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Abstract

Frege argued for the force-content distinction not only by appealing to the logical and fictional contexts which are most closely associated with the “Frege point”, but also based on the fact that an affirmative answer to a yes-no question constitutes an assertion. Supposedly this is only intelligible if the question contains a forceless thought or proposition which an affirmative answer then asserts. Against this I argue that this fact more readily supports the view that questions operate on assertions and other forceful acts themselves. Force is neither added to propositions as on the traditional view, nor is it cancelled as has recently been proposed. Rather higher-level acts such as questioning, but also e.g. conditionalizing, embed and present assertoric or directive acts that are forceful and committal, while suspending commitment to them. The Frege point confounds different varieties of force and the question whether something is merely presented for consideration with the question what is so presented. Force is representational: through assertoric and directive force indicators subjects non-conceptually present positions of theoretical or practical knowledge, while interrogative acts indicate positions of wondering which strive for such knowledge.

1. Questions and the Frege point

The clauses of e.g. conditionals are not asserted and therefore cannot be assertions. They must rather be forceless entities distinct from assertions, that is, propositions, because, as Peter Geach put it, “the same proposition can occur asserted as well as unasserted and yet be recognizably the same proposition” (1965, 449). The same entity must e.g. occur in the antecedent and the minor premise of a modus ponens argument, or else this argument would be invalidated through equivocation, and this entity apparently cannot be an assertion. Parallel points apply to other logical contexts such as negation and disjunction, as well as to non-logical, e.g. fictional, contexts. For example, the actor on stage does not assert anything, but she still expresses propositions.

What Geach called the ‘Frege point’ seemed obvious to him and to many others who accepted it and the wide-ranging force-content dichotomy built on top of it. On the traditional picture, a separate act of asserting or judging adds force to the proposition, which is the content of the assertion, that which is asserted or judged to be true. Frege introduced a separate sign for this act which he called the “judgement stroke”, but which later came more often to be referred to as the “assertion sign”. Call this the ‘plus account’.

But recently this dichotomy between force/mode and propositional content has been challenged by a growing number of philosophers (e.g. Hanks (2015; 2019); Recanati (2019); Kimhi (2018); Bronzo (2019)). Peter Hanks’s (2015) critique is simple, but powerful: anything that bears a truth value must embody a position with regard to the reality of what it represents. It cannot leave open whether things really hang together in the way they are represented as being and therefore must be committal and forceful. Otherwise we cannot ascribe truth or falsity to it, success or failure in its enterprise of representing the world.

But how then to respond to the Frege point? According to Hanks and Francois Recanati force is not added, but rather cancelled in contexts such as those created by connectives or fiction, and Hanks has also introduced a corresponding notation with a cancellation sign. However, several commentators (e.g. Horn & Schwartz (2013), Reiland (2012), Green (2018), Bronzo 2019) have questioned whether this ‘minus account’ is really as different from the traditional ‘plus account’ as it is made out to be. Does it really make a difference whether we think of occurrences in conditionals etc. as occurrences of propositions which are forceless as such, or as arising through the subtraction of force? In response Hanks has clarified that terminologically “cancellation” may be misleading: cancellation contexts actually contain more than non-cancellation contexts, not less (2019, 1389). He further says that the difference between a proposition as it occurs in cancellation and non-cancellation contexts is extrinsic rather than intrinsic (2019, 1393).

I believe that these remarks point us into the right direction, but that we need to move even further beyond the traditional picture than the cancellation account. First, the cancellation account still does not allow us to say that the same assertoric act may be performed in cancellation as well as in non-cancellation contexts – but only what Hanks calls “acts of predication”. Second, it also holds onto the idea that e.g. conditionals or conjuncts as a whole are asserted, which, I will argue, is also a residue of the traditional account. Third, the “cancellation” label is not only terminologically infelicitous, but points us to a real shortcoming of the account.

For Hanks cancellation means that the use of certain linguistic items such as conditional markers creates contexts in which “acts of predication do not have their usual requirements and consequences” (2015: 95) such as the obligation to provide justification for an assertion. But these consequences are not simply removed; it is more accurate to say that they have been transferred (cf. Recanati 2019) or deferred. As Sebastian Rödl (forthcoming) puts it, it is not like the meeting has really been cancelled, but more like it has been shifted to a different room. Or, to move even closer to the target phenomenon, it is merely being anticipated. But when it does take place, the usual meeting rules do apply. So, to cash in this metaphor, the obligation to provide justification – for example, for the antecedent through which we consider an eventuality – is deferred from the context of affirming the conditional to that of detaching the antecedent; or it is transferred from the actor to the character she is playing. But it remains connected to the kind of act that is being performed. Or so I will argue.

When we are in the grip of the ‘Frege point’, we think of assertion as what one might call ‘assertion simpliciter’ – straight out, unconditional commitment with regard to the real world. When we think in this way, it seems obvious that what occurs in a conditional or other Frege point contexts can’t be an assertion, that assertoric force must have been removed. But the door to an alternative account is opened once we see that indicators of such contexts like conditional or fictional markers rather shift the meaning of force indicators into a different dimension such as the dimension of anticipation or fictional play.

I will argue that our account of Frege point contexts can then be entirely given in terms of ‘what’s more’, namely acts of conditionalizing, fictional acts of pretense and other higher-level acts. These acts are higher-level because they create higher-level units such as conditionals, conjunctions, acts of pretense, or jokes, through logical or non-logical operations on forceful acts, while often suspending commitment *to* these acts. Think about the difference between conjoining, which does commit a subject to the conjoined acts and conditionalizing, which does not. I will propose that the intuition that the conditional does not contain assertions can be explained (away) in terms of the fact that a conditional does not entail its clauses, so that

affirming it does not commit a subject to them. Note that the conjunction does not trigger the Frege point intuition. Nor does the conclusion of the modus ponens argument. I will argue that these facts are best explained by the assumption that both conjunctions and conditionals connect assertions (or statements), but differ regarding whether they commit their subjects to them.

The idea that propositions are fundamentally different from assertions hence turns out to be an illusion. Propositions just are assertions (or directives) *as put forward for consideration* by means of higher-level acts. The mistake is to think that because something is (merely) put forward for consideration, it could not be a forceful act and thus could not (or should not) contain a force indicator. This is like thinking that an exhibit could not also be a painting or a sculpture. It confounds the question whether something is merely put forward for consideration with the question what is so put forward. That what is merely put forward must still contain force indicators becomes obvious once non-assertoric forces are considered. For example, it needs to be indicated whether we are conjoining or disjoining assertions or directives, or whether the actor pretends to assert or to direct.

The deep-seated tendency in logic, semantics and philosophy of language more broadly to disregard practical, non-assertoric, non-truth-evaluable sentences and acts, or to treat them as reducible to truth-evaluable ones, therefore fosters the confusions underlying the Frege point. The Frege point argument suggests that to understand assertoric force we need to contrast what it calls asserted propositions with their occurrences in conditionals or disjunctions, or serious assertions with non-serious acts of asserting jokingly or pretending to assert. And Frege's assertion sign (judgment stroke) gets its meaning through contrasts of this kind, but not through the contrast with directives, as Frege excluded the latter from his formalism and therefore, like most later logicians and semanticists, had no need for symbols that mark this contrast. But this way of setting things up is like a standing invitation to confound different varieties of force and to miss what is really essential to assertoric force, which can only be understood in contrast to directive force.

We can of course say that whether something is a) free-standing or a disjunct, or whether b) one asserts seriously or jokingly is a matter of force in some sense. But this sense is certainly different from force in the sense of whether one c) performs an assertoric or a directive act and thus from what is usually known as illocutionary force. In a very insightful response to the Frege point Richard Hare (1971; see also 1989) referred to force in this sense as the "tropic" and distinguished it from the "neustic" which he characterized as being about a subject's "subscription". Hare was acutely aware that whether something is an assertion or a directive and whether a subject subscribes to it or, as we can also put this, is committed to it, are different

questions, as he saw that, for example, the consequent of a conditional can have assertoric or directive force, even though in either case a subject would not subscribe to it by affirming the conditional. Accordingly, he also proposed a notation with different symbols for tropic and neustic.

