

SINCERITY AND THE RELIABILITY OF TESTIMONY:
BURGE ON THE A PRIORI BASIS OF TESTIMONIAL ENTITLEMENT

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‘Where did you grow up?’ you ask a stranger. ‘Spokane,’ she says. ‘Oh, I have never heard of that city. Where is it?’ ‘Washington State,’ she replies. ‘Washington State? It must rain all the time.’ ‘Not at all, the weather in Spokane is nothing like the weather in Seattle.’

Suppose you don’t have any particular justifying reasons or evidence for thinking she is particularly trustworthy, but that you don’t have any reasons or evidence for thinking she isn’t. Suppose you believe her. Would your belief be justified, reasonable, rational? Would it be epistemically entitled, on a par, say, with perceptual belief? Can you rationally take what other people tell you at face value?

Some say yes. People can be reasonably believed, absent reasons for thinking they can’t. For the most part people are credible. If you have no grounds for suspicion, then taking what other people say at face value is a reasonable strategy. “Default acceptance” is a justified,

reasonable stance. If you think this, then you agree with Thomas Reid and you are a “non-reductionist.” Non-reductionists embrace the *Acceptance Principle*:

A person is entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him or her, unless there are stronger reasons not to.

Others say no. Sure, she may really be from Spokane. But if you have no justifying reasons or evidence for thinking that she is credible, you should suspend belief. People cannot be reasonably believed absent justifying reasons for thinking they are sincere and competent. If you have no independent justifying grounds for acceptance, then taking what other people say at face value is not a reasonable strategy. Buyer beware! If you think this, then you agree with David Hume and you are a “reductionist” about testimonial warrant. Reductionists reject the Acceptance Principle.

Where do you stand? Do you side with Reid or Hume?¹

Tyler Burge sides with Reid.² In his 1993 landmark paper ‘Content Preservation’ he argued for the following:

- (1) The Acceptance Principle is true. Reid is right.
- (2) The Acceptance Principle is a priori necessary; prima facie entitled (warranted) acceptance of a presentation-as-true has a *rational* (non-empirical) basis, a basis in the nature of reason and understanding, independent of sense-perceptual experience
- (3) Though most comprehension-based beliefs are entitled (warranted) empirically, some applications of the Acceptance Principle result in beliefs that are entitled a priori.

Unlike perceptual beliefs, not all “testimony-based” beliefs are empirically warranted.

These are separable claims. You can embrace (1) without embracing (2); the Acceptance Principle may be true but only contingently so. And you can embrace (2) without embracing (3); the Acceptance Principle may be a priori necessary though not a single comprehension-based belief is warranted a priori.³

This is a paper about Burge's a priori justification for the Acceptance Principle. Most of the discussion in the testimony literature focuses on (1), and most of the critical discussion of Burge's paper focuses on (3). I shall grant (1) and ignore (3). My topic is (2).⁴ If you reject (1), you can still follow along, for Burge's case for (2) is independently interesting, even if (1), and so (2), isn't true. Burge's argumentation is rich and detailed, worthy of extended discussion. I shall argue that Burge's a priori case for (2), interesting as it is, falls short of making the case for an a priori basis for testimonial warrant.

1. A Note on 'Testimony' and the Acceptance Principle

I used the word 'testimonial' in my title. But the word 'testimony' is slippery, for it sometimes refers to what speakers do, sometimes to what hearers do, and sometimes to what they both do together.

Let's say speakers (senders) *present-propositions-as-true*. Presentations-as-true make up a broad category of speech acts. Speakers present-as-true by affirming, agreeing, asserting, claiming, certifying, describing, informing, insisting, reporting, telling, testifying, validating, and so on. But paradigmatically presentations-as-true are assertions.⁵

Hearers (recipients) *comprehend* presentations-as-true. A hearer perceives and comprehends the utterance: the hearer represents the utterance as a speech act, as a presentation-as-true that P. I call these representations *comprehension-states*. They are accurate or inaccurate.

Suppose a hearer represents an utterance as a presentation-as-true that P. If the speaker presented-as-true that P, then the hearer's representation—the hearer's comprehension-state—is accurate. If the speaker didn't present-as-true that P (perhaps the act had a different force, a different content, or perhaps the speaker was just making noises), then the hearer's comprehension state is inaccurate.⁶

When a hearer takes a comprehension-state at face value, he or she forms a *comprehension-based belief*. I shall not pause to discuss what I mean by “take at face value.” I trust you get what I have in mind. I also call this “acceptance.” “Accepting” and “taking at face value” amount to the same thing. Acceptance in this sense is a species of belief, not a practical act distinct from belief.⁷

Like Burge, let's call the process whereby a speaker's presentation-as-true leads a hearer via comprehension and acceptance to form a comprehension-based belief *interlocution*.

We can now reformulate the *Acceptance Principle*:

A person is entitled to accept a comprehension-state that P in forming (or sustaining) a comprehension-based belief that P, unless there are stronger reasons not to.

Comprehension-based beliefs are prima facie warrant by a prima facie entitlement.⁸

The epistemology of “testimony” is then the epistemology of comprehension-based beliefs. By “testimonial entitlement” I mean the entitlement for comprehension-based beliefs.⁹

2. (1) Without (2)

For present purposes I accept the Acceptance Principle. I accept Burge's (1). I do not accept that it is a priori necessary. I doubt Burge's (2). I fear some readers may not immediately see the difference between (1) and (2).

Whether there is a difference depends on your overall epistemological framework. Some philosophers like Roderick Chisholm and Robert Audi embrace epistemological frameworks where epistemic principles are a priori necessary.¹⁰ If either Chisholm or Audi accepted the Acceptance Principle (neither in fact does), they would hold that it is a priori necessary. They agree you cannot accept (1) without (2).

On the other hand, other philosophers think epistemic principles are only empirical contingent truths. Consider Alvin Goldman's reliabilism. Goldman believes epistemologists discover a priori the criterion of justifiedness (warrant in the broad sense)—reliably inducing true belief—but cognitive scientists discover which epistemic principles are true by discovering which belief-forming processes reliably induce true belief.¹¹ Depending on the facts, Goldman might embrace the Acceptance Principle. But the Acceptance Principle would only be empirically true if true on Goldman's framework. You could even be a radical empiricist but still embrace epistemic principles like the Acceptance Principle. So depending on your overall framework, you can embrace (1) without (2).¹²

What about Burge? Burge places a reliability condition on warrant, hence entitlement. But Burge's methodology differs from Goldman's and Burge is not a reliabilist in the same sense as Goldman. Burge does not first determine whether comprehension-based belief is reliable before deciding whether the Acceptance Principle is true. Instead, Burge first provides *other* reasons for thinking that the Acceptance Principle is true, reasons that focus on our practice and on understanding the Acceptance Principle. He thinks these reasons should persuade people to accept the Acceptance Principle. I shall not review but simply grant those reasons.¹³ Burge's argument for (2) then purports to provide a "philosophical account" or "underlying rationale" for the Acceptance Principle, granted its truth.¹⁴

Compare Kant on morality. Kant presumes that some actions are right, some are wrong. He then sets out to understand the *underlying rationale* or *justification* for morality. Kant sets out to “ground” morality a priori in the nature of reason. Morality, according to Kant, has a rational, non-empirical justification. Now of course you can accept various moral principles—it is *prima facie* wrong to kill, for example—without agreeing with Kant that morality has an a priori basis.

Similarly you can agree with Burge that the Acceptance Principle is true without agreeing with Burge that the Acceptance Principle has an a priori basis in the nature of reason. Without begging any questions, you can grant (1) without (2).¹⁵

3. Burge’s Teleological Reliabilist Epistemological Framework

So this is a paper about Burge’s a priori argument that testimonial entitlement has an a priori basis in the nature of reason. To best understand Burge’s argument you need to understand his overall epistemological framework. I am sure I won’t surprise most of my readers if I say it is complicated. I will expound his framework piece-by-piece.

The **first piece** of Burge’s framework is the *general* a priori necessary connection between *functions* and *norms*. According to Burge, for any item with a function there are *natural norms* that govern the functioning of the item. Natural norms are levels or standards of adequacy constitutively associated with fulfilling or furthering functions. So understood, natural norms are answers to questions about how well a functional item is doing in fulfilling or furthering its function. These norms apply no matter the function.¹⁶

Burge singles out four natural norms for any item with a function.

First, we might ask if the item fulfilled its function. If it has, it has clearly met a level of adequacy in fulfilling its function. This is trivial. So the first natural norm is function fulfillment.

Second, we might ask if the item is doing as well as it can, given its current resources and circumstances. Did a tick, for example, navigate as well as possible to a blood source? Or was the tick diseased or overwhelmed with other tasks? If the tick did the best it can, wasn't diseased or overloaded, then the tick functioning (operated) normally. It did well in furthering its function. The second natural norm is normal functioning.

Third, we might ask if the item *reliably* fulfills its function. This question is not about how well the item is performing now or whether it fulfills its function *now*, but whether it *reliably* fulfills its function overall. An item that reliably fulfills its function performs *well*; it meets another standard of adequacy associated with furthering its function. Reliably fulfilling its function is the third natural norm.

