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Publisher: Routledge

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Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rpex20>

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Published online: 11 Jun 2015.



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To cite this article: Johannes Roessler (2015) Self-knowledge and communication, *Philosophical Explorations: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Mind and Action*, 18:2, 153-168

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13869795.2015.1032326>

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Self-knowledge and communication

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(Received 28 October 2014; final version received 10 March 2015)

First-person present-tense self-ascriptions of belief are often used to tell others what one believes. But they are also naturally taken to *express* the belief they ostensibly report. I argue that this second aspect of self-ascriptions of belief holds the key to making the speaker’s knowledge of her belief, and so the authority of her act of telling, intelligible. For a basic way to know one’s beliefs is to be aware of what one is doing in expressing them. This account suggests that we need to reconsider the terms of the standard alternative between “epistemic” and “non-epistemic” explanations of first-person authority. In particular, the natural view that the authority we accord to self-ascriptions reflects a distinctive way we have of knowing our own beliefs should not be conflated with the traditional epistemological thesis that such knowledge reflects a private “mode of access”.

Keywords: self-knowledge; expression; communication; testimony; first-person access

1. Introduction

Suppose a speaker S, addressing an audience A, sincerely and correctly affirms that she believes that p, and as a result, A comes to know that S believes that p. How should we understand the explanatory connection between S’s utterance and A’s knowledge? The current literature on first-person authority suggests that the question presents us with a fundamental choice, often described as one between “epistemic” and “non-epistemic” explanations of first-person authority. As my aim in this paper will be to question the terms in which that choice is framed, I would like to start by distinguishing two issues that are at play in this debate:

- (a) Does it matter that S’s utterance is expressive of *knowledge*? Does the possibility of A acquiring knowledge of S’s belief in the way he does depend on S herself knowing that she believes that p? Call this the question of epistemic dependence.
- (b) Is A’s knowledge an example of testimonial knowledge, in the following specific sense: S is telling A something S knows and to which S has a kind of access A lacks, A believes S, and in that way S’s knowledge (though of course not her mode of access) becomes available to A? Call this the testimony question.

As the term is generally used, an “epistemic” explanation is one that seeks to make sense of the distinctive authority accorded to certain kinds of self-ascriptions by offering an account of the “epistemic access” we enjoy to the relevant kinds of states. “Non-epistemic”

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approaches favour a more primitive explanation, not in terms of the subject's epistemic position but, for example, in terms of the sense in which avowals express or "give vent to" the first-order states they ostensibly self-ascribe. (See Bar-On (2004) for a detailed exposition of what she calls a "neo-expressivist" approach to first-person authority.) This way of setting up the debate can make it look as if affirmative and negative answers to (a) and (b) must be accepted as a package. If you think the authority of S's utterance is to be explained in terms of S's knowledge that she believes that *p*, you owe us an account of the "mode of access" that makes S's knowledge intelligible. If you recoil from the notion of privileged, private access – perhaps because you think it would pose a threat to the possibility of knowledge of other minds – you need to produce some kind of "non-epistemic" explanation of first-person authority.

To motivate the project of this paper, I would like to make a brief, initial case for breaking the terms of the standard alternative – a case for combining a "yes" to (a) with a "no" to (b). Both parts of the case involve reflection on the perspective of participants in interactions of the kind illustrated by our example. This is not a trivial move. A striking feature of current work on first-person authority is the frequent use of the passive voice. First-person authority, we are told, *is granted*, self-ascriptions *are presumed* to be true, avowals *are treated* in this or that way. Such observations of ordinary practice are taken to be data that call for a philosophical explanation. The question that can be glossed over by this use of the passive voice is how those engaging in the practice themselves make sense of the things they *do* (such as granting authority to others' self-ascriptions). Suppose, then, we ask A how he knows that S believes that *p*. A natural reply would be: "she told me". Straight off, this would seem to support an affirmative answer to (a). Telling, it is natural to suppose, is a way of sharing knowledge with others; it makes knowledge available to others precisely by enabling them to come to share one's own knowledge. Leaving aside special cases such as double bluffing, a full explanation of the audience's knowledge, in the basic case, would need to advert to the fact that the speaker's utterance is itself expressive of knowledge. Now advocates of "neo-expressivism" might insist that a better reply for A to make would be: "she expressed her belief that *p*". This may be so. But even if it is, the fact remains that the original reply is (at least) no less natural. And this would seem to be enough to suggest that the – or at least one – way in which A makes sense of the authority he accords to S's utterance is not independent of regarding the utterance as expressive of self-knowledge.

But would this not *entail* that A's knowledge must be an example of testimonial knowledge? Note, though, that what I call the testimony question operates with a distinctive (though very common) conception of testimony (an "eyewitness model", as one might call it). On it, the authority of testimony turns on a good answer to this question: *how does the speaker know* what she is telling the audience? Or (equivalently, I assume) by what "means of access" was she able to ascertain the relevant fact? These are indeed familiar issues in the case of testimony about matters remote in space or time, but they are distinctly unfamiliar in the case of discourse regarding one's current states of mind. It is not just that the content of a good philosophical theory of "first-person access" cannot be presumed to be available to A (or other ordinary members of the public). Worse, the very question to which that theory aims to provide the answer is one that – as "non-epistemic" theorists remind us – would, in ordinary interactions, be regarded as off-key or nonsensical. ("How do you know you believe that *p*?") On the testimonial model, this is hard to understand. Why should the correct account of what makes it reasonable for A to accord authority to S's statement seem unreasonable to A?