However, in keeping what I have said already, I will argue that we only need a sign for the tropic / illocutionary force. We do not need a separate sign for subscription, because whether a subject subscribes / commits to the assertion or directive is already determined by the conditional and fictional markers and other markers for higher-level acts. This also means that we do not need a Fregean assertion sign, which we can think of as a more specialized sign of subscription. The reason is that the committal case of assertion (direction) simpliciter is the default or unmarked case. We do not need a special sign for this. We simply use illocutionary force indicators *in the absence of markers* of higher-level acts. Accordingly, what the Fregean thinks of as an additional act of asserting that needs to be marked by the special Fregean assertion sign, is actually normally expressed simply by removing the sign for the higher-level act. For example, in the modus ponens argument, what the Fregean calls asserting the antecedent proposition, is normally simply expressed by repeating the antecedent while removing the conditional marker. Conversely, there is no separate act of cancelling force in addition to a higher-level act such as conditionalizing either.

Hanks agrees that there is no such act, he thinks of cancellation not as an act, but as a context created by acts such as e.g. using conditional markers like ‘if.’¹ However, he still introduces an elaborate notation with a cancellation sign among others. But if cancellation contexts are created by acts such as conditionalization, for which of course we already have signs, what do we need a cancellation sign for? The whole paper will be an argument that it is just as redundant as the Fregean assertion sign. We only need our ordinary force indicators and various markers of higher-level acts which transfer the meaning of these force indicators into new dimensions or contexts. (As theoreticians, we can have a concept of cancellation, or, as I argue, preferably one of transfer, to capture something different kinds of higher-level acts have in common, but this does not mean that such a concept should be part of a representation of the meaning of an act.)

Logical and fictional contexts are the ones most closely associated with the Frege point. However, having outlined the broad contours of the view I want to defend, I will go on to deepen the argument by approaching the familiar issues surrounding the Frege point from the

¹ Cf. Hanks 2015: 95. Hanks also mentions conventions as creating cancellation contexts, but it seems to me that conventions are also created and maintained by acts. And even if this were false, this wouldn’t show that we need a cancellation sign in addition to whatever constitutes the existence of conventions.

somewhat less familiar angle of questions. There are several reasons why this is a fruitful angle. First, questions are the most basic way of (merely) putting something forward for consideration, for deliberation and debate, and frequently appealed to as such by Frege and others. Second, Frege also gives an argument for his version of the force-content distinction that appeals to yes-no questions. Third, there is an interesting question whether this argument is just a variant of the arguments based on logical and fictional acts, or whether it is a separate argument, and accordingly whether interrogatives are a context separate from the usual Frege point contexts or belong to them after all. Hanks does not treat questions as creating cancellation contexts, but as one of three basic kinds of propositions, distinct from, but on all fours with, assertive and directive propositions. Mark Textor (2020) also treats them as separate, but argues against Hanks that Frege's argument from questions supports a restricted form of the force-content dichotomy even if we accept the cancellation account for the other contexts. In contrast, I will attempt to turn Frege's argument around as against the force-content dichotomy and to show that questions belong to the same class of higher-level acts as logical and fictional acts and can be our model for understanding them. Fourth, questions are also well-suited for this role because they are on the one hand an excellent example of the theory bias, as practical questions have been almost entirely ignored in the literature, while on the other it is hard to deny that they exist. We cannot only ask whether, for example, the door is closed, but also whether to close it. We cannot only question assertions, but also orders, plans, obligations, and so on. Fifth, once this is acknowledged, the argument that questions are neither requests, as Frege and others have thought, nor on the same level as assertions and directives, as proposed by Hanks, but higher-level acts operating on members of both categories, is pretty straightforward. Sixth, since we find it unobjectionable to say that assertions, orders, and other forceful acts are questioned, even though we would not say that the questioner performed the questioned act, questions are also a good place to start the argument that higher-level acts do and must operate on forceful acts such as assertions and directives themselves rather than on something supposedly forceless like propositions.

In the next section I will begin to develop this argument about questions by responding to Frege's argument for the force-content distinction from questions.

2. Questions as higher-level acts

Frege's argument turns on the significance of an affirmative answer to a yes-no question:

The answer "yes" says the same as an indicative sentence, for in it the thought that was

already completely contained in the interrogative sentence is laid down as true. So a sentence question can be formed from every indicative sentence. [...] An interrogative sentence and an indicative one contain the same thought; but the indicative contains something else as well, namely, the assertion. The interrogative sentence contains something more too, namely a request. Therefore two things must be distinguished in an indicative sentence: the content which it has in common with the corresponding sentence-question, and the assertion. (Frege [1918] 1956: 293–94)

Through an affirmative answer to a yes-no or sentence question, a subject performs an assertion: a thought (proposition) is “laid down as true”. Frege takes it as obvious that this is only intelligible if the question and the assertion share the same thought as part of their content. But question and answer also contain something more. The question contains interrogative force, which Frege claims is that of a request. The answer contains assertoric force.² But what is assertoric force and how can it be added to the content of a yes-no question merely by an affirmative answer?

To appreciate the force of the question, consider that “yes” is essentially a device for indicating affirmation or assent to, agreement with, or acceptance or acknowledgment of something, not for adding anything. For example, when I say “yes” in response to an assertion (rather than a question), I do not add anything to that assertion – except a subject, because I make myself a co-asserter in this way. But it seems clear that adding a subject cannot be what the addition of force amounts to. (When Wittgenstein said in the *Tractatus* (§ 4.442) that Frege’s judgment stroke only indicated that he, Frege, took certain judgements to be true, this was of course meant as an objection.)

Moreover, since Frege, in contradistinction to many others (e.g. Searle 1969) did not think that, for example, a directive such as the directive to somebody to close the door and an assertion such as the assertion that he closed it, can contain the same thought or proposition, it seems that at least part of what distinguishes assertions from directives must already be contained in the thought. This point is strengthened if we consider practical questions. As mentioned already, practical questions have been almost entirely ignored in recent linguistic and philosophical theorizing about interrogatives. But it is hard to deny that they exist. A practical question can be generated from any directive simply by repeating it with a question intonation.

² Note that Frege thus uses “content” so that force is also part of content, whereas nowadays most reserve “content” for propositional or at least intentional content. However, this seems to be a merely terminological difference.

For example, consider an imperative sentence such as (1) with a rising intonation:³

(1) Go for a walk?

An affirmative answer to such a practical yes-no question will constitute a practical commitment with directive force, even though, on a Fregean line, we should not say that this question contains directive force, but only interrogative force and what we might call a practical thought. But how can a mere “yes” constitute a theoretical commitment with assertoric force when said in response to a theoretical question and a practical commitment with directive force when said in response to a practical question? This seems only possible if these instances of “yes” are meant to indicate agreement with a forceful act that has been expressed elsewhere. The conclusion appears inevitable that the questions must contain something that determines that affirmative answers to them have assertoric or directive force.

The account of questions as higher-level acts can straightforwardly explain this: a yes-no question is a higher-level non-logical operation performed on either assertions or directives themselves, rather than on something supposedly forceless. It is a device for presenting assertions or directives in order to elicit a yes-or-no response to them. Accordingly, a question must contain both interrogative and assertoric or directive force indicators. I therefore symbolize the structure of questions as follows, with “DIR” for directive, “AS” for assertoric and “?” for interrogative force:

(1) Go for a walk?	? DIR (we go for a walk)
(2) Did we go for a walk?	? AS (we go for a walk)

This representation makes clear that, to paraphrase Hanks, the question is more, not less, than what it operates on. It does not remove the assertoric or directive force indicator, but adds an interrogative force indicator.

Conversely, the affirmative answer commits to the act that has been put forward for consideration *by removing interrogative force*. We just say “yes”, or repeat the directive or assertion, or both – but always without interrogative intonation or other interrogative markers. This also explains why making sense of assertion as adding force to a proposition has been such a notorious problem for Fregeans (cf. Hanks 2015 for discussion): because it rather consists in

³ Thanks to Magdalena Kaufmann for pointing me to a dissertation by Deniz Rudin (2018), which deals with examples like (1), but refers to them as “rising imperatives” rather than as questions.

removing interrogative markers or other markers of higher-level acts.