Fourth, we might combine the second and third questions. We might ask if the function-bearer is functioning normally *now* and reliable *overall*. Is this a normally functioning, reliable capacity or competence? If it is, it is successfully furthering its function. Even so, meeting the second and third norms does not guarantee meeting the first norm. The fourth norm is normal functioning *on the occasion* and reliable function fulfillment *overall*.

The **second piece** is the introduction of *representational* functions. It is a priori, Burge argues, that beliefs have the representational function of being true, that belief-forming capacities have the representational function of forming true beliefs, that perceptual representations have the function of being accurate, and that perceptual representational capacities have the representational function of forming accurate perceptual representations. Similarly for other representational states and capacities.¹⁷

Burge believes representational functions do not reduce to biological functions. Representational functions have to do with accuracy and truth. Biological functions have to do

with meeting whole organism needs. Burge argues that since nature “does not care” about truth, representational functions are not biological functions. So do not argue against Burge’s claim about the function or functions of representational capacities on the grounds that nature “does not care” about truth, for Burge relies on that premise himself.¹⁸

The **third piece** of Burge’s framework is to apply the first piece to the second: if belief-forming capacities have representational *functions*, then there are *norms* governing the operation of those capacities. And since the functions are representational—achieving truth and accuracy, and so furthering knowledge—the functions are *epistemic*. And since the functions are epistemic, the associated norms are *epistemic norms*.¹⁹

Burge then argues that prima facie entitlement is a right to believe that consists in meeting one of the four natural norms associated with forming true beliefs as the representational function of the belief-forming capacity. Of the four, which one?

We already know the answer, for we already know three familiar facts about warrant:

- Entitlement is compatible with error; there are entitled false beliefs.
- Entitlement is incompatible with malfunctioning, disease and distraction.
- Entitlement is a good route to truth; entitlement entails reliability.

The first fact rules out the first norm. The second and third facts rule in the second and third norms. So if failing the first is permissible, but the second *and* third must be satisfied, then entitlement consists in meeting the fourth norm, for the fourth norm just is the second and third.

According to Burge:

Epistemic warrant is a right to believe that consists in the belief-forming capacity functioning normally on the occasion and being reliable overall, when the capacity has forming true beliefs as a representational function.²⁰

If entitlement requires reliability, must entitlement reliably connect belief to its subject matter in *all* conditions? Certainly not. We cannot require warrant to be a good route to truth in all conditions. But if not all conditions, then what conditions? Current conditions? Many reliabilists would say yes. That is not Burge's answer.

This takes us to the **fourth piece** in Burge's framework: *normal conditions*. Entitlement does not require reliability in all conditions or even in current conditions; warrant requires reliability in *normal* conditions. For in general those are the conditions that matter for evaluating functional items. We evaluate hearts when they are in organisms, not when they are on the shelf. Entitlement for Burge is then a reliable route to truth in normal conditions.²¹

Burge does not discuss normal conditions in detail.²² But in general normal conditions are those conditions (and conditions of similar type) that enter into the explanation of the nature or formation of the competence. For our perceptual competence, normal conditions are those conditions where the representational contents of our perceptual state types were formed, both evolutionary and developmental. For our linguistic competence (for our competence to comprehend intelligible utterances of speech acts), normal conditions would count as those conditions that enter into the nature or formation of our competence. These conditions are also both evolutionary—the emergence of our language faculty—and developmental—the conditions where we learned our own language.

I now turn to the **fifth piece** of Burge's overall framework. Burge follows a non-skeptical methodology. When Burge approaches perceptual beliefs and comprehension-based beliefs, he does not begin by leaving it open whether perceptual beliefs or comprehension-based beliefs are *prima facie* entitled. He assumes they are. He assumes we are "rationally entitled to rely on

reason, memory, and perception.”²³ The point is then to explain why. This is common practice in epistemology.

Since Burge has a teleological reliabilist view of entitlement, this means he contends that perceptual beliefs and comprehension-based beliefs (among other categories of belief) are reliably formed in normal conditions when functioning normally, that perception and comprehension are reliable “guides to truth” in normal conditions. Burge thus assumes that “rationality and its non-rational resources (such as perception...) are reliable in their normal environments...and that *that* reliability underwrites our default entitlements” to rely on reason, memory and perception, and those reliabilities extend to explain our default entitlement to rely on interlocution.²⁴

This teleological reliabilist framework is most explicitly developed in Burge’s writing on perception. It is not front-and-center in ‘Content Preservation’ but hints are clearly there. It is evident in the Postscript to ‘Content Preservation’ and the Introduction to his 2013 collection, and in other papers, especially ‘Perceptual Entitlement.’ According to Burge, for all belief-forming competencies, entitlement consists in meeting the fourth norm. His account of testimonial entitlement is just as much a teleological reliabilist account as is his account of perceptual entitlement.

And so when we assume with Burge that the Acceptance Principle is true, we assume:

- Comprehension and acceptance has inducing true beliefs as a representational function.
- So comprehension and acceptance is governed by natural norms.
- So comprehension-based entitlement consists in normal functioning on the occasion and reliable function fulfillment in normal conditions.

- So comprehension and acceptance of presentations-as-true reliably leads to true beliefs in normal conditions.
- So for comprehension and acceptance of presentations-as-true to reliably produce true beliefs in normal conditions, presentations-as-true need to be reliably true in normal conditions.
- So presentations-as-true are reliably true in normal conditions.

These assumptions focus our question. If we assume the Acceptance Principle and if in addition we grant Burge's overall framework, then we go so far as to grant that presentations-as-true are reliably true in normal conditions. Even though that is granting a lot, granting all of that is not to grant our question. Our question is not *whether* this is true—the issue is not whether presentations-as-true are reliably true in normal conditions—but *why* is it true. Is it true a priori because of the nature of reason, or is it true because of contingent facts about human social life? Is it a priori necessary that presentations-as-true are reliable in normal conditions, or only contingently so?

4. The Possibility of Massive Error

I am now one brief section away from expounding Burge's a priori argument. Before turning to the argument I should say how Burge deals with actual and possible errors, for some people are tempted to reject the Acceptance Principle outright because of actual and possible error. (i) How is it, for example, that I might still form a prima facie entitled belief when believing what you tell me, even though you are lying or simply mistaken? (ii) Or how it is that I might reasonably believe you when you are reliably insincere or incompetent? (iii) Or what happens if I am a massively deceived, disembodied brain-in-a-vat, but "from the inside" it seems no different to

me, and so it seems to me that I am being told all sorts of things by apparently credible interlocutors?

(i) If you are reliably sincere and competent, and just so happen to lie or slip on this occasion, my comprehension-based belief is still *prima facie* warranted, just as a perceptual belief based on an illusory perceptual representation may still be *prima facie* entitled. Entitlement does not, after all, require truth in every case. One-off lying or error isn't a problem.

(ii) But what if you are reliably insincere or incompetent? That isn't a problem either, for then there is good reason for saying that I am no longer in normal conditions. For we have assumed that comprehension and acceptance are reliable in normal conditions, and so we have assumed that presentations-as-true are reliable in normal conditions, and so we have assumed that our interlocutors are reliably sincere and competent in normal conditions. So if you are not reliably sincere, I am no longer in normal conditions. So just as we sometimes move from normal conditions for perceptual reliability to non-normal conditions (even without noticing), we sometimes move from normal conditions for testimonial reliability to non-normal conditions (even without noticing) when talking to others.

This matters because *prima facie* entitlement persists when we leave normal conditions, as long as we are still functioning normally. Entitlement requires normal functioning on the occasion and reliability overall *in normal conditions*; it does not require that we are *in* normal conditions. Entitlement may persist even if *de facto* reliability lapses. As long as we have no reason to think we are no longer in normal conditions, we are entitled to presume we are in normal conditions, and so we are entitled to presume that our source is reliable. Reliable lying or incompetence isn't a problem.²⁵

(iii) This also means prima facie warrant persists even when we are in radically non-normal conditions, including brain-in-a-vat scenarios.²⁶ If I am a brain-in-a-vat and I'm not really talking to anyone, my comprehension-based beliefs may still remain warranted.²⁷ The Acceptance Principle applies in *all* conditions, even radically non-normal conditions. Being a brain-in-a-vat isn't a problem.²⁸

I now restate one more time the issue of the paper: if prima facie testimonial entitlement requires the reliability of presentations-as-true in normal conditions, then is the basis of that reliability a priori or empirical? Is the Acceptance Principle based a priori in the nature of reason, or does the Acceptance Principle have a contingent, empirical basis?

5. Burge's A Priori Justification of the Acceptance Principle

Up to now we have assumed:

- The Acceptance Principle.
- Burge's Teleological Reliabilism.
- So comprehension has the function of inducing true acceptances, and that it reliably does so in normal conditions when functioning normally.
- So presentations-as-true are reliably true in normal conditions.

I now turn to Burge's a priori rationale for the Acceptance Principle. Here is the first step:

- I. Prima facie, an intelligible assertion is an a priori sign of a rational source.

