intending that attitude to be recognized), it is useful to focus on assertions and belief. Both Searle (1969) and Alston (2000) analyze the class of Assertives as essentially involving a normative notion – commitment to the truth of "P" (Searle), and taking responsibility for (the truth of) "P" (Alston), rather than as an expression of belief in "P". The contrast assumes that the notions of expressing *as a common denominator in all (communicative) illocutionary acts* and taking responsibility *as a common denominator in all (communicative) illocutionary acts* are not logically related. Alston (2000, 109-111) analyzes one particular category of illocutionary acts, "Expressives" in terms of taking responsibility for having a particular propositional attitude, but not all illocutionary acts. However, he does raise the issue of how general the category of Expressives might be. As he puts it at one point: "The Expressive category threatens to swallow up all the others." His response is two-fold. First, he requires Expressives *only* to express the proposition that P, they cannot contain any other

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[33] This is reflected in the fact that in Alston (2000), chapter 7, "determinable" (nonspecific) illocutionary acts get both R'ing and rule-subjection analyses, whereas "determinate" (specific) illocutionary acts get only R'ing analyses. The R'ing analyses are thus the most comprehensive.

condition. Second, Alston distinguishes (i) "expressing" as R'ing that *one
has the belief that P*, from (ii) "expressing" as R'ing *that P*.[34] The
illocutionary act of expressing a proposition is just R-ing that one has
that propositional attitude, whereas:

> It is in the second sense, but not in the first, that one expresses a
> belief whenever one R's anything whatever." (110)

So the upshot is that Alston sees Expressives as a category of
illocutionary acts involving just R'ing that one has a certain propositional
attitude, and such a category is coordinate with other categories of
illocutionary acts, such as Assertives and Directives. But (EA-TIA) does
not propose that 'expressing' (in the technical sense of R-intending the
utterance to be a reason for thinking the speaker holds the propositional
attitude in question) is a category of illocutionary act. Rather, its role in
(EA-TIA) is analogous to R'ing that *P* in (AN-TIA), where nobody
worries that there is a "category" of *undertaking responsibility* which
"threatens to swallow up" all other illocutionary categories.

We are, then, free to follow the idea that the two notions are linked
– perhaps there are logical relations between e.g. expressing the belief
that *P*, and taking responsibility for (the truth of) "*P*" and Alston says at
one point:

> ...R'ing that *P is* to express a belief that *P* in the second sense. (110
> emphasis added)

Let's made the ingredients of this explicit:

(E=C)   In uttering *e*, the relation of *S* expressing the belief that *P* =
             the relation of *S* taking responsibility for its being the case
             that *P*.

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[34] This appears to be the earlier "achievment" vs "non-achievment" distinction in
expressing. Searle (1991, 187) notes the distinction as between e.g. "John
expressed *the* belief that *P*" and "John expressed *his* belief that *P*".

A weaker, and perhaps more plausible, formulation would be the bi-conditional:[35]

(E ↔ C)   In uttering *e*, *S* is expressing the belief that *P* ↔ In uttering *e*, *S* takes responsibility for its being the case that *P*.

What might justify this connection? What Alston does say is that:

> If ... R-ing that *P* involves representing oneself as believing that *P*, there is some sense in which R-ing that *P* involves expressing a belief that *P*. In the case of assertion this impression can be reinforced by G. E. Moore's point that there is something self-defeating about conjoining a flat assertion that *P* with a denial that one believes that *P*. (2000, 110)
> I R whatever is required by the linguistic rule to which I subject my utterance. (ibid, 110-111)

And in the case of e.g. "The weather is turning cooler" the relevant rule requires that the weather be turning cooler, *not* that the speaker believes that the weather is turning cooler (ibid, 111). Why? Because, in part, it is unnecessary:

> Just by virtue of the requirement I have recognized, I am subject to blame for uttering my sentence without believing that the weather has turned cooler. For in that case I have deliberately produced the utterance without supposing (much less knowing or supposing with good reason) that the requirements of the rule are met. The rule is best construed as making an 'objective' requirement. It will then automatically lay on the speaker the requirement of seeing to it that the rule is followed, which means that the speaker at least justifiably believes that the original requirement is met. (ibid, 111)

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[35] More plausible because of questions about the nature of the identity in (E=C) i.e. what exactly is said to be identical, the two relations? And what are the identity conditions on relations? Are these just relations in extension (sets of ordered pairs), or must we take them as relations in intension (the two-place properties determining the sets of ordered pairs). If the latter, it is implausible that they are identical.

And in part it would be self-defeating:

> If one were to hold that whenever one R's that *P* one also R's that
> one believes that *P*, one would be launched on an infinite regress.
> (ibid, 111)

So it seems that, according to Alston, the connection between R-ing that
P and expressing the belief that *P* is rule-epistemic i.e. in taking
responsibility that *P* one needs evidence that *P* to apply the rule
legitimately. Intuitively, however, this just does not seem to be the heart
of Moore's paradox. The connection is more direct, it does not go
through having evidence for the legitimate application of some
illocutionary rule. This feels like a theoretical step backwards – cannot
we imagine a world just like ours, but where illocutionary acts were not
governed by rules, certainly not the kind of illocutionary rules Alston
proposes.[36]

One quick way of making such a connection might be to construe
e.g. belief as already having the notion of commitment to truth built into
it.[37] This cannot be general, however, since, as Searle himself notes,
desire does not have an analogous commitment to fulfillment built in.
And even in the case of belief, one might be nervous about the idea that
all beliefs involve such commitment. Perhaps when we deliberate and
(consciously) decide which view is right it does. But often we simply
have beliefs – they come to us, though we may work to arrange the
relevant evidence. If commitments must be *undertaken*, then many
beliefs do not involve commitments.