Frege's argument and the traditional view more broadly treat "yes" as a force indicator, as a means of indicating that e.g. an assertoric act has been performed. But they are not, they are rather devices for affirming acts of any force.

The higher-level act account is supported by common sense and ordinary language at least insofar as we normally find nothing paradoxical in saying that assertions or statements – as well as orders, plans or obligations etc. – are questioned – rather than forceless entities supposedly distinct from them. Our ordinary understanding of propositions shows the same pattern. Google dictionary defines the first sense of "proposition" as: "a statement or assertion that expresses a judgement or opinion" and the second sense as: "a suggested scheme or plan of action." So common sense also finds nothing paradoxical in the thought that propositions could be assertions and even plans.

The mistake of Frege's argument is not the idea that the question must contain something that the answer affirms. Nor is it the suggestion to call this something a "proposition" (or "thought") to emphasize the fact that the question merely puts it forward for consideration. The mistake is to think that being a proposition and being an assertion are incompatible. Being a proposition is a *role* assertions and other acts can have. To think that because something is merely put forward for consideration it could not be an assertion or plan is to confuse the question whether something is merely put forward for consideration with the question *what* is so put forward. Again, it is like thinking that an exhibit could not also be a painting or a sculpture. In fact of course nothing could *only* be an exhibit or a proposition. We can only exhibit something that already has a nature independently of being exhibited. And we can only put something forward in order to elicit a yes-no response to it that already embodies a position either regarding what is the case or what to do. Else it wouldn't make sense to ask to affirm or to deny it.

The suggestion that questions are higher-level operations on assertions or directives is also supported by the way these acts are reported. Hanks (2015) proposes that questions are one of three basic types of acts distinguished through their direction of fit, their kind of satisfaction conditions, and how they are reported. Assertoric acts have mind-to-world (mtw) direction of fit (dof), truth conditions and are reported using that-clauses. Directive acts have world-to-mind (wtm) direction of fit, fulfilment conditions and are reported using to-clauses. Interrogative acts have mind-to-mind direction of fit, answerhood conditions and are reported through whether-clauses. Hanks also points to cross-linguistic studies which show that indicative, imperative and interrogative sentences are the three basic sentence types (König and Siemund 2007). That is, it

is a universal that if a language has three types of sentences, these will be the types it has.

However, along with the mainstream, Hanks neglects practical questions and the fact that there are actually two types of whether-clauses. Theoretical questions are reported through whether + finite-clauses, practical questions through whether + to-clauses:

- (3) He asked whether the door is closed.
- (4) He asked whether to close the door.

That theoretical questions are reported through finite clauses and practical questions through non-finite ones makes straightforward sense because we assert that something *is the case*, but direct people *to do things*, and we can only direct actions that have not yet been completed.

Accordingly, if we adopt Hanks's interesting suggestion that questions have mind-to-mind dof, we should also – more precisely if somewhat clumsily – say that they have either mtw-to-mtw or wtm-to-wtm dof. They are satisfied, that is answered, by assertions or directives. I think Hanks's suggestion is insightful because it brings out that questions are not, as it were, immediately directed at the world, but via inviting minds – one's own or those of others' – to provide answers. This is also similarly brought out by treatments of (theoretical) questions in formal semantics which ascribe answerhood conditions to them and (sets of) propositions as their denotations rather than truth values. These suggestions are at least related in spirit to the present proposal that questions are higher-level acts.

That questions are higher-level acts also means that they embody a new level of self-consciousness. A subject that wonders whether something is the case or what to do, has at least an inchoate understanding of such things as that there are things to know that it does not know, but that others might know. And by questioning an assertion or directive it displays a capacity for doubt which embodies a basic understanding that they might be mistaken. Producing and understanding questions thus embodies capacities for understanding oneself (and others) which are not yet necessarily involved in producing and understanding assertions and directives.

That questions bring with them a higher-level understanding of assertions and directives does not, however, mean that these are objectified, e.g. in the sense that they are now merely being mentioned or otherwise being merely referred to. The linguist Ronald Langacker's (1987) notion of construing something subjectively is helpful here. He uses the example of experiencing one's glasses to introduce it. When one looks through them (rather than taking them off and looking at them) one experiences them as a part or extension of one's perceptual apparatus, as something that provides (theoretical) access to the world. Analogously, one may experience e.g. a

walking stick or a tool as a part of or an extension of one's actional apparatus, as something that provides practical access to the world and extends one's practical reach. I suggest that when we wonder whether an assertion is true or whether to affirm a directive we are also construing these entities subjectively. We do not merely mention them or otherwise represent them as mere objects, but as something that gives us theoretical or practical access to the world. We do not take them off and look at them but use them to indicate our mode of inquisition: whether we are wondering whether something is the case or whether to do something. I think this also means that we use and not merely mention or represent force indicators in these contexts.

The proposal that in questions both interrogative and assertoric or directive force indicators are used may provoke an objection. Doesn't it mean that the subject is changing its mind, first asserting or directing something and then taking back this act by questioning it?⁴ But the appropriate characterization is rather that the subject approaches the word in an inquisitive mode of mind, expressed by the interrogative force indicator, while the assertoric or directive force indicator expresses whether this is a theoretical or practical inquiry. There is no change of mind because the meaning of the assertoric or directive force indicator has thus been shifted into the new dimension opened up by the interrogative mode. It no longer indicates the position the subject takes with regard to the reality of the relevant SOA – as it would if the indicator was used outside a context created by a higher-level act – but the position it is trying to attain: it wants to know whether something is the case or whether to do something. But the position the subject is trying to attain is of the same kind that somebody – such as the person who is asked – who would actually affirm the assertion or directive would present themselves as occupying. So the force indicator is still being used and it is being used with the same meaning.

We still need to better understand what that meaning is and how it is related to the notion of commitment, because somebody who is resistant to the argument that force indicators can and must occur in the contexts created by higher-level acts is likely to think of force in terms of commitment.

3. Content and commitment

The argument so far has been that questions must contain assertoric or directive force indicators because it must be specified whether an assertion or a directive is being questioned and only the presence of force indicators can explain how a mere “yes” can commit to an assertion in response to a theoretical question and to a directive in response to a practical question. But we

⁴ Bronzo (2019) raises this objection against an earlier version of my account (manuscript). He explicitly formulates it in regard to conditionals, but it can be raised for any higher-level act.

still haven't given a complete account of how it is possible for a question to contain assertoric or directive force indicators even though it would not be correct to say without further ado that its subject asserted or directed something. If we do not dispel the residual sense of mystery here, we are stuck with a mere clash of intuitions.

Let me begin to do so by explaining the distinction between the commitment *in* a speech act (or attitude) and the commitment *to* that speech act. Consider again an order to somebody – let's call him Frank – to close the door and the assertion that he closed it: two speech acts directed at the same state of affairs (SOA), one from a theoretical, one from a practical position. Now recall Hanks's point that nothing could be a truth value bearer that does not take a position regarding what is the case. Likewise, in the practical case nothing could be fulfilled or applied – like practical knowledge is applied – that was not committal in the sense of taking a position regarding what to do. Assertoric acts tell what is the case, directive acts what to do. An assertion contains a theoretical, a directive a practical commitment to the reality of a SOA. But higher-level acts can suspend commitment *to* this act and thus to the committing position it contains. So, as I have argued, by questioning an assertion or directive, I present these committal acts, while suspending commitment to them. A conjunction will commit me to the conjoined clauses, but a conditional only to one of their affirmation functions: to affirming the consequent should I also affirm the antecedent, and so on.