Intelligibility is the "expression" of rationality.

A priori the explanation of intelligible utterances is that they are produced by rational beings:

Expressions of propositional representational content necessarily presuppose some source in a system of cognitive and practical interactions with the world (including belief and intention)—a system that involves the use of reasons under rational norms... The propositional *expression* of content bears a particularly marked relation to a higher sort of practical and cognitive intentional *agency*... a rational source of the expression of propositional rational content must make use of reasons in the formation of beliefs and intentions.²⁹

Expression of propositional content is an a priori, prima facie, constitutive sign of practical and cognitive rational intentional agency, a sign of a rational source that, in being a rational source, must make use of theoretical and practical reasons in the formation of beliefs and intentions.³⁰ There is an a priori constitutive connection between intelligible assertive utterances and rational sources: rational sources produce intelligible-presentations-as-true.³¹

Here is the second step of Burge's justification:

II. Rational sources are constitutively reliable; rationality is a prima facie sign of truth. What are rational sources? They are beings with epistemic competencies: perception, memory, reason, etc., that they use to guide theoretical and practical activity. And to have epistemic competencies is to have warranted beliefs on the basis of such competencies, and so to meet natural epistemic norms governing those competencies. And to have warranted beliefs on the basis of such competencies is to reliably form and sustain true beliefs in normal conditions on the basis of such competencies, as well as to correct for errors on the basis of such competencies. Rational sources are then beings with theoretical and practical reason with reliably true beliefs in normal conditions. So all else being equal, a rational source will be full of reliably true beliefs. So, prima facie, a rational source is a source of truth.³²

A rational source will not only *contain* reliably true beliefs in normal conditions, a rational source will also *present* reliably true beliefs in assertive communication. And so a rational source will present *competently* and *sincerely*.

The general features that support credibility are those implied by the rationality of presentations-as-true. Reason supports credibility. Slightly less generally, that an individual is *prima facie* competent in a given case follows from the individual's rationality. A rational person, exercising reason, would not make an assertion on a matter about which he or she is not competent. *Also that an individual is prima facie sincere in a given case follows from an individual's rationality...Sincere, rationally supported or protected, competent presentations-as-true are credible.* Further evidence that supports an interlocutor's credibility usually supports specific elaborations on the interlocutor's competence, sincerity, and/or rationality.³³

The Acceptance Principle thus follows a priori from the constitutive connections between intelligibility, rationality, competence and sincerity. The Acceptance Principle has a basis a priori in the nature of reason.

Put succinctly, here is Burge's argument:

- I. Intelligibility is a defeasible sign of rationality.
- II. Rationality is a defeasible sign of truth.
- III. So, intelligibility is a defeasible sign of truth.

Since the argument for either step does not make reference to a range of sensory-experiences, but only makes reference to conceptual-explanatory connections, the argument for the conclusion, and so for the Principle, is a priori.

Translated into the idiom of his teleological reliabilist framework, the argument goes like this:

1. A priori: intelligible presentations-as-true are reliably produced by rational sources in normal conditions when functioning normally. (Intelligibility is a defeasible sign of rationality.)
2. A priori: Rational sources are reliably sincere and competent in normal conditions when functioning normally. (Rationality is a defeasible sign of truth.)
3. So, a priori: presentation-as-true are reliably true in normal conditions when functioning normally. (Intelligibility is a defeasible sign of truth.)

To reach the Acceptance Principle as I have reformulated it, the argument then proceeds:

4. So, a priori: comprehension-states reliably transition to true acceptances (beliefs) in normal conditions when functioning normally. (For they accept reliably true presentations-as-true.)
5. So, a priori: our capacity to comprehend presentations-as-true meets natural norms constitutive of prima facie entitlement. (For it is reliable in normal conditions when functioning normally.)
6. So, a priori: A hearer is entitled in accepting a comprehension-state that P in forming (or sustaining) a comprehension-based belief that P, unless there are stronger reasons not to. (The Acceptance Principle.)

The argument appeals to general connections between intelligibility, rationality and truth.

The basis for testimonial warrant resides in the nature of reason, of rational sources, human or

not.³⁴ It applies to any possible rational source; it transcends the human social context. It does not matter whether the source is a human, a Martian or an intelligent blob.

6. The Transpersonal Function of Reason

That's Burge's argument. Convinced? Few readers report being moved by Burge's argument as presented so far. I must confess that for a long time I didn't get it. I didn't see that Burge had said anything *false*. I saw that intelligibility is a sign of rationality. And I saw that rational beings are full of true beliefs. Even so, I just didn't *get it*. I didn't see why there should be an a priori connection between rationality, truth and sincerity. Why should rational beings *say* what is true, and do so *reliably*? Why should rational beings reliably *present* truth? Why not lie when it suits your interests? Why is there a rational, non-empirical *motivation* for *sincere* presentations-as-true? What is the a priori connection between rationality and sincere presentations-as-true? Reason may produce true beliefs, but why does it produce true assertions? The very last move in Burge's exposition left me adrift.

I now see why Burge thinks rational beings should present the truth when they present-as-true. In this section I shall discuss Burge's answer, at least as I see it. Burge's answer to this question then completes his argument for the Acceptance Principle.

Burge raised our question himself in 'Content Preservation':

Rational backing is, other things equal, a ground for acceptance of something as true.

But in dealing with others, one must often take account of their lies. Why is one a priori entitled, except when reasonable doubt arises, to abstract from the possibility that it may be in the interlocutor's rational interest to lie?...My account must acknowledge the following issue: The straight line route from the *prima facie*

intelligibility of a presentation-as-true to prima facie rational characteristics of the source to prima facie acceptability (truth) of the presentation [from intelligibility to rationality to truth], is threatened by the fact that certain aspects of *rationality* (rational lying) may go counter to true presentations. So why should rationality, especially in another person, be a sign of truth? Can one have a priori rational entitlement to accept what one is told, without considering whether the interlocutor is lying—lacking special reasons to think he is?³⁵

If it can be practically rational to lie, then how can the rationality of the source be a priori constitutively connected with sincerity? How can the Acceptance Principle have a rational basis if rationality does not ensure sincerity?

Burge is undeterred. Though he accepts that it can be, and often is, rational for a speaker to lie, Burge also believes nevertheless that rationality in a source is a prima facie sign of sincerity in the source. Rational sources are reliably sincere in virtue of their rationality in normal conditions when functioning normally.

To patch this hole, Burge claims that reason has a *transpersonal* function of presenting truth.

Reason necessarily has a teleological aspect... Understanding... reason requires understanding its primary functions... One of reason's primary functions is that of presenting truth, independently of special personal interests... [Reason has a] *transpersonal* function of presenting the truth, independently of special personal interests... Reason has a function in providing guidance to truth, in presenting and promoting truth without regard to individual interest.³⁶

Burge then claims that lying for practical reasons occasions a “disunity in the functions of reason.”

Lying is sometimes rational in the sense that it is in the liar’s best interests. But lying occasions a disunity among functions of reason. It conflicts with one’s reason’s *transpersonal* function of presenting the truth, independently of special personal interests.³⁷

When this occurs, the individual is not fully rational; there is a compromise on “generic” rationality.

I think that generic rationality has practical and *impersonally* theoretical dimensions. I think that, *prima facie*, when a speaker fails to tell the truth because of special interests, the speaker crosses rationality in one significant dimension. Just as a generically rational individual can be irrational on particular occasions, a generically rational individual can be all things considered rational in the particular case, while rationally lying. But the *impersonal* function of rationality is compromised. So there is some compromise on generic rationality.³⁸

Why does this matter? How does this help Burge? How does this maintain the connection between rationality and reliable sincerity? Burge says:

I think that lacking special reason to suspect that the individual is relying on special needs or special considerations, one can presume that the individual is in a non-special situation and is realizing the *impersonal* function of rationality. This point is an instance of the more general point that one is entitled to presume that a generically rational individual is in no respect irrational in a particular case.³⁹

You are entitled to presume something provided that thing reliably occurs in normal conditions when functioning normally. So to be entitled to presume that a generically rational individual is sincere requires that a generically rational source is reliably sincere in normal conditions when functioning normally. And so they are; generically rational sources do not contravene the transpersonal function of reason. “Since rationality has an impersonal function of supporting truth, an individual who has shown rationality can be presumed to be sincere, in the absence of evidence for doubt.”⁴⁰ Burge has thereby patched the hole.

Notice that in the first passages on this point that were from ‘Content Preservation’ Burge refers to the *transpersonal* function of reason, but in the next passages from ‘Postscript: ‘Content Preservation’ he refers to the *impersonal* function. Apparently he means the same thing by these two terms. I shall return to this.