A more specific diagnosis of what is wrong with an affirmative answer to (b) is that it misrepresents A as facing two separate questions: Is S sincere? And is S in a position to know what she is telling me? This, I want to suggest, distorts the way we ordinarily think about self-knowledge. Sincerity is indeed a basic concern, but insofar as we are reassured on that front, there is normally no *further* question of competence or access that needs to be settled. Self-knowledge can be intelligible, I will argue, in terms of the speaker's sincerity in expressing her attitudes. This view is akin to "neo-expressivism" in giving a central role to the notion of expression. It differs insofar as appeal to the sense in which self-ascriptions may be taken to express the speaker's first-order mental states is seen as providing, not an alternative to, but a way to *develop*, an "epistemic" explanation of first-person authority. More precisely, an explanation that is "epistemic" in the sense of endorsing an affirmative answer to (a). Where the account differs from more standard "epistemic" explanations is in rejecting the assumption that self-knowledge must be intelligible in terms of some "mode of access".

In the next section, I provide a sketch of the view, to be filled out and defended in the rest of the paper.

2. Epistemic dependence

How should we characterize A's reason for thinking that S believes that p? As is usual in epistemology, I apply "A's reason" to considerations that A may ordinarily be expected to articulate if asked to do so. Of course, we can be wrong about the reasons for which we believe something, and even when we are right, our explanation may be more or less illuminating. The important point is that to ask about A's reason is to ask about A's perspective on the situation, his own view of how S's saying "I believe that p" relates to the question of what S believes about p.

Note that on some views of first-person authority that there is almost nothing to be said about this. We are, according to this kind of view, generally disposed to treat first-person present-tense self-ascriptions of attitudes as correct, but we have no idea, when exercising that disposition, of why we are doing what we are doing. For example, according to Wright,

it can be taken to be a constitutive principle of best psychological interpretation that the interpreter must maximally respect the express self-conception of the interpretee (authority) and must minimize the extent to which unacknowledged mental states are ascribed to the interpretee (transparency), whilst otherwise making the best possible sense of what she says and does. (2012, 406)

Suppose we ask A why he thinks S believes that p. On Wright's view, he may be expected to reply "S said she believed that p", and perhaps "S believes (or it is part of her 'self-conception') that she believes that p." But if we press him "Why does this give you a good reason to think S believes that p?", there is not much else he could reasonably be expected to say. It is not, for example, that he takes S's utterance to be expressive of *knowledge*. That would make the rational significance of S's utterance readily intelligible, but it would commit A to what Wright regards as a philosophically problematic "epistemic" explanation of first-person authority. The whole point of Wright's theory of "best psychological interpretation" is to render our ordinary practice of treating self-ascriptions as authoritative intelligible without bringing into play the notion of self-knowledge. Commonsense psychology, on this analysis, has no insight into what might be called the *rationale* of that

practice. It is at best in the light of a philosophical theory of interpretation that we can see why S's utterance gives A a good reason to think S believes that p.

The trouble is that there does seem to be a more illuminating, and perfectly intuitive, reply that A might make: "S *told me* that she believes that p." Quite generally, we take it that someone's telling one that q gives one a good reason to think that q provided two conditions are satisfied: the act of telling is a sincere expression of the speaker's view on whether q, and the speaker knows whether q is true.¹ A's intuitive reply suggests that we do have a pre-theoretical grasp of the rationale of relying on a speaker's "self-conception", and that it has to do with the speaker's knowledge of her attitudes. This in turn suggests that commonsense psychology subscribes to what I will call the Epistemic Dependence thesis (ED): the possibility of A's acquiring knowledge of S's belief in the way he does depends on S herself knowing that she believes that p.

Having gone this far in the direction of an "epistemic" explanation of first-person authority, many will say, it is impossible to stop. If ED is correct, A's knowledge of S's belief will only be fully intelligible if S's knowledge is too. So we need an account of how S knows what she believes. And the only way to do justice to the distinctive authority of S's "self-conception" is to acknowledge that S has a "mode of access" to what she believes that is available only to S herself. Put schematically, the explanation runs like this:

first-person access \implies self-knowledge \implies other-knowledge

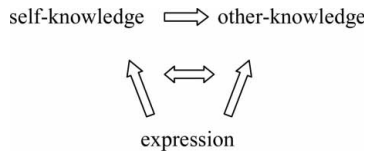
Let me highlight three features of this type of explanation.

First, the explanation aims to make self-knowledge intelligible in terms of some means – a "mode of access" – by which S is or was able to discover what she believes. A *good explanation* of S's self-knowledge is provided by something that could also have featured in a *good plan* for finding out what one believes. The means may but does not have to be conceived as a matter of inner observation. In the wake of Evans's remarks on this topic in the *Varieties of Reference* (1982, 225–226), many have argued that it is by answering the question whether p that S ascertains what she believes about p.

Second, first-person access is not shareable. S may share her *knowledge* that she believes that p with A (by telling him), but she cannot share her means of access. Two comparisons are instructive. Suppose you draw my attention to a goldfinch in the garden. In this sort of case, I will not only come to share your propositional knowledge but also its source: I will be able to attend to the goldfinch jointly with you. Again, suppose you are telling me about a goldfinch you saw yesterday. While I will not, in that kind of case, be able to share your access to the facts you report, I may (especially if your narrative is vivid) be prompted to imagine observing the goldfinch with you. In contrast, if the testifier's access is "first-personal", the audience will neither be able to share it nor to imagine sharing it. The only kind of imaginative understanding of S's mode of access available to A would be a matter of imagining *being S* and reflecting on S's belief as part of that imaginative exercise.

Third, the explanatory link between S's means of access and her self-knowledge leaves open whether, and how, others are able to know what she believes. "First-person access" does not guarantee the possibility of third- or second-person access.