But what does commitment in the act really mean? It should not be taken to imply that there necessarily is a separate act of committing after a prior act of (merely) considering or grasping. This of course would take us right back to the Fregean picture. But the child only learns to question, to conditionalize and to pretend after it has learned to understand and to perform assertions and directives. That merely considering or merely grasping an assertion or directive is a higher-level act also means that it is cognitively more complex and comes later onto- and phylogenetically. So, we might say that commitment here only means that by asserting or directing a subject has taken a position that affirms the reality of a SOA. However, while this seems correct to me, it is not really explanatory. In the explanatory order the act of taking a position is prior to the act of affirming it. As Wittgenstein put it in the *Tractatus*, the sentence “must already have a sense; affirmation cannot give it a sense because what it affirms is the sense itself”.⁵ The argument from questions showed that this sense must also include a force indicator. Affirmation cannot give an act its force either.

I think we may not be able to explain the basic committal nature of assertive or directive acts further, at least beyond saying that this means that they have satisfaction conditions, that

⁵ *Tractatus* § 4.064. I have changed the translation, which tellingly rendered “Bejahung” as “assertion”.

they require the world to be a certain way in order to count as true or fulfilled – and this is not the place to get into the debates whether this in turn can be explained further. However, there is one further aspect of commitment that is worth drawing out, namely the fact that a subject, once it has taken a position, is at least by default also taken as being committed to it. That is, unless there is some special reason to think it has forgotten or changed its mind, it will be presumed that this position will endure.

One reason that this is significant is that it can be used to give a straightforward interpretation to a distinction that has often been made regarding speech acts and other intentional acts, namely the process/product distinction. It has often been suggested that there is a significant distinction between the process of e.g. making an assertion and the product of that process, the assertion made, and that there are correspondingly different interpretations of expressions such as “assertion” or “statement”, which according to some views are even ambiguous. But what is the product of this act meant to be, what remains of it? Without trying to do justice to the intentions of those who introduced these distinctions, I want to suggest what remains is that the subject has taken a position and will be disposed to reaffirm this position and will be expected to do so and possibly held responsible for it by others. A similar motive also appears in communicative accounts of assertions (Stalnaker (2002)) and directives (Charlow (2015); Starr (2017)) which explain them in terms of theoretical or practical positions which are added to the common ground of a conversation.

I’m not convinced that every instance of assertion or direction is necessarily communicative. I think people also use language to work out and take theoretical or practical positions for themselves, as it were. But this is not crucial for present purposes. What is crucial for present purposes is how these positions figure in the minds of those who take them and how they are communicated. In the next section I will suggest that contrary to received wisdom, force indicators are representational, respectively presentational.⁶ Subjects are aware of the positions they take and present them in their speech. I will propose that in assertion they present themselves as knowing that something is the case and in direction as knowing what to do, and that basic force indicators such as intonation and grammatical mood express at least a non-conceptual sense of these positions.

This is also meant to be a second step towards dissolving the puzzle how it is possible for an act to be committal even though its subject suspends commitment to it through a higher-level act. The answer is that the act contains a representation of a practical or theoretical position that is committal with regard to the reality of the represented SOA.

⁶ I follow Searle (1983) in treating presentation as a species of representation.

4. The content of force

The Frege point has been used to support a force-content dichotomy according to which force indicators mean in a fundamentally different way than content. Only content is representational, but since it is propositional it must also be truth-conditional. Force is then either construed as entirely non-representational as in traditional speech act theory, or it is in part or entirely reduced to truth-evaluable representation of what is the case as e.g. in the proposals of Donald Davidson (1979) and David Lewis (1970). But by treating force, or aspects of force,⁷ as part of what is the case, these proposals could at best explain non-indicative moods / force indicators, while leaving the indicative mood itself unexplained and privileged. This privileging of what is truth-evaluable and theoretical is endemic to truth-conditional semantics, embodies the theory bias, and also explains the neglect of practical questions and other practical phenomena.

Instead I propose to try out a view which treats force indicators as representational without reducing them to representation of what is the case and without taking for granted and privileging theoretical force. On this view, through basic assertoric or directive force indicators a subject presents its theoretical or practical position towards the reality of a SOA. This representation is neither theoretical representation of what is the case nor practical representation of what to do. It cannot be because what makes representation theoretical or practical is that it is representation from a theoretical or practical position or point of view. The SOA of Frank closing the door is represented as a goal from a practical position of directing him to close it and as a fact from a theoretical position of asserting that he closed it. It is not that there is another position – behind the first one as it were – from which we introspectively observe the first one as something that is the case. We rather take theoretical or practical positions in a self-aware way. Force indicators complete representations of SOAs to yield acts that can bear truth or other satisfaction values. In contrast, a mere representation of a SOA is not yet “a *move* in the language game”, as Wittgenstein put it (PI, §22; his italics). If somebody just said something like “Frank close door”, we would ask: “What do you mean? Are you telling Frank to close the door or are you saying that he closed it?”.

What is essentially the same point can also be made by appealing to the invariant meaning the verb stem plausibly has regardless of the mood in which it appears (cf. Collins (2017)). That is, “close” represents the same relation regardless of whether Frank is directed to close the door, or it is asserted that he has closed it. I think this also means that we can isolate a corresponding act shared between these acts, which I will just call the act of representing the

⁷ Specifically in Davidson’s case what he calls the “mood-setter”.

relation. But doesn't this mean to reintroduce something that looks suspiciously like the traditional act of predication, which was meant to be neutral between different forces? And doesn't this, because of this neutrality, dissolve all connection between representation and truth (Bronzo 2019)? No, because just like reference to Frank, the representation of the closing relation can only be understood in the contexts of larger units such as speech acts and even larger units such as e.g. conversations or forms of life. So it cannot be understood independently of how it occurs in assertions and other truth-value bearers. The point is just, as against the theory bias, that we also cannot understand it independently of the context of practical acts. And other than on e.g. Searle's conception, the act that is neutral or variable between different forces is not a truth-value bearer, or is sufficient to express one. Therefore this is not in any way a return to the traditional force-content dichotomy or dualism. The proposal overcomes the dualistic opposition between how force and propositional content mean by ascribing representational content to force and ceasing to treat the shared content as truth-evaluable. But it still recognizes a *distinction* between force as what e.g. distinguishes assertives and directives, and *what* is asserted or directed. This sensible distinction should not be thrown out with the dichotomy built around it.

The idea that the subjects of assertions and other intentional acts represent or present their attitudes through these acts is plausible independently of any criticism of the force-content dichotomy. Of the many versions of this idea that can be found in the literature let me just mention Peter Unger's claim that an asserting subject represents itself as knowing (Unger 1975, 256), Elizabeth Fricker's suggestion that it presents itself "as taking responsibility for the truth of P" (2017) and Robert Fiengo's characterization of the act of asking a propositional question as "presenting oneself as not having license for assertion" (2007, 46; quoted after Textor (2020)). I believe that it is only adherence to the traditional force-content dichotomy that prevents us from ascribing this presentational function to force indicators.

In addition, the proposal also has various more theoretical advantages. For example, the suggestion that the asserting subject presents itself as knowing harmonizes well with accounts according to which knowledge is the norm of assertion (Williamson 2000), allowing a straightforward answer to the question how this norm is connected to this act: because the asserting subject presents itself as knowing. It also allows us to account in a straightforward way for what has been called the "causal self-referentiality" of the satisfaction conditions of certain acts such as e.g. intentions or orders and for Moore's paradox (see respectively Schmitz (2018) and (2019) for discussion).

Now what positions exactly various members of the class of assertive and directive

speech acts may indicate by which means is beyond the scope of this paper. I do believe it's plausible though that in assertions proper – as opposed to, say, guesses or hypotheses – the subject presents itself as knowing what it asserts, and will hence work with that idea in what follows. For directives I will use the parallel idea that in the most committal cases of practical speech acts – of telling somebody what to do, as opposed to making a suggestion – the subject makes a claim to practical knowledge, where practical knowledge is not mere bodily skill, but discursive knowledge of what to do (Schmitz (2013)). In support of these suggestions we can note that a practical question can be put in the form “Do you know whether to / what to do / where to go?” etc., while a theoretical question can be put in the form “Do you know whether this happened / what is the case / where it happened?” etc. In fact it is well-known that whether-contexts require the verb “know”. That is, for example, sentences of the form “I believe whether...” are unacceptable.