7. Burge’s Rationale for the Acceptance Principle Reconstructed

Here is reconstruction of Burge’s argument that includes the patch:

- (7) If a capacity C has function F, then a priori C will reliably fulfill its function in normal conditions when functioning normally.
- (8) If a generic functional capacity C has two aspects A1 and A2, then a priori C will fulfill both in normal conditions when functioning normally. Capacities with more than one function are “unified.”
- (9) Full generic rationality has both theoretical (transpersonal) and practical functions. Full generic rationality a priori reliably fulfills both functions in normal conditions when functioning normally. [From (7), (8) & (9)]

- (10) Lying a priori contravenes the theoretical function of reason: the transpersonal presentation of truth.
- (11) If a source were to lie in normal conditions when functioning normally, then the source would not be fully generically rational. [From (10) & (11)]
- (12) Hence a priori a fully generically rational source is reliably sincere in normal conditions when functioning normally. [From (12)]
- (13) Hence a rational source can be presumed a priori to be sincere in normal conditions when functioning normally. [From (13)]

Does Burge really embrace this argument?⁴¹ We have just seen passages from Burge that support the attribution to Burge of steps (8), (9) and (10). (7) is implicit already from the previous material on functions and norms. Additionally, here are two passages that support attributing (7) to Burge:

(A) “To have a capacity with a function, an individual must be competent, other things equal, to realize the capacity. *Any failure* to realize the capacity can be assumed to be an *aberration* which could not have figured in the normal conditions for obtaining the competence.”

(B) “A *function* of reason is to support and sustain truth impersonally. *So* reasons are *reliable* supporters and sustainers of truth—including sincere, communicative, reliable supporters and sustainers—other things equal....*So* a reasonable being is, other things equal, a *reliable* source for truth.”⁴²

This is the full argument, I believe, that Burge relies upon to provide an a priori, underlying rationale for the Acceptance Principle. Because of the transpersonal function of reason, a hearer can presume that a speaker is sincere, absent reasons for thinking otherwise. For it is a priori that speakers are sincere in normal conditions, and so it is a priori that a hearer's taking a speaker to be sincere will be reliable in normal conditions. That's why a hearer is a priori entitled to take a speaker as sincere, absent counter considerations.⁴³

I should once again repeat that for the sake of argument I accept both the Acceptance Principle and Burge's teleo-functional reliabilist framework: linguistic comprehension reliably induces true beliefs in normal conditions when functioning normally, absent counter-considerations. I doubt Burge's *justification* for the Acceptance Principle. I doubt that the Acceptance Principle has a *rational basis a priori* in the nature of reason.

I shall raise three doubts:

- (D1) It is not a priori necessary that function-bearers *reliably* fulfill their functions when functioning normally in normal conditions.
- (D2) Establishing a priori the *conditional* reliability of a competence is one thing, establishing its *unconditional* reliability a priori is another. The link between rationality and unconditional reliability for interlocution is not fully a priori.
- (D3) The *impersonal* function of theoretical reason is one thing; the *transpersonal* function is another. There is a gap in the argument.

The first two target reliability in general, and so target both sincerity and competence. The third targets sincerity directly.

8. First Doubt: Non-Reliable Function Bearers

The first doubt challenges the first premise:

- (7) If a capacity C has function F, then a priori C will reliably fulfill its function in normal conditions when functioning normally.

(7) is not in general true, and so not a priori necessary for all function-bearers. For there are capacities with functions that do not reliably fulfill their functions in normal conditions when functioning normally. And so I do not agree that it follows a priori from the transpersonal function of reason that rational sources reliably present truth in normal conditions when functioning normally.

We must distinguish function bearers that are *effective* but non-reliable—that fulfill their functions often enough but not reliably—from function bearers that *reliably* fulfill their functions.

Elsewhere I have argued it is a priori that if an item C has etiological function F that C will do F *ceteris paribus often enough* in normal conditions when functioning normally. For that is because an item acquires its function in virtue of producing the relevant effect that becomes its function. If it did not produce that effect in normal conditions when functioning normally, then that effect would not be its function. And so I agree that there is a constitutive connection between having a function and fulfilling that function. Etiological function bearers must be “effective” in normal conditions when functioning normally; they must fulfill their function *often enough*.⁴⁴

But I do not agree that it is a priori that for any etiological function that the item will *reliably* fulfill its function in normal conditions when functioning normally, that it will fulfill its function *more often than not* in such circumstances. Here are three familiar biological examples.

(i) Many animals are camouflaged against predators. But the camouflage may not be very good. It could be that many—even most—of the animals do not survive predation. Still, if sometimes providing camouflage against predators explains why the animals display that pattern of coloration, then providing camouflage will be the function. Camouflage once in a while might be much better than none at all.

(ii) Rabbits have danger-detection mechanisms that cause flight. These danger-detection mechanisms may be very effective: the animal flees whenever danger is present. But for all that they may be very unreliable. The animals may “detect danger” when all is clear more often than not. The function is to detect danger, even though it does not do so successfully on most occasions. “Non-reliable” danger-detection may prove effective often enough to keep rabbits in the rabbit business.

(iii) The function of sperm is to fertilize eggs. But few ever do. The conditional probability that any single sperm will fertilize an egg is vanishingly small. By far and away the vast majority of sperm do not fertilize eggs, even in normal conditions when functioning normally.⁴⁵

A small diet of cases may lead one into thinking that (7) is a priori necessary. The function of the heart is to pump blood. If it doesn't do so reliably, we are in big trouble. The function of eyes is to assist sight. And normally functioning eyes in normal conditions do that to a very high degree. “Often enough” for hearts and eyes is nearly all the time, not once in a blue moon. And so some etiological function bearers clearly do reliably fulfill their functions in normal conditions. But not all of them. If you are only thinking of hearts and eyes, you may be led into thinking that (7) is a priori necessary. But if you take in the full range, (7) won't seem true at all.⁴⁶

The distinction between *reliable* function bearers (like the heart) and non-reliable but still *effective* function bearers (like danger-detectors in rabbits) is intuitive. Sometimes, however, philosophers resist. I think that is because we often use the word ‘reliable’ for both. For example, what would you call a professional baseball player who hits over .350? Would you call him reliable? I know some would, for he is certainly among the most dependable hitters on the team, if not the entire league. But he hits well below .500, just like every other major league player. So in a clear sense he is not a reliable batsman; he strikes out more often than not. I would say he is *effective*—you want to keep him healthy so he can play every game; it’s your best chance to win—but not *strictly speaking* reliable (at least in the sense intended for reliability theories of epistemic warrant), for he never hits over .500.

If (7) is not true in general, then it is not a priori necessary. If (7) is not a priori, then Burge cannot infer the *reliability* of the transpersonal function of reason from knowing its function a priori. So even if it is known a priori that reason has supporting truth as a *transpersonal* function, one cannot simply deduce a priori that reason will transpersonally support truth *reliably* in normal conditions.

Could Burge dispense with (7) and directly assert that at least for representational functions (as opposed to biological functions) (9) is known a priori? As we will see in the next section, the answer is no, for there are capacities with representational functions that are not a priori reliable in normal conditions when functioning normally.

9. Second Doubt: The Reliability of Perception

I now turn to my second doubt.

Burge argues that a hearer's entitlement has a rational basis. That means that it is a priori that in normal conditions when functioning normally a hearer's reliance on what the hearer takes a speaker to present-as-true will be reliably true, absent counter-considerations. In short, it means that interlocution is a priori reliable in normal conditions.

A good deal—if not most—of what people tell us they have learned themselves through perception, at least in part. So the reliability of testimony depends upon the reliability—at least in part—of perception.

And perception is reliable. Indeed, it is highly reliable. And since the reliability of interlocution depends in part on the reliability of perception, and since we have granted the reliability of interlocution, we have granted the reliability of perception.

The issue is the *basis* for the reliability of perception. For Burge's argument to go through, interlocution must be a priori reliable in normal conditions, and so perception too must be a priori reliable in normal conditions when functioning normally. For if perception is not a priori reliable, how could interlocution be a priori reliable?

Burge published 'Content Preservation' in 1993. In 1997 he published 'Interlocution, Perception and Memory' and in 1999 he published 'Comprehension and Interpretation'. In those essays he claimed that perception is a priori necessarily reliable in normal conditions when functioning normally. "The general pro tanto entitlement to perceptual belief resides in one's status as a perceiver...Being a perceiver necessarily involves certain reliabilities in perceiving normal perceptual objects in normal circumstances."⁴⁷ "[One's] perceptual system must have been formed...in an environment...that makes perception reliable."⁴⁸ "I think...[the] capacity to register perceptual appearances can be shown to be necessarily reliable in normal circumstances (in order to count as a capacity for perceptual appearances)."⁴⁹

But in his ‘Postscript: ‘Content Preservation’’ he reports having rejected this view by 2003 in his paper ‘Perceptual Entitlement’. He no longer holds that perception is constitutively reliable. There are cases of non-reliably veridical perceptual states in normal conditions. Though perceptual states require a pattern of interaction with a broader environment, as well as a pattern of some veridical perceptual state tokens within the perceptual system, perceptual states do not constitutively require reliability in normal conditions. Perception is not a priori necessarily reliable in normal conditions.⁵⁰

But now hasn’t Burge rejected a premise his a priori justification requires? If perception is not a priori necessarily reliable, then how can interlocution, or at least interlocution that depends upon the reliability of perception for its reliability, be a priori reliable in normal conditions when functioning normally? When he wrote ‘Content Preservation’ he may have believed that perception was a priori reliable in normal environments. But now that he has abandoned that, isn’t there a gap in the argument?

