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Content Preservation*

Tyler Burge

Near the beginning of *Rules for the Direction of the Mind* Descartes holds that some things known “with certainty” and “by deduction” are not evident. He notes that in long deductions, we may know that “the last link is connected with the first, even though we do not take in by means of one and the same act of vision all the intermediate links on which that connection depends, but only remember that we have taken them successively under review. . . .”¹ Though he acknowledges that such knowledge is not evident or purely intuitive, and that long deductions are more subject to error than is intuitive knowledge, Descartes thinks that if the knowledge is deduced from evident mathematical premises, it is certain and demonstrative. Presumably he would not doubt that it is apriori. I lay aside certainty. But the view that the knowledge is demonstrative and apriori seems to me true.

Roderick Chisholm sees matters differently. He defines ‘apriori’ in such a way that a proposition is apriori (and known apriori) only if it is either evident or follows directly by evident entailment from something that is evident. He explicitly rules out the results of multi-stepped deductions:

What if S derives a proposition from a set of axioms, not by means of one or two simple steps, but as a result of a complex proof, involving a series of interrelated steps? If the proof is formally valid, then shouldn’t we say that S knows the proposition a priori? I think that the answer is no.

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¹Descartes, *Philosophical Works*, ed. Haldane and Ross (New York: Dover, 1955), vol. 1, p. 8. Locke, in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, bk. 4, chap. 2, sec. 7, notes that such knowledge is “less perfect” in the sense of more subject to error than intuitive knowledge.

He adds:

[I]f, in the course of a demonstration, we must rely upon memory at various stages, thus using as premisses contingent propositions about what we happen to remember, then, although we might be said to have “demonstrative knowledge” of our conclusion, in a somewhat broad sense of the expression “demonstrative knowledge,” we cannot be said to have an a priori demonstration of the conclusion.²

Some of the difference between us derives from different conceptions of apriority. There are many such conceptions. I will be explicit about mine. I understand ‘*apriori*’ to apply to a person’s knowledge when that knowledge is underwritten by an apriori justification or entitlement that needs no further justification or entitlement to make it knowledge. A justification or entitlement is *apriori* if its justificational force is in no way constituted or enhanced by reference to or reliance on the specifics of some range of sense experiences or perceptual beliefs.

I take ‘*apriori*’ to apply primarily to justifications or entitlements, rather than to truths. There are, of course, conceptual relations between these notions. Justification or entitlement aims at truth since it rationally supports belief. Moreover, the notion of apriori truth is important, though it should probably be explicated in terms of possible apriori knowledge. But in this account, justification and entitlement are fundamental.

The distinction between justification and entitlement is this: Although both have positive force in rationally supporting a propositional attitude or cognitive practice, and in constituting an epistemic right to it, entitlements are epistemic rights or warrants that need not be understood by or even accessible to the subject. We are entitled to rely, other things equal, on perception, memory, deductive and inductive reasoning, and on—I will claim—the word of others. The unsophisticated are entitled to rely on their perceptual beliefs. Philosophers may articulate these entitlements. But being entitled does not require being able to justify reliance on

²Roderick M. Chisholm, “The Truths of Reason,” in *Theory of Knowledge*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1977), reprinted in *A Priori Knowledge*, ed. Paul K. Moser (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

these resources, or even to conceive such a justification. Justifications, in the narrow sense, involve reasons that people have and have access to. These may include self-sufficient premises or more discursive justifications. But they must be available in the cognitive repertoire of the subject. The border between the notions of entitlement and justification may be fuzzy. I shall sometimes use ‘justified’ and ‘justification’ broadly, to cover both cases.

A person’s knowledge of a proposition might be adequately supported both by an apriori body and by an empirical body of justification or entitlement. Then the person’s knowledge would be heterogeneously overdetermined. The person would have both apriori and empirical knowledge of the proposition. To be apriori, the knowledge must be underwritten by an apriori justification or entitlement that needs no further justificatory help, in order for the person to have that knowledge. To be apriori, a person’s justification or entitlement must retain its justificational force even if whatever empirical justifications or entitlements the person also has to believe the relevant proposition are ignored.