Finally, a question plausibly indicates a position of ignorance or doubt and thus the absence of theoretical or practical knowledge, but it also indicates something more. Shying away from the dark unknown, one does not always want to be relieved of one's ignorance or doubt, but by asking a question one indicates that one wants to. As noted earlier, Frege characterized this additional element of questions as that of a request. However, if one interprets him as proposing a simple reduction of questions to a subcategory of requests, as later proposed by Searle (1975a), one runs into a well-known problem (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1997). When one explicitly formulates questions as requests, it becomes apparent why this account fails:

- (5) Tell me whether the door is closed!
- (6) Tell me whether to close the door!

The presence of “whether” shows that the interrogative element has not been eliminated. That questions can be reformulated as requests *to answer questions* hardly shows they are nothing but requests. A reduction of questions to a species of requests therefore does not work.⁸

It is still true though of course that a question asks for or even demands an answer, and we can more charitably interpret Frege as meaning just that. But it is better to explain this out of the higher-level nature of questions and the inherent character of the position that interrogative acts indicate. The straightforward suggestion is that by questioning a subject indicates a position

⁸ Can't this objection be avoided by reformulating the question as the request to either assert or deny that the door is closed, or as the request to assert this if one knows it is closed and deny it if one knows it doesn't? It's questionable that all occurrences of “whether” or other interrogative expressions can be eliminated in this way though. For example, what about “I wonder whether the door is closed”? or “Which doors are closed”? See (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1997) Groenendijk and Stokhof for more discussion of this.

of wondering. Wondering is a position of being aware of one's ignorance or doubt, of an absence of knowledge, and simultaneously striving for this knowledge (Friedman 2013; 2017). An observation in support of this is that both theoretical and practical questions can be roughly paraphrased through something of the form of "I wonder whether / what / where" etc.

That the subject indicates and presents its position does not mean that it represents it conceptually. I am here primarily trying to understand force as indicated through very basic features of language such as intonation and obligatory grammatical markers like mood. While I have appealed to paraphrases using lexical items such as "know" or "wonder" to help us conceptualize the subject's position, I propose that basic force indicators present it in a non-conceptual way not exactly equivalent to the conceptual representation as in "I know...", "I wonder...", "I assert..." etc. They express the subject's *sense* of its position rather than a concept of it. One crucial difference between having a sense and having a concept is that only the latter entails reflective abilities. A subject may be able to perform assertoric, directive and interrogative speech acts because it has a sense of the corresponding positions, without yet being able to reflect on whether it really knows what to do or what is the case.

We can now state in which sense commitment can be contained in an act even if a subject is not committed to that act. In asking a yes-no question, a subject indicates that it is wondering whether something is the case or whether to do something. It is striving to know what is the case or what to do, to gain theoretical or practical knowledge it lacks. So it does not take a committal position with regard to the reality of the relevant SOAs. But the inquisitive position it takes is only intelligible if it presents what it is striving for, namely these positions of theoretical or practical knowledge. So the interrogative act must present the committal positions that the questioner is trying to elicit, but is therefore not yet committed to. Because the questioner is not committed to these positions, he is also not subject to the requirements such as justificatory obligations that are connected to them. But these are not simply removed either, as the cancellation account seems to suggest, but remain connected to the position and are inherited by whoever answers the question affirmatively or negatively by saying "yes" or "no" and/or repeating the assertion or direction that was put into question, negating it in the case of negation, while removing the interrogative marker in either case. They are transferred from the questioner to the answerer – which may turn out to be different roles of the same person.

In contrast, consider how Textor rejects the proposal that questions create cancellation contexts:

In asking whether oxygen is condensable, I present myself as not being licensed to assert that oxygen is condensable, and I invite the audience to provide the license. If the

speaker in fact asserted that oxygen is condensable and only cancelled the assertoric force, the utterances would not have the intended effect of inviting the interlocutor to provide the reasons that the speaker is lacking. If the thought is put forth in a neutral way, why provide reasons for its truth? (2020: 9)

I think this argument can be turned around just like Frege's: to present myself as not being licensed to *assert* I need to indicate that a license to assertion is in question. The proposed account of questions explains how this works.

5. Some varieties of higher-level acts

In this section I will try to give a sense how the account of questions as higher-level acts can be the model for other higher-level acts, in particular the logical acts of negating, conditionalizing, conjoining and disjoining, and how some of the questions this raises can be approached from the point of view of the account of the meaning of force indicators that I have proposed. I will also very briefly say something about fictional contexts. Of course, in this paper I can only address some of the relevant problems and concerns that the higher-level account raises, but I hope it will be sufficient to motivate pursuing this account further.

To illustrate what the contexts I am exploring have in common, consider some ways in which a subject might deflect the claim that it has asserted something:

(7) I was only asking a question.

(8) I only said 'if'.

(9) I was only joking.

And while it would thus not be correct to simply say without further ado that the subject asserted something, at the same time what it really did also could not be specified without reference to assertion. What it really did was asking whether the assertion was true, making a conditional assertion, or asserting jokingly.

This suggests the principle that the acts that were performed must be reported at the level of the highest-level act that was performed, with lower-level acts reported as being embedded in the context of that act. Otherwise the report would not merely be incomplete, but incomplete in such a way as to actually misrepresent, as reports that leave out essential context often do. If on the other hand one wanted to restrict notions of assertion to what above I called assertion simpliciter, in the manner of how Frege uses his assertion sign, such a sign would be pointless. It could only have the function of indicating the *absence* of an additional act of e.g.

disjoining, joking or playacting. But if no further act is performed, the sign is redundant. At the same time, it cannot prevent the performance of such an act. As Davidson pointed out, "...every joker, storyteller, and actor will immediately take advantage" (1979, reprinted in 1984: 113) of such a sign. So, it is useless either way.

Note that this argument here is only intended to apply to an assertion sign as used by Frege and others, namely so that that it is meant to exclude non-seriousness and other Frege point contexts. As I have argued, this confounds the contrast between assertions and directives with other contrasts like that between seriousness and non-seriousness. This argument does not show the impossibility of force indicators that just mark the difference between assertoric and directive acts and can be embedded in Frege point contexts, as force indicators are conceived here.⁹

Most have assumed under the influence of the force-content dichotomy that logical operations are performed on forceless propositions at least by default, though it has sometimes been allowed that there are special cases such as e.g. conditional assertions where a force indicator might be in the scope of a logical operator. One reason for this is that when people think of speech acts, they primarily think of illocutionary acts, while – weird as it may sound – they tend not to think of logical acts as speech acts at all. This is because on this way of thinking they rather belong to logic and semantics, while speech acts belong to pragmatics. But if one tries to capture the act or acts connected to e.g. disjunction in terms of an act or acts of assertion, it turns out not to make sense to say e.g. that a subject either performed an assertion P or an assertion Q. So it seems then one can only say that a disjunction of forceless propositions was asserted.¹⁰ But this apparent difficulty immediately disappears if instead we just say that the subject disjoined two assertions.

Another reason why the notion that assertions must always take wide scope over logical complexes may seem initially compelling is because one thinks of assertion primarily in terms of commitment and correctly sees that e.g. disjunctions or conditionals involve commitments to the whole rather than to their clauses. But this can again be sufficiently accounted for in terms of the facts that the highest-level act is one of e.g. disjoining or conditionalizing and the committal case is the default one. That is, a subject conditionalizes by using a conditional marker, and will be committed to this conditional unless it performs a further act which embeds the conditional, for example, in a fictional context, or as the antecedent of another conditional.

We therefore do not need an assertion sign (or other force indicators) as a sign of

⁹ Thanks to Max Köbl for asking for clarification at this point.