It is this trio of commitments that seems to have given the "epistemic" approach to first-person authority a bad name. Critics of that approach often single out one or several of them as implausible or having unacceptable implications.² The possibility I wish to explore is that the critics are right about this, but wrong to conclude that we should abandon the epistemic approach. There is a way to develop ED, I want to suggest, that is free of the three commitments. My suggestion can be put schematically like this:



Start with the arrow linking self- and other-knowledge. This is the route to A's knowledge of S's belief that is provided by S *telling* A that she believes that p. As advocates of standard "epistemic" explanations rightly insist, this route will be fully intelligible only if S's self-knowledge is intelligible also. This requirement can be met by reflection on S's capacity to *express* her belief. That explanation (I shall argue) does not invoke any first-personal mode of access. It mentions no basis on which S discovers what she believes. Rather, the suggestion is that one can know one's beliefs *in* expressing them. This is a way of knowing one's own mind that entails the possibility of knowledge of other minds, and indeed can in a sense be shared with others. For the act of expressing her belief (in performing which S knows her belief) is one that can make S's belief manifest to A, and the capacity to know one's own belief in this way can be seen to be inseparable from the capacity to let others know them. (Hence the double-arrow.)

Perhaps the most surprising feature of my diagram is that A's knowledge may seem to be over-determined, being open to two independent explanations (in terms of S telling S about her belief, and in terms of S expressing her belief). My main point will be that we should think of the two routes to A's knowledge as intimately and intelligibly connected. In the next section, I make a case for a "double aspect" view of self-ascriptions of belief on which they serve simultaneously to express and to report one's beliefs. In section 4, drawing on Williams's work on sincerity, I argue that a basic way to know one's beliefs is provided by knowledge of what one is doing *in expressing* a belief. In Section 5, I put the various elements together, and bring out what I take to be the attractions of the resulting "joint self-knowledge" model, as compared to the more standard "first-person access" model.

3. Expression

Self-ascriptions of belief are normally part of a conversation about their subject matter. "I think so" is an appropriate and familiar answer to the question "Is the train running late?". "Why do you think so?" can in turn be a sensible response to that answer – where, importantly, what is requested is a reason for thinking that the train is running late, not a reason for thinking that one believes the train is running late.³ Both the basis and the import of "I believe that p" bear a striking resemblance to the basis and import of "p".⁴ The point about the basis was noted by Evans (1982) and has been much discussed ever since. The point about the import of the self-ascription is less familiar, but just as striking. "Neo-expressivism" suggests an elegant way to acknowledge and make sense of both points: a self-ascription of the belief that p is not a detached, disengaged judgement about a certain non-factive state of mind but serves to express one's belief that p.

The idea that self-ascriptions play an "expressive role" of this kind is commonly taken to support a "non-epistemic" account of first-person authority. A's reason for thinking S believes that p is thought to consist of S's expressing her belief that p, *rather than* S's telling A that she believes that p.⁵ I would like to consider and challenge three ways of motivating that interpretation, and in doing so advance an alternative.

First, one might insist that we cannot have it both ways. If S is telling A that she believes that *p*, the point of her utterance must be to express her knowledge that she believes that *p*. But she cannot, in a single utterance, express both her self-knowledge and her belief that *p*. Why not, though? Suppose you address the following remark to me: “I’m going to the staff meeting tomorrow.” You are telling (and informing) me that you are going to the staff meeting. Correlatively, the point of your utterance is to express knowledge that you are going to the meeting. But there is arguably another attitude you are expressing, namely your intention to go to the staff meeting. As Hampshire puts it, statements about one’s own future or current intentional actions have, in this sense, a “double aspect” (Hampshire 1965, 72). It is not clear why a self-ascription of belief should not also serve to express two attitudes.⁶

A more promising objection might be that “telling” goes with “forming a judgement on some epistemic basis”,⁷ and that the latter would be hard to reconcile with the characteristic expressive role of a self-ascription of belief. For if S’s statement were intelligible in terms of some epistemic basis used by S to find out what she believed, then the question “How do you know you believe that *p*?” should be expected to be a perfectly sensible response to her utterance. But in fact, as “neo-expressivists” emphasize, a striking feature of the “manifest image” of self-ascriptions is that they “seem to be protected (...) from the kinds of epistemic assessment and criticism that are appropriate to ordinary perceptual reports” (Bar-On 2004, 263).⁸ Again, the use of a suitable epistemic basis would be hard to square with the intuitive *appropriateness* of another kind of response, namely “Why do you think that *p*?” or “How do you know that *p*?”. Belief is a non-factive mental state. Accordingly, a proper basis for finding out that one believes that *p* should be expected to be available independently of whether one knows that *p* or whether *p* is true. The trouble is that it is hard to see how a judgement made on a basis that is “neutral” in this sense could intelligibly license lines of questioning that would also be appropriate in response to an assertion *that p*.

The right response to this argument, I want to suggest, is to challenge its premise, that telling must be intelligible in terms of an epistemic basis. There is a grain of truth in this. If A is to learn about S’s belief through S’s act of telling, it must be reasonable for A to think that S knows what she believes. And this in turn suggests that A must have some idea of S’s epistemic position: of how S is in a position to know the relevant sort of thing. What is not clear is that the notion of an epistemic basis is indispensable in this context. The case of expressions of intentions again provides an instructive analogy. Your knowledge that you are going to the staff meeting tomorrow is not intelligible to us in terms of any basis you will have used to *find out* whether you will go. (Only in exceptional circumstances can it so much as seem to make sense to you to treat the question whether you will go as a theoretical question, to be answered by finding out, rather than as a practical question, to be answered by making a decision or expressing an intention.⁹) But this is not to say that your knowledge strikes us as somehow mysterious. We arguably find it intelligible in terms of the second expressive dimension of your utterance: your expressing your intention to go to the meeting. Provided the intention reflects realistic practical reasoning (including an accurate and knowledgeable assessment of your practical abilities), we ordinarily take it that an intention can provide an agent with self-knowledge. Specifically, we recognize an intelligible connection between expressing a (realistic) intention and expressing knowledge of what one is or will be doing.¹⁰ Note that in this case, too, we would deem the question “How do you know you are going to the meeting?” out of place. This is not because we are resistant to trying make sense of your epistemic position, but because we *do* make sense of it in a way that would be incompatible with your use of a “means of access”, viz. in terms of your capacity for practical reasoning and intentional agency.