Let's try another direction. If *S*'s expressing the belief that *P* (in
uttering *e*) involves giving *H* a reason to think that *S* holds "*P*" true, then
one takes responsibility for those reasons being reasons for the truth of
"*P*". If this were sufficient for taking responsibility for the truth of "*P*",
then we would have the connection. However, it might be too fast to
conclude that if *S* takes responsibility for something being *a reason for*

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[36] See part II of Alston (2000). Plunze and Harnish (2004), Harnish and Plunze
(2006) discuss this proposal in detail.

[37] Searle (2001, 119-120) says "a belief is a commitment to truth, and when I
have a belief I am committed to all of its logical consequences".

the truth of "*P*", then one takes responsibility for *the truth of* "*P*". This is because although *R* might be a reason for the truth of "*P*", *R*' might be an overriding reason for the truth of "not-*P*", and the speaker may have *R*' as well as *R* available.[38] Hence, the best we can do here is to say that the inference goes through in the absence of overriding reasons to the contrary. (We return to the issue of taking responsibility below).

A Potential Objection
However, there is at least one potential objection, which can be stated in the form of the "argument from degrees":

(AFD)   [1] expressing an attitude does not come in degrees,
         [2] undertaking responsibility for having an attitude does come in degrees,
         _____
         [3] So it is not the case that one undertakes responsibility for having an attitude only if one expresses that attitude.

There are a number of ways to deal with (AFD):
1. First, the connection between degree of commitment and strength of belief can be more indirect, and that opens the possibility that although high commitment might be mapped into notions like holding a belief, low commitment might be mapped into a weaker notion such as entertaining a thought. In other words, expressing a belief has a relatively high level of commitment, whereas expressing a thought corresponds to a lower level of commitment. This would preserve the overall ranking of commitments and expressions of attitude, but by reinterpreting the nature of the attitude correlated with the commitments. We do not have space to pursue this idea here.
2. Second, one might challenge the first premiss [1]. This could be done in two ways:

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[38] Suppose *S* asserts that *P* and *S* is lying (*S* does not believe that *P*) and *S* knows *H* knows that *S* is lying. *S* then has contextually overriding reasons to suppose *H* will not take *S*'s uttering *e* as a reason to think that *S* believes that *P* that supports the conclusion that *S* has a reason for supposing that "*P*" is true.

(i) The attitude expressed comes in degrees, or at least in levels e.g. strong, weak or marked: strong, weak, unmarked: neutral (neither strong nor weak).

(ii) Expressing might come in degrees in virtue of the fact that its analysis is in terms of providing *reasons*, and reasons can come in degrees, or at least levels e.g. good reasons, weak reasons, (and maybe neutral reasons?). Another way of approaching this might be to assign degrees of strength of commitment to just beliefs i.e. "weak" beliefs vs "strong" beliefs. It is not clear if this is more than terminological, so we do not pursue it here.

3. Challenge the second premiss [2] by pointing out that 'R-ing that P' does not work the same as 'commitment that P' – commitments do or can come in degrees, or at least levels: strong, weak (and perhaps neutral?). In short, (AFD) does not (yet) refute (E ↔ C), and it is still a contender for being true.

10. Conclusion

The idea that normative notions are central to speech acts was pioneered by Alston, and recently embraced by Searle. The view is often conjoined with a criticism of more naturalistic Gricean theories. One worry regarding normative theories is that the relevant normative notions are high-level – too high level for basic theorizing about language use. And we saw that such notions as "commitment", "taking responsibility" etc. do not in fact seem to be easily explicated in terms of desire-independent reasons for action or being subject to a speech act rule. They do, however, seem connected to notions of being liable to criticism and blame. However, we suggested, Gricean notions of expressing an intentional state are likewise liable. So normative theory might at this level be simply another way of describing the same illocutionary facts. If this is right (and more work is required to establish it) normative theorists will have to find other grounds on which to prefer normative theories to Gricean ones.

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Speech Acts and Conversation. Language Use: Functional Approaches to Syntax. Handout for EDUC 537 Educational Linguistics H. Schiffman, Instructor. Expressives: Speech acts that make assessments of psychological states or attitudes: greetings, apologies, congratulations, condolences, thanksgivings Verdictives: rankings, assessments, appraising, condoning (combinations such as representational declarations: You're out!) Locutions and Illocutions. Locutions: the utterance act. Sentences have a grammatical structure and a literal linguistic meaning; the bald, literal force of the act: what did the person say? (Not, what did the person mean?) Illocution: the speaker's intention of what is to be accomplished by the speech act. Learn about speech act theory and the ways in which words can be used not only to present information but also to carry out actions. Speech act theory has also been used in a more radical way, however, as a model on which to recast the theory of literature...and especially...prose narratives. What the author of a fictional work—or else what the author's invented narrator—narrates is held to constitute a 'pretended' set of assertions, which are intended by the author, and understood by the competent reader, to be free from a speaker's ordinary commitment to the truth of what he or she asserts.