¹⁰ Compare Dummett (1973, ch. 8) for this argument. Even though I often disagree with it, Dummett's discussion is still unsurpassed in its breadth and depth and I will frequently draw on it in the following.

commitment to logical complexes. We also do not need it as representing a theoretical or practical position towards that complex, in the way I have suggested force indicators function. This is not to deny that there is a sense in which, to take the most obvious examples, a conjunction of assertions embodies a theoretical stance and a conjunction of directives a practical one. But I will argue that this sense can be entirely accounted for in terms of the fact that they conjoin theoretical, respectively practical acts. It's not obvious that there is any need to postulate an additional act directed at the whole complex. The only exception I have been able to think of so far interestingly concerns questions. As I will briefly discuss below, it seems to make sense to question a connective act.

In contrast, I will show that 'mixed' complexes such as mixed conditionals with practical and theoretical clauses can only be accounted for by ascribing separate forces to each clause. Besides, I have of course already argued that the Frege point does not justify the introduction of forceless propositions and that such a notion is in any case unintelligible because a mere representation of a SOA is essentially incomplete. We need to know from which position this SOA is being represented, and I have argued that is what force indicators indicate. In this section I will be mostly concerned to reinforce these arguments and to show that we do not need force indicators for a complex as a whole in *addition* to those that we need for the individual clauses. I begin my discussion with negation.

Negation. It is plausible that there is an act of rejecting or denying an assertion (or direction) simply by saying "no" in response to it, which is in some sense more basic than so-called propositional negation such as in "The door isn't closed." Some philosophers have therefore proposed that there is a speech act (by which they mean "illocutionary act") of denial or rejective negation diametrically opposed to, but on the same level as, the act of assertion – the view sometimes known as "rejectivism" (Price 1990; Rumfitt 2000). The dominant view though is the one tracing back to Frege and the Frege point according to which negation operates on the proposition and to deny an assertion is not to perform an illocutionary act of its own, but to assert the negation of its propositional content. Both views depend on the force-content dichotomy. I will argue that rejecting the dichotomy and adopting the account of force I have sketched opens up the possibility of an account of negation that vindicates and clarifies a sense in which rejective negation is basic without misconstruing it as an illocutionary act.

That construing it as an illocutionary act is a misconstrual once again becomes obvious as soon as other forces are taken into consideration: directives and interrogatives can of course also be negated. It seems clear that there are not different negatory illocutionary acts for each kind of illocutionary act such that we would have 'assertion-denial', 'directive-denial', and 'question-

denial', but just one operation of negation which can be applied to different illocutionary acts and also, as we will see, focus on different aspects of these acts. For what I will propose is that rejective negation is basic in the sense that it rejects the entire speech act in a holistic, not yet differentiated manner.

What is ordinarily known as propositional negation or internal negation operates on the SOA-representation. It denies that things hang together in the way they are represented as hanging together in the non-negated SOA-content. It rejects the reality of the represented SOA and could in the present framework therefore be more aptly called "SOA-negation". It is tempting to think that this phenomenon supports the traditional construal of propositions, but this is not the case. The argument against this is again that it still needs to be specified whether the reality of this SOA is being denied from a theoretical position towards the world, as something that might be the case, or rejected from a practical position, as something to possibly bring about. Otherwise we again get something that is essentially incomplete and not yet a move in the language game. SOA-negation thus presupposes force. It leaves it unchanged and unchallenged and generates the opposite, contradictory assertion (statement) or directive: we assert that something is not the case, or direct somebody not to do something.

But there are also ways of rejecting speech acts in which we challenge the legitimacy of the position the speaker is taking, without necessarily taking the opposite position. A hearer may say such things as "You don't know this!", "You are not in a position to assert this!", "You are not in a position to tell me what to do!", and so on. The speaker in turn may deny taking a certain position by what is known as illocutionary negation (Searle and Vanderveken 1985), saying things such as "I don't assert that...", "I don't order you to...", often as a prelude to taking a weaker stance such as "I'm only guessing / hypothesizing / advising", or to indicating theoretical or practical neutrality or indifference with regard to the reality of the relevant SOA. Acts of illocutionary negation are not autobiographical reports of how things are with the subject, they don't treat its position as something that may or may not be the case, as part of the relevant SOA; they are rather acts of refusing to take a certain theoretical or practical position with regard to a different SOA, of indicating that one is unable or unwilling to do so (see also Dummett 1973, 332).

The illocutionary verbs in these examples thus function as (non-basic) force indicators, so that the phenomenon of illocutionary negation once more highlights the crucial point of this paper that many higher-level acts can only be understood as the subject using a force indicator to indicate a position it does not (yet) take. In illocutionary negation a subject uses a non-basic, conceptual, lexical force indicator to indicate the position it refuses to take. This point equally

applies to basic force indicators and basic (rejective) negation. I can reject an assertion by using a force indicator to present the assertion I am rejecting, for example, by repeating it with a question intonation and then saying “no”. It is perverse to think that because I cannot be said (at least without further ado) to be asserting, what I am rejecting cannot be the assertion either, but must rather be the supposedly forceless proposition. I neither perform a separate illocutionary act of denial, nor do I make the opposite assertion. Rather the act I perform is the higher-level act of rejecting an assertion as a whole.

To focus the act of negation on the force indicator and thus on the subject’s position, this position has to be conceptualized and thus to be represented through a non-basic, conceptual level force indicator, as negation and other logical operations do not operate on non-conceptual content (Schmitz 2012). The present proposal that basic force indicators such as intonation and grammatical mood are non-conceptual can therefore explain why internal negation is commonly seen as the basic kind of (non-rejective) negation. For convenience I will also assume this interpretation of negation and a standard, bivalent logical framework in the following discussion of the other connectives.

Conjunction. While the notion that the whole complex is asserted at least initially has certain intuitions behind it when we consider disjunctions and conditionals, it immediately leads to counterintuitive consequences for conjunctions. Consider a conjunction of two statements / propositions such as that the door is closed and the window is open. If this conjunction is asserted, how many assertions were made? On the traditional view, it seems the answer must be one (1973, 337). Hanks, who sees that the conjunction is not a cancellation context, but still holds on to the traditional idea that the whole must be asserted, ends up claiming that three assertions have been made (2015, 103ff). But both answers seem wrong. As John Stuart Mill put the point a long time ago, “a team of horses is not another horse” (1884, 52). Intuitively, it seems clear that the correct answer is two, and that the assertion that the door is closed and the window is open must entail both the assertion that the door is closed and the assertion that the window is open. The most straightforward account of this is that we are simply dealing with a conjunction of two assertions / statements.

Also note that reports like “He ordered him to close the door and to open the window” and corresponding performatives like “I order you to close the door and to open the window” in ordinary language use to-clauses, which we have seen are indicative of practical stances, rather than that-clauses, which the traditional view takes to be forceless propositions. This further undermines the view that directives should be thought of as operating on conjunctions of forceless propositions and supports the straightforward account in terms of conjunctions of

directives. “I order you to close the door and to open the window” is just a slightly more economical way of saying “I order you to close the door and I order you to open the window”, which in turn is a more elaborate way of saying “Close the door and open the window!”.

Does the reduction of illocutionary acts operating on conjunctions to conjunctions of illocutionary acts always work? Here’s a difference between questioning a conjunction and a conjunction of questions: though there is a sense in which both acts put all conjuncts into question, the first can be answered negatively without specifying which of the conjuncts is to be rejected and without knowing and giving the answer to both questions, whereas of course both conjoined questions need to be answered (Dummett 1973, 337). This is a fairly subtle difference, but it should still be accounted for. The most straightforward way of accounting for it is to assume that we cannot only question assertions and directives, but also logical acts. This suggestion is also supported by the fact that we sometimes utter connectives with a question intonation. And because questioning is an act that can be applied to both theoretical and practical acts and is as such neither practical or theoretical, it makes sense from the present perspective that it can also be applied to logical acts, which are also as such neither practical nor theoretical, but can operate on acts of both kinds.

That connective acts can be questioned also indicates that there is a sense in which they can be incorrect. To conjoin a false statement with a true one is incorrect in a way in which disjoining them or negating the false statement or the conjunction obviously would not be.