In holding that the justificational force of an apriori justification or entitlement is in no way constituted or enhanced by reliance on the specifics of some range of sense experiences or perceptual beliefs, I do not require that an apriori justification rely on reason or understanding alone—as pre-Kantian rationalists required. A justification or entitlement would count as apriori if it did not rely for its justificational force on sense experience or perceptual belief at all. But it might also count if it depended on entirely general aspects of sense experience or perceptual belief, or on aspects of the structure of the subject’s sense capacities and on their function in yielding categories of information.³

³Kant thought that all synthetic apriori judgments, except those in his practical philosophy—and perhaps in the critical philosophy as a whole—rested on general (“pure”) aspects of the structure or function of sense experience. In fact, he believed that the justificational force of all such judgments depended on one’s actually having had sense experiences. My conception of apriori knowledge makes room for Kant’s conception. I do not, however, agree with Kant that those apriori justifications whose justificational force is not enhanced at all by sense experience are vacuous, or analytic in the sense of being true independently of any relation to a subject matter. The distinction between reliance on the specifics of a range of sense experiences, or perceptual beliefs, and reliance on the structure or function of one’s sense capacities in obtaining categories of information is not sharp. I think it may remain useful.

An individual need not make reference to sense experiences for his justification or entitlement to be empirical. My term ‘reliance on’, in the explication of apriority, is meant to acknowledge that most perceptual beliefs about physical objects or properties do not refer to sense experiences or their perceptual content. Such beliefs make reference only to physical objects or properties. But the individual is empirically entitled to these perceptual beliefs. The justificational force of the entitlement backing such beliefs partly consists in the individual’s having certain sense experiences, or at any rate in the individual’s perceptual beliefs’ being perceptual.

An apriori justification (entitlement) cannot rely on the specifics of sense experiences or perceptual beliefs for its *justificational force*. An apriori justification will usually depend on sense experiences or perceptual beliefs in some way. They are typically necessary for the acquisition of understanding or belief. But such dependence is not relevant to apriority unless it is essential to justificational force. Distinguishing the genesis of understanding and belief from the rational or normative force behind beliefs is fundamental to any view that takes apriori justification seriously.⁴

⁴This explication of apriority applies to justification of cogito-type thoughts like *I am thinking*, and of other judgments about intellection. (It does not apply to *I am having an afterimage*.) These thoughts’ justification is grounded on understanding, not on sense experience or perceptual belief. I am aware that some traditional conceptions of apriority would exclude *cogito* cases. Some of these conceptions emphasize not justificational independence of sense experience, but justificational independence of any “experience” at all, including intellectual “experience.” (I leave open here whether this use of ‘experience’ is appropriate.) This is one of Leibniz’s conceptions (see *New Essays* IV, ix). Of course Leibniz centered on apriori truth rather than on an individual’s justification. Frege’s conception features justificational independence of any relation to particular events or facts in time (see Gottlob Frege, *The Foundations of Arithmetic*, sec. 3). On his conception, only general truths and truths derivable from general truths could be known apriori.

The terminological issues here are complex; but this difference with traditional explications will not affect my argument with Chisholm, which goes through on any of these conceptions. Moreover, the broader argument of the paper does not depend on how one uses the term ‘apriori’. I am less interested in the term than in the conception I associate with it. The argument of the paper hinges on the role of perception in justification or entitlement. I do think that there are significant substantive and historical issues regarding these different notions associated with the term ‘apriori’ that bear on the way the issue between empiricism and rationalism has come to be understood since the work of Kant, Mill, and the positivists.

No serious conception of apriority has held that all justifications held to be apriori are unrevisable or infallible. Traditionally, the deepest apriori justifications were seen to be hard to come by. Putative apriori justifications were traditionally held to be revisable because one could fail to understand in sufficient depth the relevant propositions, or make errors of reasoning or analysis.

