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Intention and commitment in speech acts

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What is a speech act, and what makes it count as one kind of speech act rather than another? In the target article, Geurts considers two ways of answering these questions.¹ His opponent is intentionalism—the view that performing a speech act is a matter of acting with a communicative intention, and that speech acts of different kinds involve intentions to affect hearers in different ways. Geurts offers several objections to intentionalism. Instead, he articulates and defends an admirably clear and resolute version of the view that performing a speech act is a matter of undertaking a social commitment. Different kinds of speech acts, on his view, involve social commitments of different kinds.

My aim is to respond to Geurts on behalf of intentionalism. I'll argue that his objections aren't all that worrying (Section 3), that Geurts' view suffers from some quite serious problems that intentionalists don't face (Section 4), and that intentionalists can give a principled account of the ways that speech acts give rise to commitments (Section 5). First I will spell out the two opposing views (Sections 1–2).

1 Intentionalism

Intentionalism is the view that the central mechanism of human communication is intention recognition. To perform a speech act is to make an utterance with a communicative intention—an intention to produce a state of mind in one's addressee partly by revealing this intention to them.² Communication happens if

¹ There are other theoretical options as well. One might understand speech acts in terms of conventions (Austin 1962; Lepore and Stone 2015; Searle 1969), in terms of the expression of mental states (Bar-On 2004; Green 2007), in terms of the constitutive epistemic norms that govern them (Williamson 2000), or in terms of the functions for which they have been selected (Millikan 1998; Skyrms 1996). I will follow Geurts in ignoring these options here. For a fuller survey of the theoretical landscape, see Harris et al. (2018).

² The version of intentionalism that I outline here is the one that I defend elsewhere; see in particular Harris (2014, 2016, FC, M).

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the addressee, having observed the utterance and taken it as evidence, comes to understand what kind of effect the speaker intended to have on them. (Actually having the effect is another matter.)

Speech acts of different kinds involve intentions to produce different kinds of effects. I assert that Oslo is north of Copenhagen if I communicatively intend for my addressee to believe that Oslo is north of Copenhagen. I request that they fly to Stockholm if I intend for them to form an intention to fly to Stockholm. I ask whether they've ever been to Helsinki if I intend for them to form an intention to say whether they've ever been to Helsinki.

Intention recognition combines mindreading and practical reasoning—two cognitive capacities that are uniquely powerful in humans. Mindreading is our capacity to predict and explain other agents' behavior by inferring their mental states. We need this capacity to recognize others' intentions, but also to predict how our utterances will change others' states of mind given what we know about their beliefs. Practical reasoning is our capacity to form intentions by reasoning from our beliefs and prior intentions. Communicative intentions are both the product of practical reasoning about how to achieve our extra-communicative ends as well as inputs to further practical reasoning about what kind of utterance will get our point across. Psycholinguists have amassed significant evidence that we tailor our utterances to particular addressees, taking into account what we know about their background information and linguistic capacities.³

2 Geurts' commitment theory

A commitment, says Geurts, is a three-place relation between a person, a person, and a proposition. He annotates commitments using the schema $C_{a,b}p$, which means that “ a is committed to b to act in a way that is consistent with the truth of p ”. This also means “that b is entitled by a to act on p , and should b wish to act on p , and p turn out false, then b may hold a responsible for the consequences” (p. 4). Commitments “are social relations first and foremost, not psychological states: a can be committed to act on p without suspecting that he is thus committed, and indeed without even entertaining the possibility that p ” (p. 4).

Geurts holds that commitments may be either telic or atelic. An agent's telic commitments specify their goals whereas their atelic commitments do not. For example, if I have a telic commitment to the proposition that Shaquille O'Neill becomes president, then I am committed to this proposition as a goal. But if I have

³ See, for example, Brennan and Hanna (2009); Clark (1996); Clark and Carlson (1982); Clark and Marshall (1981); Clark and Schaefer (1987).

an atelic commitment toward the same proposition, I am committed to behaving as if this commitment is already true, or at least that it is inevitable.