Disjunction. With this we can move to disjunction, as there is also a sense in which a disjunction can be a “false alternative”, which may commit a subject to a false statement, or, for directives, to a wrong course of action. It is tempting then to think that disjunctions or other complexes must also be true or false in a sense which cannot be reduced to the truth or falsity of the connected clauses, but rather indicates the presence of a theoretical (or practical for complexes of practical stances) position towards the complex as a whole. However, “false” does not only contrast with “true”, but also with “right” and “correct”. For example, there are false moves in chess, but no true, but only right or correct ones. So a connective act can be wrong in the sense that it commits a subject to a false statement or to a directive prescribing a wrong course of action, but it is not obvious that the claim that there is also a further theoretical or practical act directed at the whole adds anything meaningful to this. And once we consider mixed complexes such as “If it rains, close the window!”, it becomes questionable what this act should even be.

Dummett (1973, 306f) claims that the fact that we will usually only jokingly respond “yes” to a disjunctive question such as “Coffee or tea?”, and that “no” in response to a negative

question such as “Isn’t he at home?” is usually interpreted as rejecting the negated statement rather than the act of negation, is a logical defect of English, and that certain West-African languages follow the “more logical” conventions in this regard. It’s clear that he thinks this because for him, as for many others, the default interpretation of logical operations is as within the scope of forceful acts. That is, he thinks the disjunction has the structure “? (P ∨ Q)” and the negative question the structure “? (¬P)” and if that were true, the default interpretation of a “yes” in response to the first question would have to be an affirmation of the disjunction and of a “no” in response to the second question the assertion of P.

Now, I don’t think either interpretation would necessarily be “more logical”, and my proposal can make sense of both. For example, it can make sense of agreeing with the disjunction as agreeing with presenting the right alternative along the lines just discussed. But it can also readily explain why this is not the default response English speakers give to such disjunctions: because the default understanding is rather as a disjunction of yes-no questions, so that the disjunction can be answered and thus satisfied by giving an affirmative answer to one of these questions, while questioning the disjunction itself and in response agreeing with it rather than with either of the disjuncts is a much more abstract, elusive and cognitively demanding operation. In contrast, it is not clear how this is to be explained on the kind of traditional account defended by Dummett and others.

The assumption that agreeing with a purely logical operation is cognitively more demanding and elusive may also be able to explain the pattern of responses to negative questions, though here the facts seem more ambiguous than Dummett makes them out to be. At least for German, recent experimental results (Claus et al. 2017) indicate that there are individual differences here, and for what it’s worth I also remember having been sometimes conflicted about how a “yes” or “no” in response to a negative question or other negated act would be interpreted. In any case, my account again has the resources to explain both responses, while the prediction of the traditional account are again not borne out.

Conditionals. With conditionals it is important to emphasize that a purely logical interpretation of the conditional marker is intended, as it is plausible that conditional markers in natural language also carry non-logical, temporal, causal and epistemic meanings. So I will just stipulate that the purely truth-functional, respectively affirmation-functional meaning of the material conditional is intended here.¹¹ A related point is that in natural language conditional

¹¹ But what is the point of discussing material implication here if only very few linguists and philosophers nowadays believe that it captures the meaning of natural language conditional markers? My concern is not primarily natural language semantics here, but to rebut arguments that force markers must take wide scope over logical operations. Force indicators rather only complete the entities logical operations can operate on, and these entities can be practical as well as theoretical. If this is accepted, it opens up the possibility of reconceptualizing logic as

markers are subordinating and have a topic-focus structure (Haiman 1978), while these features get lost on the way to the more abstract and purely coordinating material conditional. These points are important because if we are not careful, our natural language intuitions may bias our thinking about the logical connectives.

The first point is important because if non-logical meanings such as temporal or causal meanings are in play, it is easy to understand how the presence of temporal or causal relations between SOAs could be asserted or could be directed to be brought about. But then the connections between the clauses are not purely logical, not purely truth- or affirmation-functional, either. If on the other hand they are purely logical, it becomes hard to understand how they can be asserted or directed. This is because Wittgenstein's view that the logical constants and thus logical operations do not represent anything in the world is very plausible. It is plausible, if not compelling, that neither negation nor conjunction – in terms of which all logical operations, including conditionalization, can be defined – pick out anything in the world. They are rather purely subjective operations, acts of rejecting an act and denying the reality of something, or of creating a unit of acts for purposes of further logical operations. This is not the place to discuss these issues, but I wanted to make explicit the Wittgensteinian roots of the present perspective on logical acts.

The second point about subordination vs. coordination and topic/focus-structure is important because it can explain (away) the intuition that e.g. a mixed conditional such as “If the patient is still alive in the morning, change the dressing!” is an order – as we would typically say in ordinary language – which would seem to support the intuition that the whole conditional is in the scope of a directive act. It makes sense to classify it as an order in ordinary language because the main clause, which is the focus of the whole conditional, is an order. But this non-logical structure gets lost once we move to a purely logical representation, and all that remains is a purely affirmation-functional connection between a statement (assertion) and an order. And in any case, it is of course absurd to think that the order could be executed by killing the patient and thereby making sure the conditional is true, as would have to be possible if a directive act had wide scope over a conditional consisting of forceless propositions.

Or is it? It is a testament to the strength of the grip in which the force-content distinction has held the philosophical imagination that philosophers have defended the wide-scope interpretation even in the face of such consequences and the fact that the main clause is in the imperative, while the if-clause is in the indicative. So Dummett still argues that in case the

affirmation- rather than truth-functional, as argued in the text, and this may also make possible new frameworks for natural language semantics. Thanks to Max Kölbl for pressing me on this point.

antecedent is potentially under the control of the orderer, “there seems an overwhelming reason” for the wide-scope interpretation, “namely that in such a case the person given the command may falsify the antecedent precisely in obedience to the command. E.g., a child, told to put on his coat if he goes out, may very well choose not to go out in order to comply with the command; and he may be commended for his obedience in acting so.” (ibid.: 339f). But all this shows is that a subject may take care that the condition of a command does not come to pass in order to avoid disobeying the command, and may sometimes be commended for that, though, as our earlier example showed, and Dummett goes on to admit, this will definitely not always be the case. It certainly does not show that there is any sense in which the SOA of his going out is the object of a directive which he could be said to be obeying or disobeying. Rather in the antecedent of the conditional, this SOA of the boy going out, though it involves an action, is considered from a theoretical position, as something that may or not turn out to be the case. Just if it does turn out to be the case, the boy is ordered to put on his coat. So only this latter action is in the scope of a directive.

For the same reason, a directive also cannot detach the statement antecedent of a conditional, even if the statement were to turn out to be true if the directive was executed. For example, the antecedent of the conditional “If the door is closed, open the window!” cannot be detached by the command “Close the door!”, but only by the statement “The door is closed.”. The antecedent represents a factual condition and it therefore has to be determined from a theoretical position towards the world that that fact obtains. A mere wish, intention, or order to close the door is not sufficient. We need to know that this practical act has been fulfilled. It might be objected that in Dummett’s example the boy may have to put on his coat before he actually goes out in order to obey the command. But this is just a contingent feature of this particular example which has no logical significance. The logical connection is still between the truth of the antecedent and the consequent directive.

Compare this with what I think is a practical conditional like e.g. “To build resilience in isolation, master the art of time travel!”.¹² Here the antecedent to-clause can and must be detached with the order to build resilience in isolation, allowing us to infer the consequent order through a practical modus ponens argument. The statement that resilience in isolation has been built is not sufficient to detach the antecedent. If it is already a fact that resilience in isolation has been built, the conditional does not commit the subject to accepting the prescription to master the art of time travel. Only the goal to build resilience commits it in this way. Note again that the idea here is not that the subject introspects, finds a wish and detaches the antecedent on that

¹² New York Times from May 15, 2020.

basis. This would turn the practical mental state into a fact observed from a theoretical position towards the world. Rather the suggestion is that the subject represents building resilience as a goal from a practical position towards the world, in a self-aware way.