Traditional views did tend to overrate the tightness of connection between genuine (as opposed to putative) apriori justifications and truth. First, apriori justification (entitlement) can be nondemonstrative: an apriori justification can be outweighed without being shown to be rationally deficient or based on misunderstanding—without being shown not to have justificational force (not to be a justification). Some mathematical arguments are nondemonstrative, even broadly inductive, yet apriori in my sense. If a principle is accepted because its truth would explain or derive a variety of other accepted mathematical principles, the justification for accepting the principle is nondemonstrative; but it may not derive any of its force from perceptual beliefs. Second, although some apriori justifications or entitlements may be invulnerable to empirical counterconsiderations, such invulnerability does not follow from the notion of apriority. As will emerge, I think that some beliefs with genuine apriori justifications or entitlements are vulnerable to empirical overthrow.

In both ways, a belief's being apriori justified, for a person at a time, does not entail that it is true. There are, I think, some apriori justifications or entitlements that are demonstrative and do entail truth. But they do not do so purely by being apriori. The present conception of apriority fixes on the nature of the positive rational support for a belief. It says nothing about ways in which a belief may be vulnerable to counterconsiderations.

Thus apriori justification may be unevident, fallible, nondemonstrative, and not "certain." Beliefs thought to be apriori, and even actually justified apriori, are subject to revision. In these ways, my conception of apriority differs from Chisholm's.

Our differences are not primarily verbal, however. Chisholm

For now, it is enough that the present explication signals my interest in justifications or entitlements whose force is grounded in intellection, reason, or reflection, as distinguished from perception, understood broadly to include feeling.

regards long deductions as importing memory of particular past mental events into the justification of the deduction.⁵ If such memories are a necessary part of the justification of the deduction, then—at least where they include memories of empirical beliefs or experiences (memories of reading symbols carefully, for example)—such deductions are not apriori, even on my conception of apriority.

But Chisholm's conception of the *role* of memory in demonstrative reasoning seems to me off the mark. If memory supplied, as part of the demonstration, "contingent propositions about what we happen to remember," the demonstration could not be purely logical or mathematical. But the normal role of memory in demonstrative reasoning is, I think, different. Memory does not supply for the demonstration propositions about memory, the reasoner, or past events.⁶ It supplies the propositions that serve as links in the demonstration itself. Or rather, it *preserves* them, together with their judgmental force, and makes them available for use at later times. Normally, the content of the knowledge of a longer demonstration is no more about memory, the reasoner, or contingent events than that of a shorter demonstration. One does not justify the demonstration by appeals to memory. One justifies it by appeals to the steps and the inferential transitions of the demonstration.

Why did Chisholm think otherwise? Long demonstrations are more fallible, and fallible in different ways, than short ones are. As he notes, people make mistakes of haste or incomplete understanding in judgments about relatively obvious propositions. But in longer demonstrations there are not only more opportunities to make these mistakes. One may suffer memory slips, even if one is careful and fully understands each proposition in the deduction. Traditionally, belief that appealed to apriori justification was held to be subject to error. But the sources of error were sometimes limited to failures of understanding and reason. It may seem that

⁵Descartes's own remark that in deductions we must remember that we have taken the links of the deduction "successively under review" may suggest this view. I find it unclear how he intended the remark.

⁶Chisholm's "thus," in the quoted passage, is clearly a mistake. It does not follow from a deduction's reliance on memory that it, or any justification associated with it, uses "contingent propositions" about memory as premises.

failure of memory is a source of error not easily accommodated by the traditional conception.

But relevant differences between short and long demonstrations are at most those between short-term and longer-term memory. Even one-step demonstrations could go bad if the reasoner's short-term memory were defective enough. So if we take vulnerability to memory failure as a sign that a justification of reasoning must *make reference to* memory, no reasoning at all will be independent of premises about memory. This is unacceptable. It is one thing to rely on memory in a demonstration, and another to use premises about memory. Any reasoning in time must rely on memory. But not all reasoning must use premises about memory or the past.

Here as elsewhere, to be justified in a cognitive process, one need not include premises in the justification that rule out all possible sources of error. This is a widely accepted point about perceptual justification. To be entitled to a perceptual belief that there is a bird there, one need not rule out all ways that one could be fooled. The same point applies to reasoning. To be justified in deductive reasoning, one need not include in one's justification propositions that guard against memory lapses, short or long term. Reliance on memory does not even add to the justificational force of the deductive justification.