A commitment may be to someone else, in which case $a \neq b$ in the schema $C_{a,b}p$, or to oneself, in which case $a = b$. Geurts calls the former ‘social commitments’ and the latter ‘private commitments’. Private commitments, it turns out, are just beliefs and intentions (or, at least, their normative aspects). If the commitment $C_{a,a}p$ is atelic, then it is (an aspect of) a ’s belief that p ; if it is telic, then it is (an aspect of) a ’s intention to bring about the truth of p . On the other hand, Geurts is quite explicit that social commitments are non-psychological social relations between people. This even includes telic commitments. Geurts insists that the sense of goal involved here needn’t be a psychological notion (p. 7, n.4).

To perform a speech act, according to Geurts, is to undertake a social commitment. To assert p is to undertake an atelic social commitment to p . To promise to ϕ is to undertake a telic social commitment that one will ϕ . To direct someone to ψ is to undertake a telic social commitment that they will ψ . On Geurts’ view, all other categories of speech acts turn out to involve one of these three kinds of commitments.

3 Geurts’ objections to intentionalism

3.1 Intentionalism and the development and evolution of mindreading

Geurts’ main problem with intentionalism is that it entails that children have a capacity for mindreading before they develop an ability to perform speech acts. Geurts thinks that this is an implausible prediction. He claims that “there are no working models of how children might learn to attribute mental states before they start dealing with speech acts” (p. 2), and that we don’t have an explanation of how mindreading could have evolved to be innate, either. These are empirical concerns, but Geurts doesn’t say what it is in the vast empirical literature that bears on this topic that leads him to be pessimistic.⁴

Geurts is right, of course, that we don’t have a good explanation of the childhood acquisition or evolutionary origins of mindreading. But the problem of explaining where our conceptual capacities come from is one of the most difficult challenges facing contemporary cognitive science, and there is nothing special

⁴ It is notable that Geurts has sometimes been a contributor to this literature in ways that are supportive to intentionalism (Geurts and Rubio-Fernández 2015; Rubio-Fernández and Geurts 2013).

about mindreading in this respect.⁵ The fact that we lack satisfying models of the childhood development or evolution of nearly any human conceptual capacities should not lead us to doubt that children acquire mindreading at a young age, any more than it should lead us to doubt the existence of their impressive capacities for facial recognition, numerical cognition, cross-modal object recognition, language acquisition, and so on.

The question, then, is not whether we can presently explain how infants acquire their mindreading capacities. It is whether the communicative abilities that we observe in children at each stage of development can be explained by their mindreading capacities (and related capacities and resources) at that stage. Notice that this is not an all-or-nothing matter: if mindreading or the cognitive resources needed to effectively deploy it develop gradually in infants, then intentionalists should expect their communicative abilities to develop on a corresponding schedule.

As of the early 2000s, things weren't looking good for this prediction. Children under four, whose use of language had already developed substantially, consistently failed the verbal mindreading tasks that had been standard since the 1980s (Wellman et al. 2001). Some argued that this posed a devastating problem to intentionalism (Breheny 2006). But then came the emergence of new, nonverbal experimental methods that found evidence for mindreading in young toddlers and even infants.⁶ There is not yet a consensus on how to explain the fact that young children fail verbal mindreading tasks but pass nonverbal tasks, but one popular answer is that infants possess the conceptual capacity for mindreading but haven't yet fully developed some of the cognitive resources needed to deploy it in adult-like ways.⁷ If these resources are themselves taxed by verbal tasks—something that intentionalism predicts, since it takes language-use to require mindreading—then this would explain why young children fail at those tasks despite already being half-decent mindreaders. This is not the only way to interpret the current evidence on childhood mindreading.⁸ But if it is correct, then young children may be good enough mindreaders to begin learning how to perform and interpret speech acts, even if we shouldn't expect them to communicate

⁵ On the difficulty of these challenges and two of the most exciting recent attempts to face up to it, see Laurence and Margolis (2002) and Carey (2009).