Alvin Goldman’s distinction between conditional and unconditional reliability may prompt useful reflection on this issue. A conditionally reliable belief forming or sustaining process takes other beliefs as its inputs. A belief forming or sustaining process is conditionally reliable when a sufficient proportion of its input beliefs are true. For example, memory is conditionally reliable. The outputs of memory—the beliefs we remember—are mostly true provided the beliefs that were “placed” into memory were mostly true. Memory reliably stores beliefs, true or false. If its inputs are true, then its outputs are true. Deductive reasoning is conditionally reliable as well. If the premises are true, then its conclusion beliefs are true. If its inputs are false, its outputs are likely to be false too.

An unconditionally reliable belief forming process, however, does not take other beliefs as its input, or does not depend for its reliability on the truth ratio of its input beliefs. Perceptual belief-formation, for example, is a paradigm case of a belief-forming process that does not take other beliefs as its inputs. Introspection is a case of belief-formation that may take (introspective awareness of) beliefs as part of its inputs. But the reliability of introspection clearly does not depend on the truth of the first-order beliefs that introspective awareness is about. Introspection is unconditionally reliable, if reliable.

How shall we think of interlocution? I think it is natural to draw analogies, as Burge has, with memory.⁵¹ The analogy with memory suggests that, like memory, interlocution is preservative, and so it is a conditionally reliable belief-forming process. Its outputs are reliable in normal conditions provided its inputs are reliable, and its inputs depend in turn on the expressed beliefs of others. So its outputs depend on the reliability of the beliefs of others. So just as my memory is a little bit like testimony from a former self, testimony is exactly like testimony from another person.

So to establish the Acceptance Principle, one has to establish two things. First, that interlocution is like memory in being conditionally *reliable*. That is, interlocution, like memory, must reliably *preserve* content. Hence the title of Burge's paper. But second, one must also establish the reliability of the inputs, and not just the reliability of preservation, for otherwise its outputs won't be mostly true. And to establish the Acceptance Principle a priori, Burge must establish the reliability of the inputs a priori. Interlocution may a priori necessarily *preserve* belief—sincerity may follow a priori from the nature of reason—but the reliable truth of the beliefs in normal circumstances sent from the speaker to the hearer—the reliability of the inputs—may not be based a priori in the very nature of the belief-forming capacities.

Burge must establish this reliability. For Burge holds that comprehension of a presentation-as-true provides the hearer with the hearer's own proprietary prima facie entitlement to accept what the hearer seemingly comprehends as presented-as-true. Burge holds that comprehension on an occasion does not merely inherit whatever epistemic force the sender's belief enjoyed (the extended body of warrant), but that comprehension on its own confers prima facie warrant, its own prima facie entitlement, (and does so even in cases where the sender had no epistemic force to transmit, and so in cases where there is no extended body of warrant). This is the hearer's own propriety entitlement, and entitlement entails reliability in normal conditions. That means comprehension as a type must not only reliably *preserve* beliefs (true or false), but must also reliably induce *true* beliefs. So comprehension must reliably induce true beliefs in normal conditions when functioning normally, and it will only do that if the inputs are reliably true. And it will do that a priori, at least for inputs that depend on the perceptual capacities of our interlocutors, only if perception is a priori reliable in normal conditions.

But as Burge has argued, perception just isn't necessarily reliable in normal environments. Burge may have established a rational connection between a hearer's uptake and a speaker's belief, but I don't see how he has established a rational connection between a speaker's belief and the truth, at least for perceptual beliefs.

I believe that Burge is sensitive to this point. In a footnote in 'Postscript' he says "Rationality itself is constitutively (and a priori) a good, reliable route to getting things right, in all circumstances." Here I believe he has conditionally reliable processes in mind like deduction and induction, and possibility also introspection. He immediately continues: "However, some of the resources that rationality relies upon (like perception) are not constitutively, hence not necessarily, reliable, even in normal conditions." This is where he signals that he no longer

believes that perception is a priori reliable in normal conditions. Then he says “Insofar as a rational being relies on rationality itself, it is, I think, clear, that the rationality will necessarily and a priori have the reliability necessary for being entitled to rely on it. Whether the same can be said for a rational being that relies upon perceptual belief, but can use rationality to correct it, is the complex and deep issue.” But then isn’t this “complex and deep issue” exactly the issue that must be addressed to establish the Acceptance Principle a priori? For when we rely on the intelligibility of an utterance as a sign of a rational source, and the speaker’s rationality as a sign of truth, aren’t we also relying on the reliability of their perceptual capacities, for aren’t they often telling us about the things they have seen?

10. Third Doubt: The Function(s) of Reason

I’ve raised two doubts so far. (D1) I have argued that Burge has not established the a priori *reliability* of the transpersonal function of reason. Knowing the *transpersonal function* of reason a priori is one thing, knowing its *reliability* is another. (D2) I have argued that Burge has not established the reliability *a priori* of the transpersonal function of reason. Knowing the *conditional reliability* a priori of presentations-as-true is one thing, knowing their *unconditional reliability* a priori is another. So even if we grant Burge that there is a transpersonal function of reason, it does not follow that we know a priori that presentations-as-true are reliably true in normal conditions.

I now turn to my third doubt. I doubt that Burge has even established the transpersonal function of reason in the first place.

Here again is the passage from ‘Content Preservation’ where Burge announces the transpersonal function:

One of reason's primary functions is that of presenting truth, independently of special personal interests. Lying is sometimes rational in the sense that it is in the liar's best interests. But lying occasions a disunity among functions of reason. It conflicts with one's reason's transpersonal function of presenting the truth, independently of special personal interests.⁵²

So reason has a constitutively necessary function of transpersonally presenting truth from one mind to another, and so is a priori reliably sincere when functioning normally.

But then Burge immediately adds the following footnote:

Although I think that my claim about this constitutive function of reason is a priori, I do not maintain that it is self-evident. It can be and has been coherently questioned... But the claim has substantial initial plausibility, and I believe that this plausibility is deepened through reflection, including reflection on challenges to it.⁵³

I do not find Burge's claim self-evident. Is there some other evidence for the claim? Why think that it is true? Will its plausibility be deepened (or possibly weakened) through further reflection?

Burge immediately gives three reasons for the claim that "reason has a function in providing guidance to truth, in presenting and promoting truth without regard to individual interest." When we rationally lie, we lie for practical reasons. But epistemic, theoretical reasons for belief are independent of practical reasons for belief:

- i. For epistemic reasons are not relativized to a person or to a desire.
- ii. For someone whose reasoning is distorted by self-deception is in a significant way irrational—even when the self-deception serves the individual's interests.
- iii. For one is rationally entitled to rely on deductive reasoning or memory, in the

absence of counter-reasons, even if it conflicts with one's interests.⁵⁴

So theoretical reason has one function (promoting truth), and practical reason has another (promoting the good).

Here are some illustrative examples:

(i). Suppose you and I are competing scientists. I will win a prize if the experiment says P, and you will if it says \sim P. Suppose the evidence says \sim P. Then you and I have the same epistemic reason to believe \sim P. Our interests have nothing to do with it. Epistemically, we both ought to believe \sim P.

(ii). The classic example of self-deception involves a cheating husband. Suppose a wife has plenty of evidence that her husband is having an affair, evidence that would justify the suspicions of a conscientious detective. But suppose that if the wife believed the evidence, she would lose all faith and the marriage would be ruined. Suppose furthermore that her life would be ruined if the marriage collapsed. In such a case, she might successfully self-deceive herself into believing that her husband is not having an affair but simply overworked. She might then be all-things-considered better off, even though she is "in a significant way irrational" for she has crossed the theoretical dimension of rationality.

(iii). Suppose you remember a legal obligation that you would be better off not having to fulfill (it may cost you a lot of money or time). Suppose if you had forgotten the obligation, then you would have been excused (suppose it is a legitimate legal excuse in this case). In such a case, remembering the obligation conflicts with your interests. Even so, your normally functioning memory entitles (warrants) your belief that you are under that obligation. Or suppose you do some research into your medical condition and engage in a little deductive reasoning that concludes you might die from your current condition. You are still evidentially entitled in

holding that belief, even if your odds of survival would be higher if you ignore the evidence and your reasoning.

Burge thereby rejects so-called pragmatism about reasons for belief, the view that practical benefits can rationalize belief against or beyond the evidence; reason does not simply function to serve individual or personal interests. Reason has a “transpersonal” epistemic function of presenting truth, regardless of how ignoring the truth might benefit the believer.

Burge allows that you can be all-things-considered rational in any of these cases. Even so, you have “crossed rationality in one significant dimension—the impersonal theoretical dimension.” Even if all-things-considered it can be rational to believe against the evidence, believing against the evidence is still a failure in “generic” rationality; it can be all-things-considered rational to fall short of epistemic rationality. For reason as a whole to work well, these functions must not be at cross-purposes. This means that rational sources when functioning normally are unified; one dimension has not crossed the other. Full generic rationality involves a unity in the functioning of these two dimensions of rationality, and I agree. I agree that “reason has a function in providing guidance to truth, in presenting and promoting truth without regard to individual interest.”