Here is a final consideration in favour of the “non-epistemic” interpretation. “Suppose self-ascriptions of belief have a “double aspect” in the sense outlined: S’s assertion is simultaneously a case of telling A that she believes that p and of expressing her belief that p. Then A would be given two unrelated reasons for thinking that S believes that p. This would in itself be puzzling. To make things worse, one of the two reasons would plainly be a better reason than the other. Quite generally, expressions of attitudes show or manifest or display the expressed attitude, enabling others to recognize the attitude in its expression.¹¹ If S’s utterance *shows* her belief in this way, it would hardly be sensible for A to rely on hearsay for her judgement about S’s belief. In short, the “expressive role” of S’ self-ascription surely makes S’s act of telling completely redundant”.

On this picture, the two reasons at A’s disposal are mutually independent. S’s act of telling will give A a good reason to think S believes that p only if S knows what she believes. S’s “giving vent” to her belief provides a more direct avenue to her belief, bypassing her self-knowledge. An immediate response is that this picture misrepresents the relation between the two reasons: it fails to recognize that the second kind of reason *also* crucially depends on S’s self-knowledge. A self-ascription of the belief that p, or for that matter an assertion that p, does not express one’s belief that p in the way an involuntary facial expression of anger expresses anger. In the latter case, the subject’s epistemic position regarding the attitude does seem to be an independent matter. Telling from someone’s facial expression that she is angry is compatible with taking her to be unaware of her anger. Whether the subject realizes that she has the expressed attitude is a further question, not settled by the way her facial expression manifests the attitude. But this is not so in the case of the expressive role of assertions. Recognizing an assertion that p as a manifestation of the speaker’s belief that p involves recognizing it as case of intentionally, hence knowingly, stating her view that p.¹² Insofar as we take the assertion to be an expression of the speaker’s belief that p, we have not only settled the question whether she believes that p but also, and simultaneously, whether she is aware of her belief.¹³

The “double aspect” interpretation of S’s self-ascription, then, does not saddle A with a choice between two unrelated reasons. The force of *both* reasons depends on S’s knowing what she believes. I want to go further, though, by suggesting that the first reason (the one provided by S’s telling A that she believes that p) is corroborated and rendered intelligible by the second reason (the one provided by S’s expressing her belief). Here is the basic idea. Whether it is reasonable for A to give credence to S’s act of telling depends, among other things, on whether it is reasonable for A to assume that S knows what she believes about p. To this question, the second reason is immediately relevant. For (as I will argue in the next section) expressing one’s beliefs provides a basic way of knowing one’s beliefs.

4. Spontaneity

The idea of an explanatory connection between expressing and knowing one’s beliefs is a central theme of Williams’s discussion of sincerity in *Truth and Truthfulness*. One of Williams’s concerns here is to resist a tendency to over-intellectualize (and connectedly, over-moralize) sincerity. On a view he associates specifically with Rousseau, “we first and immediately have a transparent self-understanding, and then go on either to give other people a sincere revelation of our belief (...) or else dissimulate in a way that will mislead them” (2002, 193). This account, Williams argues, misrepresents both sincerity and self-knowledge, by failing to appreciate what he calls the “basic spontaneity of assertion” (2002, 76). Regarding sincerity, he suggests that “sincerity at the most basic level is simply openness, a lack of inhibition”. It is the disposition “spontaneously to come out with

what we believe" (2002, 75). Regarding self-knowledge, he writes: "in the simplest case I am confronted with my belief as what I would spontaneously assert" (2002, 76).

I begin by illustrating the intuitive appeal of Williams's thesis. Suppose you try to recall a name, Austin's middle name, say. You think hard, and finally "Langshaw" comes to mind. On Rousseau's view, you will first, in this way, gain knowledge of what you take the name to be, and in turn this will enable you to disclose your belief to others (if you so wish). The correct response is surely that this is not how we ordinarily think about the situation. Your saying "Langshaw" does not have to be *preceded* by the event of the name coming to mind. It can *be* that event. If so, your assertion will not be *based on* prior self-knowledge. It may *provide* you with self-knowledge. In fact, this is so even in cases where you do not say "Langshaw" out loud. Recalling the name involves pronouncing it at least "under your breath" or in "inner speech", so in these cases your self-knowledge may be provided by an "inner" speech act.

The question is whether this intuitive account of the situation points to a real explanatory connection between assertion and self-knowledge, and if so, how the connection should be articulated theoretically. Much here depends on how to understand Williams's notion of spontaneity. What the example brings out is that an assertion that *p* is not in general informed by a *prior* intention to assert that *p*, though there will often, perhaps typically, be some other prior intention, such as that of answering the question whether *p*. In Williams's terms, the assertion will be spontaneous "as to what", though pre-meditated "as to whether" (2002, 75). But I think Williams takes this to imply not just the absence of a certain prior intention but also, additionally, the absence of a certain kind of explanation. On one view, asserting that *p* is an intentional action that can be "rationalized" in terms of (i) the speaker's intention to express his view that *p* and (ii) his belief that a good way to do so is by saying "*p*".¹⁴ That the assertion is intelligible in this way does not mean the speaker must have had a prior intention to assert that *p*, nor (differently) that he must have engaged in explicit practical reasoning about the matter. But it does mean that the speaker must be aware of what she believes independently of the assertion: it is hard to see what work the assertion could do in *providing* you with knowledge of what you believe if it is *rationally based* on your conception of the right means to express your view. On this account, the view Williams associates with Rousseau may be wrong to assume that our self-understanding is "transparent", or that self-knowledge always precedes assertion, but quite right to insist that self-knowledge must be intelligible independently of assertion. Assertion presupposes and thus cannot explain self-knowledge.