⁶ Buttelmann et al. (2009); Onishi and Baillargeon (2005); Southgate et al. (2007). For a survey of the evidence for mindreading in infants and toddlers, with an emphasis on goal detection, see Carey (2009, ch.5).

⁷ Carruthers (2013); Leslie (1994); Rubio-Fernández and Geurts (2013); Westra and Carruthers (2017).

⁸ I also don't mean to suggest that it is the only interpretation that is consistent with intentionalism, but just to use it as a promising example of how the literature might play out.

like adults. There is some evidence for this prediction, too: children become able to perform and interpret indirect speech acts later than direct speech acts; they become capable of engaging in and detecting deceptive communication even later; they master irony and non-literal speech later still; and their communicative abilities at various ages are correlated with what we know about their mindreading capacities and related cognitive abilities.⁹ There is also significant evidence that individuals with disabilities characterized by mindreading deficits also suffer from communicative deficits (Loukusa and Moilanen 2009).

None of this is conclusive evidence for intentionalism, of course. But I think it is safe to say that the scientific state of the art is consistent with intentionalism and gives us some reasons to be optimistic about the theory's empirical prospects.

3.2 Does Geurts Unify Conventional and Communicative Speech Acts?

A second advantage that Geurts claims for his approach is that he is able to offer a unified account of all speech acts. By contrast, intentionalists distinguish the communicative acts that they seek to theorize from conventional acts, such as those involved in marriage ceremonies or judicial proceedings, which can be performed only against the background of social conventions or institutions.

Geurts argues that his “commitment-based analysis applies to conventional and non-conventional speech acts alike” (p. 15). The psychological state of someone who finds a defendant guilty, participates in a ship-naming ceremony, or declares war are irrelevant to the success of these acts, he claims. “However, it is clear that each of these speech acts causes the speaker to become committed to act on the proposition expressed” (p. 14). For example, a judge who declares a defendant guilty of armed robbery “is expected to act on \llbracket the defendant is guilty of armed robbery \rrbracket ” (p. 14).

I think that this argument is wrongheaded. Committing to act in a way that is consistent with the truth of a proposition is generally not enough to perform a conventional speech act. If a and b are sufficiently deluded, a can undertake the commitment $C_{a,b}\llbracket a$ is married to $b\rrbracket$ without having gone through the relevant conventional procedure. As a result, a and b can act on the truth of $\llbracket a$ is married to $b\rrbracket$ all they want, but a 's act still won't have constituted a successful act of marrying someone. The same applies to Geurts' examples, all of which must be performed by someone who occupies the right social role in the right circumstances, and who may have to be in the right state of mind (for

⁹ See e.g. Bosco and Gabbatore 2017 and their literature survey.

example, not somnambulant or hallucinating). A conventional act can be performed only within the jurisdiction of a given social institution—one that defines the nature of the act itself. Looked at cross-culturally, marriage is at best a loose cluster concept. Not just the means for accomplishing it but the results—including the resulting commitments—vary enormously from one society to another.¹⁰ The same goes for acts of legal judgment, ship naming, and declarations of war. By contrast, although the linguistic means of asserting, directing, and questioning vary, the acts themselves seem to be cultural universals and needn't be performed against the backdrop of any one jurisdiction. One can assert or ask a question across international borders, but marriages and legal judgments are always relative to a given cultural or legal framework.

In short: performing a conventional speech act usually involves social relations that are considerably richer than Geurts' social commitments. It seems to me that a theory of speech acts should account for these differences. I therefore see Geurts' collapse of the distinction as a bug rather than a feature. By contrast, intentionalism gets the distinction right. Conventional acts can vary as much as the conventions on which their nature and performance depend, but communicative acts depend only on cognitive capacities that are universal to normal humans. Conventional acts are social kinds whereas communicative acts are natural kinds.¹¹

4 Some problems with Geurts' theory

4.1 Communication and information transfer

Invoking Austin and Wittgenstein, Geurts argues that exchanging information “is not the only thing” that “we seek to do by way of our linguistic interactions” (p. 12). He is quite right about this. As he emphasizes, we also seek to coordinate our future actions with those of others. This is the point of undertaking social commitments, Geurts thinks.