Philosophers have often denied that there are conditionals with practical antecedents. But this is because they have been looking in the wrong place.¹³ It is true that “if” or other conditional markers like it do not allow practical antecedents. They require a theoretical, factual, antecedent condition. Note that these conditional markers differ from the other connectives in this regard. Negation, conjunction and disjunction all equally operate on practical and theoretical clauses. This is another indication that natural language conditional markers carry non-logical content. They haven’t evolved purely logical, affirmation-functional meanings yet.¹⁴

Now of course practical deductive inferences are also a neglected topic in the study of formal languages after a period of intense interest from about the 30s to the 70s of the past century.¹⁵ I cannot discuss the many issues this raises in this paper, but since the approach I have presented is heavily invested in the notion that the practical domain should be integrated by treating it in a parallel fashion rather than by attempting to reduce it to the theoretical, I want to briefly comment on this.

First, I think there is a powerful argument for integrating practical acts into logic which derives from the meaning of logical constants. It is widely accepted that deductive inferences proceed in virtue of these meanings. So, since natural language connectives mostly already operate on both theoretical and practical clauses and conditional connections also at least make sense for both, such an integration should be possible.

Second, the force-content dichotomy is a, if not the, major obstacle to such an integration, as it centers everything around the proposition as a truth-evaluable, but supposedly forceless entity. Overcoming this dichotomy should therefore facilitate this integration. If the argument of this paper is correct, force indicators (with the exception of questions as higher-level force indicators) do not operate on truth- or other satisfaction-evaluable items, but only complete SOA representations to form such items. They should thus be added to formal languages as a separate category of non-logical expressions and be treated accordingly. The validity of inferences will then also depend on matching force indicators, but apart from that

¹³ Again compare Dummett: “...and we may then rack our brains to discover why we cannot joint two commands by means of ‘if’ – why we cannot get an imperative into the antecedent.” (ibid.: 306).

¹⁴ Maybe strictly speaking “or”, “and” and “not” are not purely logical in natural language either, but because they operate on both theoretical and practical clauses, and the conjunctions among them are syntactically coordinating, they are significantly further down that path.

¹⁵ But this may be starting to change again. See Vranas (2011) and Charlow (2014) for some recent work on imperatives and imperative logic in philosophy and Kaufmann (2011) for a recent monograph on imperatives in linguistics.

everything else should pretty much stay the same.

Third, it has often been noted that the meaning of connectives for imperatives / directives can be specified through “obedience tables” or “satisfaction tables” in a manner that is parallel to how truth tables specify the meaning of connectives for statements. However, there is a disanalogy in that, while a statement ascribing a truth value to a statement also amounts to affirming this statement, this is not true for the ascription of a satisfaction value to a directive. This is because a statement ascribing a satisfaction value to a directive is still a statement, and affirming a statement is not tantamount to affirming a directive, which is directed towards its satisfaction in a different way. To achieve a better unification, one should look for a pair of terms that can be applied to both theoretical and practical acts and affirm or reject them equally.

Dummett proposes “correct” and “incorrect” (ibid: 305), but the argument of this paper strongly points to the conclusion that we should simply choose “yes” and “no” as markers of affirmation and denial or rejection. To affirm a statement is to affirm its truth, to affirm a directive is to affirm its fulfillment. In this way, an affirmation table can specify the meaning e.g. of material implication. It specifies the pattern of affirmation and denial of the clauses that is consistent with affirming the conditional and thus determines the inferences that are valid. For example, affirming the antecedent will commit us to affirming the consequent and rejecting the consequent to also rejecting the antecedent regardless of whether these clauses are theoretical or practical.

Fiction. I will be very brief about fiction here, using playacting as my example to illustrate the basic idea, which is simply that, just as there are no special fictional meanings for terms like “red” or “table” (Searle 1975b), there are also no special fictional meanings for force indicators. We just have fictional markers which transfer these familiar meanings into a new dimension or context. In this context, the actors play asserting as well as commanding, questioning, greeting, and so on. They also play negating, disjoining, conjoining and conditionalizing. The fictional language-game is at a still higher level than the acts we have considered so far. But the illocutionary and logical markers are still *used* for the purposes of this new game. They are now used to indicate the positions taken by the characters the actors are playing, and it is the characters who are subject to the obligations connected to positions. And again, the actor is not committed to the positions she indicates because she is doing less, because she is not using a Fregean assertion sign, but because she is doing *more*: she is using our ordinary force markers in a special context indicated by fictional markers and governed by the further conventions of dramatic representation (Dummett, op. cit.: 310f).

6. Comparison with some alternative accounts

I've argued that questions belong to the same class of contexts as those more commonly associated with the Frege point such as logical operations and fictional contexts, and that all these contexts can be accounted for in essentially the same way, namely in terms of 'what's more': of interrogative, logical, or fictional acts. These higher-level acts often suspend commitment to the lower level acts which they embed, but still can only be understood as operations on forceful acts rather than on supposedly forceless propositions. Basic force indicators non-conceptually present theoretical or practical positions a subject takes in a self-aware way. Higher-level acts shift this meaning into the new dimensions they open up. For example, in the context created by the higher-level illocutionary act of a yes-no question, the force indicators now indicate the position of theoretical or practical knowledge the subject is seeking. The requirement to provide justification for this position is transferred to whoever provides an answer to the question, and the answer is given by removing the indicator of interrogative force from the assertion or directive that has been put into question rather than by adding a Fregean assertion sign. Similarly, acts such as disjoining or conditionalizing connect theoretical or practical positions, while only committing to one of their affirmation functions. In a conditional the antecedent force marker indicates the practical or theoretical position from which a SOA is considered as a possible goal or a possible fact in order to determine what else to do or what else will be the case in this eventuality. The antecedent is detached and commitment to it is expressed by repeating it while removing the conditional marker, thus taking the anticipated position with its justificatory requirements and inferring the consequent.

In conclusion, I want to compare my account to some of its rivals. I've already at length discussed how it is similar to and different from Peter Hanks's cancellation account, to which it is certainly much indebted. Now I want to focus on accounts which appeal to notions of display and simulation like those of Francois Recanati (2019), Irad Kimhi (2018) and Silver Bronzo (2019). I've also frequently said such things as that higher-level acts display or present lower level forceful acts, and instead of saying just now that we anticipate goals or facts in a conditional I could also have said that we simulate them.

But the question here is: what is being simulated and how? In any simulation there are things that are actually done in order to perform the simulation and other things that are merely being simulated. To use Kimhi's example, a flight attendant may actually move a life-vest in order to mimic and display its use while not actually using it. For Kimhi, 'unasserted' occurrences as in Frege point contexts are assertoric gestures which mimic assertions without being assertions. Bronzo claims that propositions, which like Hanks he thinks must be forceful, can for

that reason not even occur in complex clauses like conditionals. Only simulations of propositions which specify the propositions they simulate occur in such clauses. Recanati appeals to Austin's distinction between locutionary and illocutionary acts and claims that in cancellation contexts only the locutionary act is performed and that this performance represents and simulates the performance of the illocutionary act.

Let's stick with the conditional. Let's suppose I wonder what to do if it rains and that I linguistically represent and thus simulate the occurrence of the fact that it rains. In so doing I also represent and simulate taking a theoretical position towards this SOA. Now generally we simulate something by performing a similar action or through symbolic representation as in a computer simulation of a hurricane. The present case is complex because I might be thought to be doing an action simulation of a symbolic act of representation: the assertion that it rains. This seems to be what Bronzo, Kimhi and Recanati are suggesting. But am I then also merely simulating meaningfully using language? This seems to be the radical position Bronzo is taking by claiming that the relevant propositions do not occur in a conditional at all. Kimhi and Recanati at least appear to be denying that a force indicator is being used in the antecedent. But I don't see how we can explain how the simulation of my position and the situation works unless we assume I am actually using the force indicator and the other bits of language to represent both. How can what is not even a meaningful use of language 'specify' a proposition? How can I represent the position I would take if not in virtue of the established meaning of the force indicator? It therefore seems to me that I do use the force indicator, it's just that I use it in the special context created through the conditional marker to indicate a position I merely anticipate or simulate and have not yet taken.¹⁶

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