Has Burge made a case for the transpersonal function of reason? I agree with Burge that epistemic reasons are not practical reasons. I agree that belief formation is not a practical activity, even if we can take steps that influence what we come to believe. I agree that believing against the evidence, even when it is all things-considered rational to do so, involves a failure of rationality—of epistemic rationality. Reason has a theoretical function of presenting truth *to the individual rational being*, independent of *the individual’s* practical interests. I agree that “reason has a function in providing guidance to truth, in presenting and promoting truth without regard to

individual interest.” But even so, has Burge made a case for the *transpersonal* function of reason? Does reason have a function in providing guidance to truth *to others*, without regard to the reasoner’s own individual interest?

Burge uses the phrase ‘transpersonal’ in ‘Content Preservation’ and the phrase ‘impersonal’ in ‘Postscript’ to refer to one and the same function. But I think we can use these very same phrases to distinguish two different functions. And once we do it should be apparent why Burge’s claim that reason functions to transmit truth to others through communication is not self-evident, never mind the evident distinction between theoretical reason and practical reason.

So I distinguish “impersonal” theoretical functions from “transpersonal” theoretical functions. In my sense, reason has an *impersonal* theoretical function when its job is to present truth *to the individual* rational being, independently of the rational being’s own personal, practical interests (whether those interests be egoistic or altruistic). Reason has a *transpersonal* theoretical function in my sense when its job is to present truth *to others* through communicative presentations-as-true (paradigmatically through assertions), independently of the rational beings own personal, practical interests (egoistic or altruistic). This distinction is important, for it allows one to coherently deny that reason has a *transpersonal* function while granting that it has an *impersonal* function. One may grant that theoretical reason functions impersonally in me *to give me* an accurate map to guide my practical activity while coherently denying that theoretical reason functions transpersonally in me *to give others* an accurate map to guide their activity. Theoretical impersonal reason may function in me to present truth *to me*, without eo ipso functioning in me so as to present truth *to others*.

Belief is not a practical activity. Belief, unlike action, is not the work of the will. We do not form beliefs—at least not directly—by first forming intentions to form them. We rationally

form beliefs as a result of the evidence, of reasoning and deliberation, and the functioning of our belief-forming systems. Belief is governed in the first instance by the norms of theoretical reason.

Action, on the other hand, is a practical activity. Action is the work of the will. We perform actions, in the paradigm case, as a result of first forming and then executing an intention. Action is governed in the first instance by the norms of practical reason.

If the impersonal theoretical function of reason governs belief and the practical function of reason governs action, why should the impersonal function of reason also govern assertion? Why should the impersonal function somehow or other extend from beliefs to intentional to presentations-as-true? Assertions are actions and not themselves beliefs. Why not simply say that belief is governed by theoretical reason, and since assertion is an activity, assertion is *not* governed by theoretical reason but by practical reason instead?

Since assertion is an action, doesn't it simply follow that the impersonal theoretical function does not extend to assertion, that the a priori link between rationality and sincerity is broken once we note the practical nature of assertion?⁵⁵

David Owens makes a useful comparison.⁵⁶ When we believe against the evidence for practical reasons, there is a clear failure of rationality. However, when we act for one practical reason over another, there is no failure of rationality. That is just how practical rationality works. So if Phillip believes against the evidence then he is not fully, generically rational, even if he is all-things-considered rational in so doing. But if Susan decides to take a nap instead of taking a walk in the park because her desire to rest outweighs her desire to get a bit of fresh air, she's not only all-things-considered rational but fully rational full stop.

So compare two ways of describing what happens when someone lies for a very good

reason (maybe for their own personal interest, or maybe to help another, as in lying to prevent a great harm). We can describe it Burge's way. For Burge, the agent not only has impersonal reason to believe that P, but also an impersonal (transpersonal) theoretical reason to assert that P. When the agent lies for good reason, the agent is rationally lying, but even so the agent is irrational in the same way Phillip, who believes against the evidence, is irrational. Lying to another is just like lying to oneself. Described this way, there is an evident "disunity" in the functions of reason.

Or we can describe it another way. We can say that the agent is in a situation where ordinarily she has a practical reason to tell the truth, but on the occasion she has a practical reason to lie. She weighs these up and concludes that lying is her best option. Describing it this way there is no evident conflict with theoretical reason. Described this way, there is no evident "disunity" in the functions of reason.

Since assertion is an action, shouldn't we prefer the second description over the first? The interests, ends, and desires of an individual are what account for testimony occurring in the first place – after all, the speaker had to want to speak up.

I can imagine an argument for the first description, an argument for extending the impersonal function of reason (as I have conceived it) so as to establish a transpersonal function. The argument notes that assertions are not ordinary acts like baking bread or walking down the street, for assertions typically if not constitutively "express" beliefs. There is then the possibility of a constitutive relation between assertion and the theoretical function of reason governing belief. Here's the argument:

1. Theoretical reason has an impersonal function of presenting truth.
2. One expression of theoretical reason is assertion.

3. So reason functions in one mind so as to present truth to another mind through assertion.

Though there is something suggestive about this argument, I don't think it works. I agree with the first two premises. But I don't think they establish the conclusion. We can still grant the impersonal function of reason, grant that assertion expresses states governed by impersonal reason, and so grant that assertions are a priori reliable signs of the normal operation of rationality (theoretical and practical), yet rationally doubt whether impersonal theoretical reason has the function of transpersonally presenting truth from one mind to another. Assertions are still actions, governed by practical reason.

I don't think Burge has established a priori the transpersonal function of reason. And so I don't think he has established that rational lying occasions a "disunity" in the functions of reason. I don't think he has established a priori the reliable sincerity of rational sources, and so the a priori reliability of interlocution.

Again, this does not mean that I think speakers lie more often than not. This does not mean that I think interlocution is not reliable in normal conditions. On the contrary, I agree with Burge that speakers are reliably sincere and we are prima facie entitled in taking presentations-as-true at face value. The issue is the explanation of all this. Does entitled acceptance have its basis a priori in the nature of reason?

This was a long paper. To summarize, I distinguished between the truth of the Acceptance Principle, its justification as a priori or empirical, and the possibility of a priori applications of the Principle to cases. I expounded in some detail Burge's teleological reliabilist framework to set the stage for his a priori justification of the Acceptance Principle. I then raised three doubts

aimed to undermine his case for supposing that the Acceptance Principle has an a priori basis in the nature of reason.⁵⁷

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¹ Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, 1764. David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748.

² ‘Content Preservation’ from *The Philosophical Review* in 1993 is Burge’s most influential paper on interlocution, reprinted in his collection *Cognition Through Understanding* (2013). Along with Tony Coady’s 1992 book *Testimony*, ‘Content Preservation’ spurred considerable interest in the epistemology of testimony. Later Burge papers include ‘Interlocution, Perception, and Memory’ (1997/2013), ‘Comprehension and Interpretation’ (1999/2013), ‘Computer Proof, A Priori Knowledge and Other Minds’ (1998/2013), ‘A Warrant for Belief in Other Minds’ (2011b/2013) and ‘Postscript: ‘Content Preservation’’ (2011a/2013), as well as the Introduction to *Cognition Through Understanding* (2013). Page references to these papers are to the 2013 collection. Related material includes his paper ‘Perceptual Entitlement’ (2003) and his book *Origins of Objectivity* (2010).

I shall include a remark on Burge’s uses of the terms ‘warrant,’ ‘entitlement’ and ‘justification’ (Burge 1993, 2003, 2013). Warrant, for Burge, is what many epistemologists would call “justification” in a broad sense of the term, including both internalists and externalists, where justification in this broad sense is a necessary condition on knowledge. Burge distinguishes between two kinds of warrant: entitlements and justifications. Justifications are paradigmatically arguments in the psychology of the individual. They paradigmatically consist of premises (other warranted beliefs) that warrant conclusions. Entitlements, on the other hand, are warrants that do not consist of reasons (warranted beliefs). Paradigmatically we are entitled to rely on the force of sense-perceptual representations to form perceptual beliefs, for example. The paradigm, default warrant for a perceptual belief is not another belief but comes from a

perceptual representation and the reliability of the perceptual system in normal conditions.

Paradigm, default warrants for perceptual beliefs are entitlements, not justifications. In Burge's work on testimonial warrant, he is primarily interested in our entitlement to take the word of another at face value. Hence my choice for 'entitlement' throughout.

³ The difference between (2) and (3) is this. (2) is about a general abstract principle, the Acceptance Principle. (3) involves applications of the general abstract principle to cases, to particular beliefs. (3) says there are applications of the Acceptance Principle to individual beliefs where the beliefs do not rely on sense-perceptual experience for their entitlement. Burge argued there were cases of comprehension-based beliefs that did not essentially rely on sense-perception for their entitlement, and so some comprehension-based beliefs might be a priori entitled. Compare an analogous putative a priori necessary general principle for perceptual entitlement. No application of that principle for perceptual entitlement to cases would ever result in an a priori entitled belief, for perceptual entitlement essentially relies on sense-perception for its force.