According to intentionalism, all of the aims of communication, including social coordination, are accomplished by means of information transfer—namely, a transfer of information about the speaker's intentions. To get you to adopt a plan that fits with mine, I might issue a directive. My goal is for you to form an intention

¹⁰ See, for example, Brown (2003) for an anthropological perspective on the enormous variation in what marriage amounts to in different cultures.

¹¹ Aside from the two objections to intentionalism that I have considered, Geurts also articulates a third, which is that intentionalists can't make sense of self-directed speech. I address this objection elsewhere (Harris FC), and so I won't consider it here.

that will influence your future action. My means to this end is for you to recognize that I intend for you to form this intention. Why does this work? Insofar as you are motivated to do what I intend you to do—whether this motivation stems from a desire to satisfy my preferences or from your recognition of my authority over you—your recognition of my intention gives you a new reason to comply with my directive.

Geurts denies that speech acts need involve any information transfer. His view entails that even a successful assertion needn't result in a change to the addressee's beliefs. If a successfully asserts p to b , the commitments $C_{a,b}p$, $C_{b,a}C_{a,b}p$, etc., will result, but Geurts maintains that these commitments can exist unbeknownst to a and b . Indeed, even if a 's commitment $C_{a,b}p$ becomes common ground, Geurts' view is consistent with the possibility that a and b will at no time be aware of this fact. The problem with this, I think, is that it threatens to divorce successful speech acts from the broader aims for which they are performed. Presumably, the reason that speakers enter into commitments is because of the effects that these commitments will have on their and others' future actions. But I don't see how commitments can have these effects if they are unknown to the parties involved. After all: what sets actions apart from other events is their relation to the mental states of those who perform them.

Consider an example. Suppose that a has performed a successful speech act that has resulted in the commitment $C_{a,b}p$ becoming common ground (in Geurts' sense of that term). But, due to a freak case of *folie à deux*, a and b commonly believe that the content of a 's speech act was $\neg p$ rather than p , and so commonly believe that a has committed to $C_{a,b}\neg p$. As far as I can tell, because Geurts decouples agents' commitments from what they believe about their commitments, nothing in his theory rules out the possibility that a 's original commitment, $C_{a,b}p$, would continue to obtain and to be common ground in this case. But I think it's quite clear that this commitment and the fact that it is common ground would be causally inert. It is $\neg p$ rather than p that will govern the participants' future actions. This illustrates a significant cost of disconnecting communication from information exchange. It also gives us good reasons, as communicators, to ultimately care more about what our addressees believe, including what they believe about our commitments, than we do about the commitments themselves.

4.2 Miscommunication

According to Geurts, for a to perform a speech act whose content is p (addressed to b) is a matter of undertaking a commitment $C_{a,b}p$. Geurts argues that part of what it is for this commitment to exist is that a further commitment exists—namely,

$C_{b,a}C_{a,b}p$. This is what it is for an addressee to ‘accept’ a speech act, according to Geurts, and successfully performing a speech act requires that one’s addressee accept it. Borrowing a term from Austin, Geurts says that performing a speech act requires achieving uptake.

It is surely right that undertaking commitments requires achieving uptake. If I say something so quietly that you don’t even notice, then I haven’t thereby committed myself to anything. But is this also the right thing to say about what it takes to perform a speech act? Not according to intentionalism. One reason for this is that building uptake into the metaphysics of speech acts collapses the distinction between performing a speech act and getting it understood by the addressee. This is a bad result, as there seems to be a difference between, say, asserting p and being correctly interpreted by an addressee as having asserted p . More importantly, part of what a theory of speech acts and communication needs to explain is the nature and potential causes of miscommunication. And one kind of miscommunication occurs when a speaker performs a speech act of a certain kind and their addressee wrongly takes it to be a speech act of some other kind. An addressee might miss an implicature, for example. Or a speaker who makes a mere prediction about their own future behavior might be misinterpreted as making a promise. Or S might describe some local bylaws by saying, ‘you mustn’t park here’, but A might misinterpret S’s utterance for a command.¹²