Evidently if a "spontaneous" assertion is to play the epistemic role Williams thinks it plays, it cannot be rationalizable in this way. But does this mean it is not *intentional*, or at least not intentional "as to what"? Williams appears to think so. He refers to spontaneous assertions as "involuntary as to what" (2002, 75), and the only kind of control he seems to grant the agent in such cases is that of inhibiting the assertion. (Sincerity "at the basic level" is "a lack of inhibition".) This would make asserting that *p* akin to breathing. It would be an action that is not normally performed intentionally, though we are able to exercise intentional control over it if required. This is not particularly plausible in itself, though, and it is certainly hard, on this reading of "spontaneity", to make sense of the combination of "spontaneous as to what" and "pre-meditated as to whether". In any case, here is an alternative suggestion.

An assertion can be intentional under descriptions such as "asserting that *p*" or "stating one's view that *p*" even if it is not open to a rational explanation in terms of an instrumental belief about how best to achieve one's goal of expressing the view that *p*. Compare: an act

of arm raising can be intentional even if it is not open to a rational explanation in terms of the instrumental belief that flexing certain muscles will cause one's arm to rise. Raising one's arm is something most people are able to (intentionally) do *directly*. There is no need for any instrumental belief, and even if someone did have some such belief, a rationalizing explanation invoking it would normally not be correct. Similarly, as Jennifer Hornsby has argued, "(v)oincing our thoughts is something that we are able to simply do" (2005, 120). Occasionally it takes practical reasoning to put one's thoughts into suitable words (especially if the words belong to a second language). But usually our relation to the words we produce is more immediate. As Hornsby remarks, just as we hear the meaning "in the words" when we listen to someone speak, similarly the words we intentionally produce are "laden with meaning" (2005, 118). Of course, this is entirely compatible with the fact that "basic" acts of voicing one's view are typically open to rational explanations in terms of further goals they serve (for example, reminding others, or oneself, of a name).

Suppose, then, that a spontaneous assertion is one that is neither pre-mediated (at least not "as to what", as opposed to "as to whether") nor rationally based on the kind of instrumental belief alluded to, yet is intentional under descriptions such as "asserting that p" or "stating one's view that p". This would make it possible to understand the epistemic role of assertions as follows: given that we normally enjoy "knowledge in intention" of what we are intentionally doing (Anscombe 1957),¹⁵ someone spontaneously (and sincerely) asserting that p can have knowledge in intention of stating her view that p. Beliefs are not actions. Still, one may be aware of an action under descriptions that do not fall short of a self-ascription of belief, such as "I am stating my view that p". Your assertion "the name is Langshaw", then, can make it intelligible that you are aware of your belief that he was called Langshaw: you may know your belief *in* "spontaneously" expressing it.

On this way of developing the account, it is important to guard against a possible misunderstanding of Williams' formulation ("I am confronted with my belief as what I would spontaneously assert"). The phrase might be heard as saying that it is *by* being confronted with something (such as our spontaneous assertions) that we come to know what we believe. Appeal to whatever it is that is confronting us would provide an account of a "means of access" by which we know our beliefs. But this reading is not mandatory. Instead, we might say that in making a spontaneous assertion one knows or is aware of – and in that sense confronted with – one's belief. Again, there is no implication that one did not know one had this belief before making the assertion, let alone that one is taken by surprise (though both things may be true). What matters is that S's spontaneous assertion enables A to make sense of S's epistemic position vis-à-vis her belief: given her capacity to express her belief it is unsurprising that she is aware of it.

Note that a spontaneous assertion, on the current reading of "spontaneous", may well be preceded by deliberation. Should we go further and insist, with Richard Moran, that being aware of a belief in expressing it actually *requires* deliberation, or at least requires taking oneself to hold the belief for adequate reasons?¹⁶ This raises a number of issues, but the most immediate thing to say, from the current perspective, is that the answer depends on the account we should give of the normative expectations governing the speech act of assertion. One way to motivate Moran's view would be to argue that the norm for assertion is epistemically justified belief, and that epistemic justification requires believing on the basis of adequate epistemic reasons. The "Langshaw" example helps to bring out the sense in which this account would seem to be revisionist. Intuitively, your assertion "the name is 'Langshaw'" is perfectly acceptable, even if you have no evidence for your belief.¹⁷ One way to make sense of this verdict is to endorse the view that the norm for

assertion is knowledge.¹⁸ It is true that there is something you will be able to say in defence of your assertion, namely “I remember that the name is ‘Langshaw’”. But this is not the kind of reason Moran’s account demands – a reason reflection on which can play a role in a process of reaching or sustaining beliefs by deliberation. Remembering that *q* entails knowing that *q*, and so also entails believing that *q*. Thus, while the fact that you remember that *q* gives you an excellent reason to think that *q*, and indeed may well be a reason *for which* you believe that *q*, in reflecting on that reason you take the question whether you believe that *q* to be settled. Reflection on that reason is not conducted from what Moran calls the “deliberative stance”.¹⁹ In short, Moran’s “deliberative stance” is plausibly seen as an important special case, not an inescapable requirement.

5. Joint self-knowledge

Earlier I identified three commitments commonly attributed to an “epistemic” explanation of first-person authority: self-knowledge is thought to be intelligible in terms of a (i) first-personal “means of access” that is (ii) unshareable and (iii) neutral on the possibility of knowledge of other minds. I have sketched some elements of a version of the epistemic approach that is free of these commitments. I now want to use the three headings to summarize and elaborate my alternative proposal.