⁴ Burge continues to believe (1) and (2) but has abandoned (3). Burge now argues that every comprehension-based belief is partly entitled empirically, for our comprehension of utterances as assertions requires perceiving those utterances, and so every instance of comprehension-based belief for humans requires sense-perceptual experience for entitlement. "Good use of perception is part of good exercise of comprehension of others' utterances. If perception were not reliable in getting right (enough of) what an interlocutor uttered, we could not be warranted in comprehending the representational content...of utterances by others.... Knowledge [through interlocution] is always empirical, even if sometimes just barely" (2011a/2013: 284). I shall not discuss this issue.

⁵ Burge excludes conversational implicatures. I am inclined to be more liberal. I think speakers present-as-true directly and indirectly: implicatures are speech acts too. (Some miss this point for they wrongly assimilate implicatures to insinuations. Implicatures are overt and avowable. Insinuations are covert and essentially nonavowable (Strawson 1964: 454)). I am inclined to categorize the category of “presentations-as-true” more broadly than Burge. The reason why Burge excludes these is complicated, and so I will not dwell on it here, but involves questions about the psychology of linguistic comprehension and the amount or kinds of inferences required to comprehend speech acts. Nothing turns on this here.

On another note, David Owens points out that other speech acts, like suggesting or guessing, also “present a proposition as true” (Owens, forthcoming). But the phrase is not intended to include those speech acts, for they are not typically used to express beliefs. So the phrase ‘present-as-true’ must be read so as to exclude guesses and suggestions.

⁶ Of course speakers (senders) perform other kinds of speech acts as well, and hearers (receivers) comprehend those and react appropriately. In general, “comprehension-states” represent the whole range of speech acts. But since our focus sending and receiving presentations-as-true, for ease of exposition I use ‘comprehension-state’ in this paper to refer just to those that represent speech acts as presentations-as-true.

⁷ Hearer’s form beliefs about speech acts as well as beliefs in the propositions comprehended as presented-as-true. You may believe that your interlocutor told you she was from Spokane and that she is from Spokane. Acceptance can occur whether or not the hearer’s comprehension-state was accurate. If someone presents-as-true that P but you represent it as the presentation-as-true that Q and then accept that Q, your belief that Q is still a comprehension-based belief. The category of comprehension-based beliefs is then like the category of perceptual

beliefs, for perceptual beliefs can be based on inaccurate perceptual representations. I discuss these and related issues in more detail in my ‘Testimony as Speech Act, Testimony as Source’ (Graham 2015) and ‘Testimonial Knowledge: A Unified Account’ (Graham 2016c).

⁸ The original formulation says a hearer is entitled to accept a presentation-as-true. The reformulation says a hearer is entitled to accept a comprehension-state that represents a presentation-as-true. The original formulation seems to imply that the hearer’s comprehension state must be veridical for warranted acceptance. The reformulation does not, and so allows for entitled “miscomprehension” and acceptance, on analogy with perceptual misrepresentation and entitled perceptual belief. I believe the wider reformulation is closer to the truth, though I know some “disjunctivists” would disagree. Burge accepts the wider reformulation (2011b/2013: 370-1).

⁹ There are roughly two factions within the “non-reductionist” camp. Reidians like Burge believe that assertive communication works a bit like memory—it preserves and transfers warrant across minds at a time like memory does within a mind over time—and a bit like perception—it confers prima facie entitlement on beliefs newly formed through the exercise of a representational capacity. Assurance theorists, on the other hand, see “testimony” as a unique species of assertive speech acts whereby a speaker assures a hearer—the speaker’s intended audience—that something is so, and thereby provides a special kind of reason to just the audience that the proposition is true. Though I do not disagree that “assurance” in this sense often happens, I do not believe it covers the whole category of warrant through comprehension of assertive communication. I shall not discuss assurance views in this paper.

¹⁰ Audi (2010) and Chisholm (1989).

¹¹ Goldman 1986.

¹² Faulkner (2011) is guilty of conflating (1) with (2). For discussion, see Graham 2013.

¹³ Some argumentation in a footnote, however, might be welcome. In the ‘Postscript’ Burge says “I believe that reflecting on practice and taking care to avoid hyper-intellectualization are the best grounds for a philosopher’s coming to accept the [Acceptance Principle].” (2013: 266: n. 18) In ‘Content Preservation’ he reflected briefly on practice: “As children and often as adults, we lack reasons not to accept what we are told. We are entitled to acquire information according to the [Acceptance Principle]—without *using* it as a justification [without using it as a premise in reasoning]—accepting the information instinctively.” (1993/2013: 236). He also briefly clarified the role of the Principle, writing “Given life’s complexities, this default position is often left far behind in reasoning about whether to rely on a source. One might wonder, with some hyperbole, whether it can ever be the last word in the epistemology of acceptance for anyone over the age of eleven. The primary point—that it is a starting point for reason—would not be undermined if its purse applications were relatively rare.” (1993/2013: 238). See Burge 1993/2013: 236-238, 241; 2013: 29; 2011a/2013: 264-271

Burge was not alone to focus on children. Reid himself made his case for something like the Acceptance Principle on similar grounds: “Nature intends that we should be carried in the arms of others before we can walk on our legs; similarly, nature intends that our belief should be guided by the authority and reason of others before it can be guided by our own reason....[I]f nature had left the mind of the hearer evenly balanced...we wouldn’t take anyone’s word until we have positive evidence that he was speaking the truth....It is obvious that in the matter of testimony nature tips the balance...to the side of belief...when there is nothing to put on the opposite side. If this were not so, no proposition that is uttered...would be believed until it was examined and tested by reason, and most would be unable to find reasons for believing a

thousandth of what is told them...children would be absolutely incredulous and therefore absolutely incapable of instruction...In short: if trust were the effect of reasoning and experience, it would grow up and gather strength in the same proportion as reason and experience do. But if it is a gift of nature, it will be strongest in childhood and limited and restrained by experience.” Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind on the Principles of Common Sense*, Chapter 7.

In my “Formulating Reductionism about Testimonial Warrant and the Challenge of Childhood Testimony” (2016) I further articulate the case from warranted childhood acceptance in favor of the Acceptance Principle, discussing recent evidence from developmental psychology, among other issues. I also reflect in defense of the Principle in my 2006, “Liberal Fundamentalism and Its Rivals” (2006a) and my “Testimonial Justification: Inferential or Non-Inferential?” (2006b).

Other defenses of the Acceptance Principle include Owens 2000, forthcoming; Perrine 2014; Zollman 2014 and Shieber 2015. Most rejoinders tend to grant the childhood case, and then elucidate the scope of available background adult knowledge concerning the reliability of testimony, while typically ignoring the demanding features of reductionism.

¹⁴ Burge credits Fricker (2006) with prompting this way of framing his case for (2). Burge 2011a/2013: 266, fn. 18.

¹⁵ I defended (1) and (2) in Graham 2006a, and (1) in 2006b. I have developed an empirical defense of (1), or something close to (1), in Graham 2010. I elaborate in Graham 2015b and in work in preparation.

¹⁶ Burge 2003: 512-214; 2007: 179-180; 2010: 308-315, 340-1. Natural norms are not “guidance” norms like cooking recipes, instructions that we self-consciously follow when pursuing an aim. Natural norms need not be represented or understood by the individual they

apply to. They are more like standards for good health than they are guides for good living.

Natural norms apply to organisms that cannot even conceive of norms, let alone be guided by norms. They “apply” even if no-one knows the first thing about them, even if no-one can “apply” them.

¹⁷ Burge 2003: 504-512; 2010: 31-2, 39, 74-75, 81, 292-307.

¹⁸ Burge 2003: 508, 511; 2010: 301-315, 339. The issues here are more complicated than I convey in the text. I discuss Burge on this point in ‘The Function of Perception’ (Graham 2014b).

¹⁹ Burge 2003: 505-6; 2010: 312ff.

²⁰ Burge 2003: 506-514; 2013: 1-4; 2011a/2013: 260; 1998/2013: 347; 2011b/2013: 367.

In a series of papers, I develop a related view (Graham 2010, 2011a, 2011b, 2012, 2014).

²¹ For Burge on normal conditions, see Burge 2003: 532-4, 538; 2011a/2013: 260. The interpretive issues here are difficult. I pursue questions about the connection between normal conditions and warrant in my 2012a, 2016, and forthcoming.

²² When I say Burge does not discuss in detail what counts as normal conditions for our linguistic competence, I mean he does not expound the details of these conditions. Burge is assuming that there are no hard issues about what counts as normal or abnormal conditions, for according to Burge’s non-skeptical methodology, Burge is assuming that our linguistic competence is reliably veridical in normal conditions. Given the truth of the Acceptance Principle, his framework and his non-skeptical assumption, it follows that our competence is reliable in normal conditions. I shall not pursue the issue here.