This is a problem for Austin-style conventionalists as well. For them, it presumably arises from Austin’s excessive focus on ritualized speech acts. It does seem right to say that the speech acts involved in marriage require uptake. But this is just one of many things that sets conventional speech acts apart from communicative speech acts. Conventionalists also have a way around this problem that is unavailable to Geurts. They can distinguish performing a speech act from merely attempting to perform it, where the latter involves the speaker’s unfulfilled intention to participate in the relevant conventions. Miscommunication, on this way of thinking, is a special kind of failure that happens when one required participant in a convention doesn’t realize that another participant has attempted to invoke it.

Geurts could try something similar. He could distinguish undertaking a social commitment $C_{a,b}p$ from acting on one’s private telic commitment, $C_{a,a}C_{a,b}p$, to undertake this commitment. Geurts could call the latter ‘merely attempting to perform a speech act’. Miscommunication is what happens when these attempts do not succeed in creating public commitments. But remember: private telic commitments are just intentions, and so this is just another way of saying that

¹² On the idea that deontic modals are ambiguous between descriptive and performative uses, and for an argument that this ambiguity is pragmatic, see Kaufmann (2012, 60–63).

miscommunication is what happens when one acts with an intention that doesn't result in uptake. And this brings us very close to a kind of intentionalism.

4.3 Goals and the Distinction between Telic and Atelic Commitments

One peculiar aspect of Geurts' view is his distinction between telic and atelic commitments. As Geurts puts it, "a commitment is always a commitment only to act in ways that are consistent with the truth of a given proposition p . Telic commitments just have a special feature that atelic commitments lack, in that they represent speakers' goals" (p. 8). This distinction does most of the work in Geurts' taxonomy of speech acts, but Geurts does not say much about what it is for a commitment to represent an agent's goal.

It might be tempting to think of telic commitments as just those that concern the future actions of the agents involved. For example, it might be tempting to think that $C_{a,b}[[a \text{ will become president}]]$ is necessarily a telic commitment because it commits a to the truth of a proposition about their own future actions. But this view would collapse categories of mental states and speech acts that we need to distinguish. An agent can intend to do something or merely believe that they will do it without also so intending. Analogously, an agent can predict that they will do something without thereby promising to do it. Imagine someone who utters the following to their addiction counsellor: "I am going to use drugs again. How can I stop myself?". The natural interpretation is not that this person is promising to use drugs, or that they intend to do so, but only that they expect and predict themselves to do so. For the same reason, we can't distinguish directives from predictions about addressees' actions in terms of their contents.

Particularly mysterious is Geurts' insistence that goals needn't be psychological. This is important to his theory since it puts distance between his view and intentionalism. But I am not satisfied by his footnote defending non-psychologism about goals (p. 7, n.4):

It is sometimes supposed that goals are psychological entities, but that is not how I understand the term, and I believe that my understanding agrees with everyday usage: we freely attribute nutritional and procreational goals to bees, bats, and even bacteria, but it is doubtful that all or any of these creatures have minds.

The only sense in which bacteria have goals is that their activities have biological functions. The function of a trait is the result of its past instances that has led to its continued reproduction. The most prominent defense of the idea that speech acts' properties are sometimes determined by their functions, in this sense, is by

Millikan (1984; 1998; 2005). But even she does not claim that all speech acts can be thus understood. She argues, for example, that the functions of nonliteral and indirect speech acts are determined by speakers' intentions. One obvious reason to agree is that such speech acts may have no historical connection to the vehicles with which they're performed, and so their functions cannot be understood in terms of the results of past usage.

I therefore think that the concept of a goal, as Geurts deploys it, is one of the most unsatisfying aspects of his theory. By comparison, the intentionalist explanation for the goal-directedness of directives and commissives is relatively clear: a directive is an attempt to produce an intention in one's addressee and a commissive is an attempt to publicize an intention to one's addressee. Intentions are goal-directed mental states, which are distinguished from non-goal-directed mental states by their special role in planning and causing actions.