- (i) If you know that *q* there must be a good explanation of *how you know* that *q*. This is often assumed without argument, but it amounts to a substantive, and prima facie implausible, claim.²⁰ For the question “How does X know that *q*?” is naturally associated with a certain set of expectations as to what counts as a good answer, and it is not clear that satisfaction of these expectations is a necessary condition of making someone’s possession of knowledge intelligible. One such expectation, both in everyday interactions and in philosophy, is that the answer should invoke a certain “means of access”, something that could intelligibly be used to find out about what is conceived as an independent fact of the matter as to whether *q*. Familiar examples include evidence, observation and testimony. I suggest that knowledge of one’s current and future intentional actions, and knowledge of one’s current beliefs, provide apparent counterexamples. The question “How do you know?”, or even “How does she know?”, does not strike us as readily intelligible in these cases, precisely because we do not ordinarily think of our intentional actions, or beliefs, as a matter of independent facts to be discovered by some suitable means of access. This is not to say, however, that pre-theoretically we have no resources to make sense of someone’s possession of such knowledge. Directly or indirectly, we find such knowledge intelligible in terms of the idea, roughly put, that doing something intentionally involves doing it knowingly. An agent’s possession of a (realistic) intention, together with her ability to express the intention in the form of an assertion, makes it unsurprising that she knows what she is or will be doing. The connection between practical reasoning, intention and assertion provides materials for an intelligible answer to questions such as “What explains her ability to know ..?” or “How come she knows?”, though the answer frustrates the specific expectations generated by “How does she know?”. The commonsensical idea of first-person knowledge should not be conflated with the philosophical construction of “first-person access”.

- (ii) The notion of first-person access suggests that S's telling A that she believes that p is to be understood on the model of an eyewitness report. The authority of S's act of telling reflects a mode of access she has that is not just contingently but in principle unavailable to the audience. In contrast, if S's self-knowledge is made intelligible in terms of her awareness of what she is doing in spontaneously expressing her belief, there is a sense in which A is able to share the way S knows her belief. This is not quite the sense of sharing that is relevant in the case where we jointly attend to a goldfinch and in that (shared) way know about its presence. S is aware of her belief *in* expressing it. A comes to know what S believes *on the basis* of her expressing it (by recognizing the intention informing her assertion). Correlatively, A needs to listen to what S is saying. S does not. Still, both interlocutors' knowledge of S's belief may be made possible by S's spontaneous expression. Indeed, the two ways of knowing may be seen as complementary roles, or as interdependent aspects of a single shared capacity for communication. It is often in exercising the capacity to make her belief manifest to an audience that S is aware of what she believes. And it by appropriately responding to S's exercise of that capacity that A is able simultaneously to know what S believes and to make sense of S's self-knowledge.
- (iii) If S's self-knowledge derives from her ability to spontaneously express her belief, then self-knowledge and knowledge of other minds are not, as orthodox "epistemic" explanations of first-person authority have it, separate subject matters. Rather, at least on the plausible assumption that in expressing an attitude one can make the attitude manifest to others, the capacity for self-knowledge can be seen to entail the possibility of knowledge of other minds. Developing this suggestion would require a more detailed examination of both the assumption and the entailment than is possible here. For current purposes, what matters is that the epistemic role of spontaneous assertion encourages – and helps to make sense of – the "double aspect" interpretation of self-ascriptions of belief. In affirming that she believes that p, S is *telling* A what she believes. Suppose A makes sense of the authority of that act of telling in terms of S's ability to know her beliefs in spontaneously expressing them. Then, it would be a short step to attribute to S's utterance a further expressive role, *viz.* to see it as an *exercise* of the very ability that makes S's self-knowledge intelligible. You might worry that this structure gives A "one reason too many". Why would A rely on testimony if the utterance makes S's attitude *manifest* to him? But the two reasons are really inseparable. For even if S expresses her belief simply by asserting that p, this will normally provide A with a reason to think S believes that p only insofar as he takes S to know what she is doing in making that assertion, hence to be aware of her belief. Moreover, it should not be assumed that the point of S's self-ascription is to offer testimony, conceived on the lines of the "eyewitness model". The self-ascription may serve to make explicit the knowledge that is implicit in the activity of sincerely expressing one's beliefs.

I would like to end by addressing a basic line of objection to my argument. It might be said that I have been exaggerating the extent to which self-knowledge (of the kind under consideration) is of *concern* to commonsense psychology. I complained about the use of the passive voice in characterizing first-person authority and the effect this tends to have of glossing over the question of how we ordinarily make sense of the authority we accord to each other's "self-conception". The counterargument would be that there is really

nothing much to be said on this score. Commonsense psychology assumes that self-ascriptions of belief – at least if they are sincere and serious – are very largely correct, but takes no interest in why this assumption should hold.

The assumption here, I think, is that commonsense psychology can afford to be indifferent to this question precisely *because* self-ascriptions are regarded as strongly authoritative: we do not probe or question, and *hence have no need to understand*, the authority of others' "self-conception". This is where first-person authority differs from the real but qualified and open-to-scrutiny authority we accord to eyewitnesses. It seems to me that the problem with this view is that while it is true that we do not probe self-ascriptions in one sort of way, we occasionally do so in another. The probing does not take the form of asking second-person questions such as "How do you know?" or "What makes you so sure?" It takes the form of raising the (often third-personal) background question whether the speaker's self-ascription is in fact "sincere and serious". (Note that the assumption I am challenging simply stipulates that this condition is satisfied.) It is in this context, I suggest, that commonsense psychology takes an interest both in the limitations and, connectedly, in the explanation of self-knowledge.

On the view Williams associates with Rousseau, the only question we face under the heading of sincerity is whether the speaker is revealing, or deliberately misrepresenting, her state of mind. But this distorts the nature of everyday interactions. S's self-ascription can lack authority in ways that are perfectly familiar to commonsense psychology even if S is not lying. Here are three examples. First, Williams uses the case of the protagonist of *Rameau's Nephew* to illustrate the point that if the speaker's "declarations are too whimsically inconstant, there comes a question of what kind of thing is in his mind". If the speaker's views change too often "for internal reasons", "they will not be beliefs but rather something like propositional moods" (2002, 191). Second, S may tell A that she believes university degrees from different institutions are of equal value, and in doing so may not deliberately misrepresent her view. Still, A may have strong background evidence that this is not in fact S's view at all (Peacocke 1998, 90). Third, one question on A's mind may be whether S is a bullshitter, in the sense analysed by Harry Frankfurt. A self-ascription of belief is not granted authority if there is evidence that the speaker "does not really care what his audience thinks about" the belief's subject matter and may just be trying to "convey a certain impression of himself" (Frankfurt 1988, 121).