If a justification depends on valid deductive reasoning from (let us presume) premises that are known *a priori*, then one's being justified by the justification depends only on one's *actually* understanding the reasoning sufficiently, and on one's reasoning processes' *actually* working properly. The justification does not depend on a premise that says that these conditions obtain, a premise that would itself require further justification. (I think that such dependence would involve a vicious regress.) One can presume that they obtain, without needing justification for the presumption, except in special situations in which these presumptions are called reasonably—and perhaps even correctly—into question.

In a deduction, reasoning processes' working properly depends on memory's preserving the results of previous reasoning. But memory's preserving such results does not add to the justificational force of the reasoning. It is rather a background condition for the reasoning's success. Memory is no more intrinsically an empirical faculty than it is a rational faculty. Its function in deductive reasoning is preservative. Its role in justification derives from what it

preserves. Our entitlement to rely on memory in long deductions derives from our entitlement to rely on reasoning to carry out its functions. Memory failures that cause demonstrations to fail are failures of background conditions necessary to the proper function of reasoning. Hence the fallibility of memory in deductive reasoning is a source of error that can be countenanced by the traditional conception of apriority—and our conception as well.

Even in empirical reasoning, memory has a purely preservative function that does not contribute to the force of the justification, but simply helps assure the proper working of other cognitive capacities over time. When we perceive events and infer an explanation, memory preserves the perceptual beliefs as we carry out the explanation. But this preservation is not part of the justification of the explanation, nor does it add to it—even though if it were to fail, the explanation would be jeopardized. Rather, memory just holds the results of the perception intact long enough for explanation to be carried through.

Of course, memory sometimes is not purely preservative, but is an independent element in justification. Memory of events, objects, experiences, or attitudes may form a premise in a justification of an empirical belief. The beliefs that such memories support are justified partly *by reference to* the memory. Or else they may partly rely for their entitlement on memory.

Substantive memories of specific events, objects, experiences, or attitudes may play a role in deductive reasoning. They may aid reasoning without being elements in the justification they aid. So, for example, we may draw pictures in a proof, or make use of mnemonic devices to aid understanding and facilitate reasoning, without relying on them to enhance the mathematical justification. Alternatively, substantive memories may be part of an auxiliary, double-checking justification. In such cases, they may play a justificational role, yet be justificationally dispensable.

Substantive memory can even be needed to shore up gaps in a person's deductive reasoning. When a purely preservative instance is reasonably challenged, because memory has proved unreliable, one may have to rely on substantive memory. For example, if one knows one's memory has been slipping, one might have to resort to remembering counting the number of implication signs in a pair of formulas to support one's presumption that one's inference was based on correct memory. In such a case, reliance on the mnemonic

devices may be indispensable to the person's justification—not merely a part of an auxiliary double-checking procedure. For the person is no longer entitled to the presumption that memory can be relied upon. I think, however, that the need to make reference to memory in deductions in order to be justified by the deductions is uncommon. In certain cases one might reasonably doubt that one is entitled to rely on one's memory, but be wrong to doubt it.

But the fact that memory can play substantive roles in justification or entitlement should not obscure the distinction between substantive and purely preservative memory. Let me summarize the distinction. Substantive memory is an element in a justification; it imports subject matter or objects into reasoning. Purely preservative memory introduces no subject matter, constitutes no element in a justification, and adds no force to a justification or entitlement. It simply maintains in justificational space a cognitive content with its judgmental force. Like inference, it makes transitions of reason possible, but contributes no propositional content. Unlike inference, it is not a transition or move—so it is not an element in a justification. Hence in deductions, neither reliance on it nor susceptibility to errors that arise from its malfunction prevents the justification associated with the deduction from being *apriori*.⁷

My discussion of memory is pointed toward exploring analogies between memory and acceptance of the word of others. What is the role of interlocution in the justification of our beliefs?

⁷The distinction between substantive memory and purely preservative memory roughly parallels a distinction in psychology between “episodic memory” and “semantic memory.” There is evidence that these sorts of memory function differently in our psychologies. See E. Tulving, “Episodic and Semantic Memory,” in *Organization of Memory*, ed. Tulving and Donaldson (New York: Academic Press, 1972).