²³ Burge 1993/2013: 239; 2011a/2013: 263; 2011b/2013: 371-2, 378.

²⁴ Burge 2011a/2013: 262-3, n. 14.

²⁵ “Unless one has reason to think that the conditions of a particular communication act are not normal conditions, one is entitled to rely on their being normal. So one can rely on what a being with reason says unless one knows something that countermands such reliance.” Burge 2013: 30.

²⁶ Burge 2003; 2011a/2013: 262-3, n. 14. See also my forthcoming paper ‘Reliability and Demon Worlds: Burge on Perceptual Entitlement and Natural Norms’ for more discussion of Burge on this issue (Graham forthcoming-a).

²⁷ This view about error—even massive error—is not uncommon, even among reliabilists. Alvin Goldman and Ernest Sosa, for example, both require reliability for warrant but allow for warrant even in brain-in-a-vat scenarios, just as long as the relevant process reliably induces true beliefs in the actual world. On their views, as long as a psychological capacity reliably induces true beliefs in the actual world, it confers prima facie warrant in all possible worlds. See my “Against Actual World Reliabilism” (Graham 2016) and my “Normal Circumstances Reliabilism” (Graham forthcoming-b) for discussion of Goldman and Sosa on demon worlds and brain-in-a-vat scenarios. I know “internalist” readers are not inclined to believe any of this. But please put that to one side. For the issue here is not whether internalism or externalism about warrant is the whole story, but the argumentative quality of Burge’s justification for the Acceptance Principle.

²⁸ We can now see why Burge says the Acceptance Principle is not making, or is not backed by, a point about the statistical frequency of true presentations-as-true. Reliability in all conditions—or even typical conditions—is not what matters. It is reliability in normal conditions that matters. Normal conditions may be statistically rarer than you think.

²⁹ Burge 2011b/2013: 374.

³⁰ “Presentation of propositional content presupposes...a connection to a system of perceptual, cognitive, and practical interactions with the world, involving beliefs and intentional activity. Belief and intention in turn presuppose operation under norms of reason or rationality—norms governing information acquisition, inference, and practical activity. For propositional attitudes, especially those complex enough to yield articulated presentations of content, are necessarily associated with certain cognitive and practical purposes. To be what they are, such practices must—with allowances for some failures—accord with norms of reason or rationality.” Burge 1993/2013: 240.

³¹ Do not doubt the first step on the grounds that there could be instances of seemingly intelligible assertive utterances that are no such things at all. Burge’s view is that there is an a priori, constitutive connection between intelligibility and rational backing in normal conditions. This does not entail that the subject is in normal conditions. Nor does it entail reliability in all conditions. And it certainly does not entail veridicality in every case. Even in normal conditions, a seemingly intelligible utterance may be illusory. Our entitlement to take intelligibility as a sign of rationality is neither infallible nor indefeasible. Burge 1993/2013: 241; 2011b/2013: 370-1, 374-5.

³² “...if something is a rational source, it is a prima facie source of truth. For a condition on reasons, rationality and reasons is that they be guides to truth...An epistemic reason for believing something would not count as such if it did not provide some reasonable support for accepting it as *true*....A source is a guide to truth *in* being rational...For other things equal, reason can be reasonably followed in seeking truth.” Burge 1993/2013: 239.

³³ Burge 2011a/2013: 270. Emphasis added.

³⁴ Burge 2011a/2013: 268.

³⁵ Burge 1993/2013: 242.

³⁶ Burge 1993/2013: 242-3.

³⁷ Burge 1993/2013: 243.

³⁸ Burge 2011a/2013: 266, n. 18.

³⁹ Burge 2011a/2013: 266, n. 18.

⁴⁰ Burge 2011a/2013: 263, n. 15.

⁴¹ Here is another reconstruction. (i) The intelligibility of an utterance is an a priori prima facie sign of a being with reason (a rational source). (ii) A function of reason is to support or sustain truth transpersonally. (iii) To have a capacity with a function, an individual must be competent, all things equal, to reliably realize that capacity. Any failure to reliably realize the capacity would be a failure of normal functioning or of normal conditions. (iv) So in normal conditions when functioning normally, a reasonable being is a reliable source of truth. (v) So intelligibility of an assertive utterance is an a priori prima facie sign of reliable truth. (vi) So a hearer is prima facie entitled to rely on the prima facie intelligibility of an utterance, and so to accept what one is told.

⁴² Both passages from 2013: 30. (B) clearly assumes that if F is the function of C, then C reliably does F in normal conditions. For then the transition from “a *function* of reason is to support *truth*” to “so reasons are *reliable* supporters and sustainers of truth” would be valid. That (A) assumes this requires a little unpacking. In general, function-bearers acquire their functions in virtue of causing certain effects in normal conditions. The effects that explain the persistence and/or nature of the function-bearer are the function of the function-bearer. If the function-bearer cannot produce those effects in normal conditions when functioning normally, then the function-bearer does not in fact possess that function. So the first sentence “to have a capacity with a

function, an individual must be competent, other things equal, to realize the capacity” is true. But the second sentence does not automatically follow, at least not in general, unless we assume that failures to fulfill a function in normal conditions are always “an aberration,” so that function bearers always fulfill their functions in normal conditions when functioning normally, all else being equal. And so the first passage seems to assume that if F is the function of C, then C very reliably does F in normal conditions when functioning normally.

⁴³ In this argument Burge is not adverting to the norms constituting assertive speech acts, or to the function or functions of assertive speech acts. He may believe in such norms or functions. He may even believe such norms derive from the functions of reason. But he is not appealing to any such norms in his argument. He is appealing directly to the functions of reason. Do not assimilate Burge’s argument to arguments that appeal to constitutive norms or individuating functions of assertion, norms or functions that constrain speaker’s motives when asserting. For an account of testimonial warrant that does (in part) appeal to the function of assertion, see my ‘Testimonial Entitlement and the Function of Comprehension’ (Graham 2010).

⁴⁴ Millikan 1984: 33-4. Graham 2012: 458-9; 2014b: 26-7.

⁴⁵ Against Burge, Schmitt (2006: 207-8) points out that not all artifacts with artifact functions fulfill their functions. He first points out cases of malfunctioning. That does not dent Burge’s position, for his position is that functional items fulfill their functions in normal conditions when functioning normally. Malfunction is neither here nor there. But then Schmitt points out that we can assign functions to devices that cannot fulfill their assigned functions because of “inept design.” Such is the history of (failed) invention. But as I argued elsewhere, artifact functions are very different from etiological functions, in part for this very reason (Graham 2012, 2014a). I believe Burge is clearly not relying on the notion that applies to

artifacts. Burge is relying, broadly speaking, on the etiological notion of function, on a notion that entails some capacity. Schmitt also argues that the function of communication turns on the speaker's interests, so that conveying truth is incidental at best and not the function of communication. This argument misunderstands how functions arise and how the needs of the hearer constrain what speakers can accomplish when making assertions. I have rebutted this point in Graham 2010. Regardless, Burge is relying on a putative function of *reason*, not assertion. See prior note. On the other hand, Schmitt rightly raises the kind of concern I have raised in the text, the possibility of function bearers that do not reliably fulfill their functions.

⁴⁶ I believe that Burge is aware that (7) is not true in general, despite his apparent reliance on (7) in my reconstruction. Burge is aware of unreliable camouflage and danger-detectors, among other natural function bearers (Burge 2003: 5-7-8; 2010: 300).

⁴⁷ Burge 1999/2013: 347.

⁴⁸ Burge 1999/2013: 357.

⁴⁹ Burge 1997/2013: 294.

⁵⁰ For more discussion of this point, see the Appendix to my "Reliability and Demon Worlds: Burge on Perceptual Entitlement and Natural Norms" (Graham forthcoming-b).

⁵¹ See also David Owens 2000, 2006. It is also suggestive to draw analogies with perception. After all, the belief formed in the hearer is new to the hearer, just as a perceptual belief is new to the perceiver. I have drawn the analogy with perception in Graham 2000, 2006 and 2010. Millikan (1984) goes even further, assimilating interlocution to a kind of perception she calls teleperception.

⁵² Burge 1993/2013: 243.

⁵³ Burge 1993/2013: 243.

⁵⁴ Burge 1993/2013: 243.

⁵⁵ Faulkner (2011) emphasizes the practical rationality of assertion in his brief against the a priori status of the Acceptance Principle.

⁵⁶ David Owens, forthcoming.

⁵⁷ I have presented some of this material previously at Northern Institute of Philosophy at the University of Aberdeen in 2013, the University of Oxford in 2014, Yonsei University in 2015, and the University of Edinburgh in 2015. I am grateful to the Academic Senate of the University of California, Riverside and The Templeton Foundation for generous support. I am also grateful to helpful comments that led to improvements from Zachary Bachman, Elizabeth Fricker, Mikkel Gerken, Sandy Goldberg, Paul Lodge, Guy Longworth, Meredith McFadden, David Owens, Joseph Shieber, and the editors and referees for this volume.