I conclude with two observations. One is that although it is natural to describe these examples as involving failures of self-knowledge, it is not clear that the notion of "first-person access" would offer a helpful tool for making sense of them. It is not, for example, as if there is some readily intelligible connection between the various factors at work in the examples – fickleness, say, or various kinds of motivational factors – and the subject's inability to utilize some "means of access" by which we ordinarily find out what we believe. The other observation is that in all three cases, there is a sense in which the speaker is not properly aware of what she is doing in stating "I believe that p". She may not, for example, be able fully to articulate (even to herself) the real objective of her self-ascription (of conveying a certain self-image) or she may wrongly take herself to express a settled view when she is in fact vacillating. One effect of this is to make the self-ascription unreliable. Another is to complicate the interaction between S and A: it can be hard to know how to respond to a statement that one suspects is not what the speaker takes it to be. It is here that self-knowledge, and its limitations, would seem to be of interest to commonsense psychology (not just to philosophy or psychiatry). You might say that our interest here is *exclusively* in ways in which self-knowledge can be impaired, not in how to make possession of unimpaired self-knowledge intelligible. But it is not clear that the two

issues can be wholly kept apart. The natural question is why factors that result in a failure to be properly aware of what one is doing in expressing a view should also make the corresponding self-ascription unreliable. The beginnings of an answer may be this: they make it hard for the speaker to know her views by disabling her from spontaneously and knowingly expressing them.

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to audiences at workshops and seminars at Tübingen, Nijmegen, Madrid and Geneva for discussion of previous versions of this paper, especially to Cristina Borgoni for her excellent reply at the Madrid meeting, and to Maria Alvarez, Dorit Bar-On, Lucy O'Brien, Julien Deonna, Peter Langland-Hassan, Krysztina Órban, Katia Samoilova, Fabrice Teroni and Hong-Yu Wong for suggestions and criticism. I have also benefited immensely from detailed comments on the penultimate draft by Naomi Eilan, Fleur Jongepier, Guy Longworth and Derek Strijbos. The views expressed in it are those of the author and may not reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Funding

My work on this paper was supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation. The views expressed in it are those of the author and may not reflect the views of the John Templeton Foundation.

Notes

1. There are other, less straightforward ways in which someone's telling you that *q* can give you a good reason to think that *q*. Perhaps you know that she is trying to mislead you, and also that she realizes you are aware of this (though not of her realization). So you accept that *q* because you think this is the truth she is trying to withhold from you by asserting that *q*. For discussion of the significance of this kind of case, see Anscombe (1979) and Moran (2006).
2. For example, Dorit Bar-On challenges the first commitment by arguing that "avowals" do not form "the culmination of the subject's inwardly directed truth-targeting reflection", and do not represent "the self-ascriber's carefully formed judgement that she is in the self-ascribed state" (2004, 242). Crispin Wright is worried about what he sees as unacceptable implications of the second and third commitment: "the conception of avowals as reports of inner observation is saddled with the idea that the observations in question are ones which *necessarily* only the subject can carry out. And once that conception is in place, others' means of access to the state of affairs which their subject (putatively) observes is bound to seem essentially second-rate by comparison and be open to just the kinds of skeptical harassment which generates the traditional problem of other minds (...) (Wright 1998, 108).
3. Some would argue that these expectations are not set in stone. Conversations with a therapist, it is said, can provide one with adequate grounds for self-ascriptions of belief that are detached from grounds for the relevant first-order belief, and in that context, the usual appropriateness of responding to a self-ascription with a first-order question or challenge may be suspended. An alternative way to think about such cases would be to suggest that they involve a conflict between two kinds of expectations, that self-ascriptions should express one's first-order beliefs, and that they should be truthful.
4. It might be said that while in asserting that *p* one represents oneself as knowing that *p*, in asserting "I believe that *p*" one does not: the question "How do you know that *p*?" is in principle always appropriate in response to the former but not in response to the latter statement. But there are other possible interpretations. Sometimes the phrase "I believe that *p*" may be intended not as a self-ascription of the belief *that p* but merely of the belief that there is significant