Another difference between the two types of memory is that purely preservative memory necessarily plays a role in any reasoning in time. The extent to which substantive memory enters into reasoning depends on the psychology of the reasoner, the subject of the argument, and so on. One should not underestimate, however, our dependence on the use of symbols in reasoning. The role of symbols is partly that of providing perceptual objects. Explicating this sort of dependence is a difficult and important matter. Doing so may complicate or blur the distinction between the sometime dependence on substantive memory and the more general rational necessity of depending on purely preservative memory. But I think that the distinction will remain valuable.

Relying on others is perhaps not metaphysically necessary for any possible rational being. But it is cognitively fundamental to beings at all like us. Though ontogenetically later than perception and memory, reliance on others for learning language and acquiring beliefs is deeply ingrained in our evolutionary history. Acquiring beliefs from others seems not only psychologically fundamental, but epistemically justified. We do not as individuals justify this reliance empirically, any more than we justify our use of perception empirically. But we seem entitled to such reliance. Most of the information that we have, and many of the methods we have for evaluating it, depend on interlocution. If we did not acquire a massive number of beliefs from others, our cognitive lives would be little different from the animals'.

What is the epistemic status of beliefs based on interlocution? I will state my view broadly before qualifying and supporting it. The use of perception is a background condition necessary for the acquisition of belief from others. But in many instances, perception and perceptual belief are not indispensable elements in the justification of such beliefs, or in the justificational force of entitlements underwriting such beliefs. The function of perception is often analogous to the function of purely preservative memory in reasoning. Without perception, one could not acquire beliefs from others. But perception plays a triggering and preservative role, in many cases, not a justificatory one. Sometimes, the epistemic status of beliefs acquired from others is *not empirical*. In particular, it is not empirical just by virtue of the fact that the beliefs are acquired from others.⁸ Such beliefs are sometimes apriori justified in the

⁸Contrast Chisholm, "The Truths of Reason," sec. 5, and James F. Ross, "Testimonial Evidence," in *Analysis and Metaphysics*, ed. Keith Lehrer (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1975). They assume that belief based on testimony cannot be justified apriori and, if it is knowledge at all, must be empirical.

I think that some of what I am saying here bears on the common assumption that knowledge based on the output of proofs by computers cannot be apriori. Cf. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 35; also Thomas Tymoczko, "The Four-Color Problem and its Philosophical Significance," *Journal of Philosophy* 76 (1979): 57-83. Kripke says that such knowledge is based on the laws of physics. Although such knowledge depends on the functioning of a machine according to the laws of physics, it is not obvious that knowledge of the laws of physics is an indispensable part of our justification for believing in the results of such output. I discuss this issue in "Computer Proof and Apriori Knowledge" (in preparation).

sense that they need not rely for justificational force on the specifics of some range of sense experiences or perceptual beliefs.

Thomas Reid insightfully compares acquisition of belief from others to perception as a basic “channel to the mind,” with its own functions in acquiring knowledge. Reid also claims that the tendency to rely on others for acquiring beliefs is innate:

The wise and beneficent Author of nature, who intended that we should be social creatures, and that we should receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by the information of others, hath, for these purposes implanted in our natures two principles that tally with each other. The first of these principles is a propensity to speak truth . . . [the second] is a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us.⁹

Reid notes that credulity, unlike reasoning and experience, is “strongest in childhood, and limited and restrained by experience.” We restrain credulity by weighing the character and disinterestedness of witnesses, the possibility of collusion, the antecedent likelihood of information. Moreover, our reliance on others is more fallible than our reliance on perception—as Reid also notes. We make perceptual errors, but the errors derive from illusions that often can be explained by reference to natural law. We are led into mistakes by others through lies and emotional interferences that are capricious in comparison to the patterns of nature. Why do these considerations not show that acquisition of beliefs from others is not only necessarily empirical but far more in need of empirical expertise than ordinary perception for its justification?

Justification in acquiring beliefs from others may be glossed, to a first approximation, by this principle: *A person is entitled to accept as true something that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so.* Call this the *Acceptance Principle*. 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 principle—without *using* it as justification—accepting the information instinctively. The justification I develop below is a reflective philosophical account of an epistemic entitlement that comes with being a rational agent.