4.4 The Diversity of Commitments

Geurts argues that either an assertion or a direction whose content is p commits the speaker to acting on p , the only difference being that the latter involves treating p as a goal. But there appear to be other differences. It is felicitous to direct someone to do something while also conditionally directing them to do something else if not the first thing. By contrast, analogous pairs of assertions are infelicitous:

- (1) Arrive on time.
If you don't, come in quietly through the back door.
- (2) The seventh decimal place of π is 7.
If it's not 7, then it is 8.

The commitment involved in asserting seems to be of a different, more resolute kind than the commitment involved in directing. It's not clear how Geurts should explain this, given that he is pursuing "a unified view on commitment" (p. 6).¹³

Intentionalists can explain this nuance. Directives are aimed at producing intentions, and it can be rational to intend to ϕ without fully believing that one

¹³ Note that this contrast can't be explained in terms of the telic/atelic distinction. Geurts thinks that commissives are like directives in that they create telic commitments, but they pattern with assertions in this case: "I promise to finish this paper by the 20th of February. # If I don't finish it by then, I'll finish it by the 21st".

will ϕ . This is what makes it rational to have backup plans: it may be both rational and prudent to intend to arrive on time and also to intend to enter quietly through the back if one doesn't arrive on time. This is the state of mind that one would intend to produce by uttering (1) literally. By contrast, it is not rational to have backup beliefs. If one believes that the seventh decimal place of π is 7, one can't also (rationally) cling to the belief that it's 8 if not 7. The assertions one would normally perform in uttering (2) would therefore be aimed at producing incoherent mental states. Beliefs and intentions are different kinds of mental states with different functional roles, so it shouldn't be surprising if trying to produce them creates different kinds of commitments.

5 Committing by intending

Nothing I have said so far casts doubt on Geurts' central observation that speech acts give rise to social commitments. Geurts explains this by building commitments into the nature of speech acts themselves. But intentionalists can pursue the alternative strategy of arguing that intention recognition, being a kind of rational and cooperative social interaction, is subject to normative requirements that govern all such interactions. In this section I will briefly sketch an explanation of this kind.

To do so, I will draw on Michael Bratman's theory of agency. Bratman argues that intentions serve to coordinate actions by being stable, action-guiding commitments that constrain future choices. Suppose that I intend to order a vegetarian meal but I haven't yet decided what. I then learn that all of the menu items except for the pasta contain meat. This puts rational pressure on me to adopt an intention to have the pasta. The pressure, Bratman (1987) argues, derives from the rational requirements that govern intention and belief: I should seek to make my intentions consistent with one another and with my beliefs about what is possible, for example, and I should seek to intend what I believe to be the necessary means to my intended ends. My sensitivity to these requirements guides my choices in light of my intentions and beliefs.

Bratman (2014) argues that these requirements also govern joint action, but in this case the requirements are *interpersonal* as well as *intrapersonal*. Suppose, for example, that you and I are baking a cake together. What makes this a genuine case of joint action is that we have a shared intention: each of us intends that we bake a cake together, intends that we do so by way of meshing subplans, and believes that the other intends the same.¹⁴ To say that we intend to have

¹⁴ This gloss leaves out some complexities of Bratman's account that aren't relevant here.

meshing subplans is to say that we intend to achieve our shared end through interpersonally coordinated means. If you intend to handle the wet ingredients for the cake and expect me to take care of the dry ingredients, then I must have the converse intention and expectation in order for our subplans to mesh. If we fail to meet these conditions, then our plan is likely to fail for lack of coordination.