- evidence that *p*. Again, the phrase may sometimes be used to enter a kind of pre-emptive plea for blamelessness (in case it turns out that one did not know that *p*).
5. According to Dorit Bar-On “avowals proper” “are not acts that subjects deliberately undertake to perform with a specific audience-directed goal in mind, such as convincing, informing, pleasing, etc. Like many non-verbal expressive acts, they may not even have any communicative point” (2004, 242). This is in keeping with the “neo-expressivist” view that A’s reason for thinking that S believes that *p* is provided by S expressing her belief that *p* (*rather than* by S telling or informing A that she believes that *p*). Admittedly, there are passages in which she seems to depart from that strict view. For example, at the very beginning of the book, she characterizes avowals as “everyday utterances in which speakers tell us certain things about themselves” (2004, 1). And much later in the book, she considers a “dual expression thesis”, on which avowals can express *both* the self-ascribed state and the judgement that one is in that state (2004, 307). Still, as far as I can see, these complications do not affect the account she would give of A’s reason for thinking S believes that *p*.
 6. Versions of this “double aspect” interpretation of self-ascriptions of belief can be found in Hampshire (1965, 79), O’Shaughnessy (2000, 187) (“these somehow pre-eminent self-conscious manifestations of a belief are at once evidence both of the belief *and* of ‘insightful’ knowledge of its existence”) and Bar-On (2004, 307ff).
 7. Bar-On uses this phrase in formulating what she regards as a possible, and popular, reading of the claim that avowals are assertions. On this reading, “assertion” is “understood, just like ‘report’, as involving the forming of a judgement on some epistemic basis, as well as seeking to convey it (even if only to oneself).” (2011, 195, n. 8) She argues that thus read, the claim should be rejected. I agree that the claim should be rejected, but it seems to me that what is wrong with it is simply that it reflects a plainly mistaken view of assertion. By the lights of that view, not even your telling me your name would count as an assertion (or a report).
 8. It might be said that questions such as “How do you know you believe that *p*?” or “What makes you think you believe that *p*?” are regarded as conversationally inappropriate merely because it is common knowledge what the answer is. (Williamson (2000, 252–253) considers this in discussing the assertion “I want to go home”.) The total lack of agreement in the literature on even the broadest outlines of the correct answer seems to me to count against that interpretation. A more specific concern about Bar-On’s characterization of the way self-ascriptions are “protected” is this. As Hampshire (1979) points out, there is a “general purpose” type of challenge that would sometimes be regarded as appropriate even in response to self-ascriptions of mental states, viz. “Are you sure?” Unlike “How do you know?” and “Why do you think?”, however, this question merely presupposes that one can be more or less careful in making the target judgement, not that the judgement is intelligible in terms of some kind of epistemic basis.
 9. See Hampshire (1965) and Moran (2001) for illuminating discussion of this point.
 10. The idea that intentions can provide for knowledge in a distinctive way that is not analysable in terms of some “means of access” is a central theme of Anscombe (1957) and Hampshire (1965). For discussion, see also Falvey (2000), Haddock (2011), Thompson (2011), Stroud (2013), and Roessler (2013a).
 11. See Bar-On (2011) for illuminating discussion of this thesis: “Naively, the showing behavior relevant to expressing is behavior that springs directly from the expressed state of mind and directly betrays the expresser’s state of mind so that suitably endowed observers can immediately recognize it” (218). See also McDowell (1998), Green (2007) and Owens (2006).
 12. As William Alston pointed out long ago in a classical article:

We ordinarily take the look [of a facial expression of disgust] to be an indication of disgust because we suppose it to be a ‘natural’, spontaneous manifestation of being disgusted. As soon as we learn that someone is contriving to look that way, we properly suspect deception. Just the opposite is true of ‘I’m disgusted’. Here we will take the utterance of the sentence to be a reliable indication of disgust only if we suppose it was done intentionally with the agent realizing what he was doing. If we think the sentence was uttered in a fit of abstraction, its indicative value will be impaired if not altogether lost. (1965, 24)

13. The point is not just that the audience needs to construe an assertion as an intentional act. Neo-expressivists might accept this, but insist that we only need to think of an assertion as an act of

intentionally *uttering* something, not as intentional under what might be called attitude-involving descriptions, such as stating one's view that p. (Bar-On's response to Matthew Boyle, as quoted in Boyle (2010, 16–17), suggests she is tempted by this line of response.) But this would make it hard to understand how asserting something can serve to *show* one's belief: the audience's conception of the point of the utterance would leave the question of the speakers' attitude wide open. See Owens (2006) and Green (2007) for discussion of the role of the speaker's intentions in making it possible for assertions to show one's beliefs.

14. One philosopher who takes this view is Brian O'Shaughnessy: "(w)hen I say 'it is raining' (...) I intend to convey a belief of mine, and that communicative intention is rationally based upon knowledge of that belief" (2000, 187).
15. See note 10 above for recent attempts to elaborate and defend this claim.
16. I take the second, weaker suggestion to provide the canonical statement of Moran's view. Compare this passage: consideration of a deliberative question "terminates in the formation or endorsement of an attitude" (2001, 63 my emphasis). Admittedly, there are also formulations that encourage a stronger reading, on which occupying the "deliberative stance" is a matter of *forming* a belief (a deliberative question is "answered by a decision or commitment of oneself", 2001, 145). And there are formulations that suggest a very much weaker reading, on which an occupant of the "deliberative stance" is committed only to taking her beliefs to be *open to revision*, were she to encounter contrary evidence. Moran sometimes recoils to that position in response to critics who take him to be committed to the strong reading. For example, in his response to Shoemaker, he writes: "the point of speaking of something as 'up to me' here is to indicate the responsibility a believer may have when one or another part of this supporting network [of beliefs] is challenged or abandoned" (2003, 403). But arguably, that reading is too weak for Moran's purposes. On it, it is hard to see how the "deliberative stance" can do the work Moran expects it to do; for example, in resolving the putative "puzzle of transparency" (how it can "make sense" for a subject to answer a question about one's belief by answering a first-order question). Note that whether the work Moran expects to be done by the "deliberative stance" needs doing is a substantive question. See my (2013b) for scepticism about some of the assumptions that generate the appearance of a "puzzle of transparency".
17. Compare Strawson's remark that there are things ("that my elder daughter's name is Julia, that the French for rabbit is 'lapin'") we know "*too well* to believe them *for reasons*" (1992, 93–94). Heal (2004) also expresses misgivings about what she calls the "internalist" commitments of Moran's theory.
18. For discussion of the two accounts, see Williamson (2000), Kvanvig (2009) and Williamson (2009).
19. One might insist that your reason in the example is that you *seem to* remember the name. This would not be much of a reason, however. Nor, arguably, is it the kind of reason for which we normally believe what we remember to be the case.
20. Note that even critics of an "epistemic" approach to first-person authority tend to accept the following conditional: *if* the authority of S's self-ascription reflects her distinctive epistemic position, then a good account of A's reason for thinking S believes requires a theory of how S knows what she believes. They go on to argue by *modus tollens*, rather than *modus ponens*.

Notes on contributor

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