Suppose that we are deciding how to bake our cake and I direct you to cream the butter. But suppose that my direction is disingenuous: I secretly intend to cream the butter myself before you have a chance, and so I don't actually intend for you to do it. Geurts explains the normative defectiveness of this act by saying that I have committed myself to the proposition that you will cream the butter, but by creaming the butter myself I will fail to act on my commitment. Bratman's theory paired with intentionalism offers a more detailed explanation of what has gone wrong. By prompting you to form a subplan of our shared intention while also maintaining my own conflicting subplan, I have intentionally put us into an incoherent state. My intention to do so was incompatible with our shared intention to bake a cake, which includes the intention to have meshing subplans. Since I am responsible for having brought about our lack of coordination, and since I violated a rational requirement in doing so, I am subject to your rebuke—particularly if I go on to act in a way that conflicts with the intention that I produced in you. This is to say that when I directed you to cream the butter, I committed myself to being in a state of mind that cohered with the one that I was trying to produce in you, and so to act in a way that was coordinated with your resulting actions.

The same goes for commissives. If you promise me to add the vanilla extract, you intend me to form a belief about your intentions—and so an expectation about your actions—that will factor into my practical reasoning about what to do. If you break your promise, uncoordinated action is likely to result and I am within my rights to criticize you for knowingly putting us into the incoherent state that led to our failure. As in the case of directives, your commitment follows from the more general norm that we should seek to have meshing subplans of our shared intentions (and accurate beliefs thereabout).¹⁵

Finally consider constatives, whose natural habitats are conversations aimed at information exchange. We can think of this kind of conversation as itself a joint activity that is organized around a shared intention to increase what at least one of the participants knows about some topic without any participant increasing their misinformation. In such a context, suppose that I assert something that I don't believe. In so doing, I intend for you to believe something false or for which I

¹⁵ For arguments that the commitments undertaken via promises arise because of the expectations they create, see Norcross (2011); Scanlon (1990).

lack adequate evidence.¹⁶ In this case, there is a straightforward conflict between our shared intention, my intention for you to believe *p*, and my beliefs about the epistemic status of *p*. If I go on to act as though I don't believe *p*, then I reveal that my assertion violated a rational requirement and I deserve your criticism. This is why asserting *p* commits one to act in a way that is consistent with the truth of *p*.

It might be objected that it is possible to perform assertions and other speech acts without participating in a joint action. This is correct: I could trick you into thinking that we are engaged in good-faith information exchange when in fact my aim is to mislead you. In this case, we don't actually have a shared intention since I am not playing my part, and so it is not possible to explain the commitments associated with my assertions in terms of the rational requirements posited by Bratman.¹⁷

I don't think this is a serious problem for my view. It is wrong, *ceteris paribus*, to deceive others about whether one is engaged in a joint activity with them. It is normally wrong to lead someone to believe that I am seeking to share knowledge with them when I am not, for example, and it is normally wrong to deceive someone into thinking that I am attempting to coordinate my actions with them when I am not. If we grant this unobjectionable claim, then it is clear why failing to act on the content of one's speech act is cause for sanction: doing so is evidence either that one has violated a rational requirement or that one is wrongfully deceiving another person.

I have offered only a sketch of an explanation of why speech acts give rise to commitments. But if it can be spelled out more fully then I think it is preferable to Geurts' account, given the advantages of intentionalism that I discussed in Section 4.

¹⁶ My wording should call to mind the maxim of quality, which, following Grice, I take to be a special case of a much broader norm governing all cooperative activity (Grice 1989, 28).

¹⁷ What about situations in which neither speaker nor addressee take themselves to have a shared intention? Geurts claims that such cases exist (p. 3): "For example, living in the same building calls for coordination between tenants, but that does not necessarily imply that they share a common goal, except perhaps a very general one, which is achieved mainly by refraining from, rather than engaging in, certain kinds of activities." I don't find this example convincing. Coordinating with my neighbors might require that we have meshing intentions and beliefs about who will out the trash when, where to store bicycles, what times to avoid making too much noise, and so on. All of these meshing intentions are subplans of shared intentions—to get the trash taken away and avoid fines, to allow easy access to bicycles without blocking hallways, and to live in a community that strikes a good balance between fun and peacefulness, for example. If we didn't have shared aims like these—broad and general though they may be—why would we bother to coordinate our plans and so enter into commitments at all?

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