⁹Thomas Reid, *An Inquiry into the Human Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), chap. 6, sec. 24.

Justified (entitled) acceptance is the epistemic “default” position. We can strengthen this position with empirical reasons: “she is a famous mathematician.” We can acquire empirical reasons *not* to accept what we are told: “he has every reason to lie.” But to be entitled, we do not have to have reasons that support the default position, if there is no reasonable ground for doubt. Truth telling is a norm that can be reasonably presumed in the absence of reasons to attribute violations.

It is usually said that to be justified in accepting information from someone else, one must be justified in believing that the source believes the information and is justified in believing it. I think this misleading. A presupposition of the Acceptance Principle is that one is entitled not to bring one’s source’s sincerity or justification into question, in the absence of reasons to the contrary. This too is an epistemic default position.

The Acceptance Principle is not a statistical point about people’s tending to tell the truth more often than not. Falsehoods might conceivably outnumber truths in a society. The principle is also not a point about innateness, though Reid’s claim that a disposition to acceptance is innate seems to me correct. The principle is about entitlement, not psychological origin.

The epistemic default position articulated by the Acceptance Principle applies at an extremely high level of idealization in most actual communication, especially between sophisticated interlocutors. Social, political, or intellectual context often provides “stronger reasons” that counsel against immediately accepting what one is told. 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 purest applications were relatively rare. But I think that it has broader application than the hyperbolic conjecture suggests.

Acceptance underlies language acquisition. Lacking language, one could not engage in rational, deliberative activity, much less the primary forms of human social cooperation. (Indeed, this point suggests the line of justification for the principle that I shall begin to develop below.) But unquestioned reliance is also common in adult life. When we ask someone on the street the time, or the

direction of some landmark, or when we ask someone to do a simple sum, we rely on the answer. We make use of a presumption of credibility when we read books, signs, or newspapers, or talk to strangers on unloaded topics. We need not engage in reasoning about the person's qualifications to be rational in accepting what he or she says, in the absence of grounds for doubt. Grounds for doubt are absent a lot of the time.

The primary default position, the Acceptance Principle, is not an empirical principle. The general form of justification associated with the principle is: *A person is apriori entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so, because it is prima facie preserved (received) from a rational source, or resource for reason; reliance on rational sources—or resources for reason—is, other things equal, necessary to the function of reason.* The justificational force of the entitlement described by this justification is not constituted or enhanced by sense experiences or perceptual beliefs.¹⁰ Before filling in this form of justification, I want to make some preliminary points.

I think that I need not show that other rational beings are necessary to the function of one's reason in order for one to have these entitlements. One has a general entitlement to rely on the rationality of rational beings. The Acceptance Principle can be apriori instantiated where one has apriori, undefeated, prima facie entitlement to construe something prima facie intelligible as having a rational source. So I think that to maintain that one is apriori entitled to rely upon rational interlocutors, I need not show that a solitary reasoner is impossible.

Our account distinguishes rational sources and resources for reason. Resources for reason—memory and perception, for ex-

¹⁰Principles narrower than the Acceptance Principle could with luck and context achieve the same utility: rely on the first person one comes across and no one afterward. Such principles are not rational starting points. We are entitled to something more general. In learning a language, one usually need not know the credentials of one's source—beyond the fact that the source is intelligible. Having an apriori entitlement based on the Acceptance Principle is compatible with also having empirical justifications of prima facie acceptance—or of narrower principles, such as “nonaggressive care-givers are more trustworthy than strangers who threaten one.” I think that one does not have to have these empirical justifications to be entitled to accept what one is told in particular cases (even though people do have such empirical justifications).

ample—need not themselves be rational beings or capacities to reason. In these senses they need not themselves be rational. Yet they may provide material and services that a rational being is *a priori* entitled to rely upon. Rational sources are sources that themselves are a capacity to reason or are rational beings.

As with rational sources, I think that to show that we are *a priori* entitled to rely upon a given resource for reason, I need not show that such a resource is necessary to any possible reasoning. One is entitled to rely upon resources for reason in general—other things equal—even if some particular resource for reason is not indispensable to the function of reason. Such resources may enrich reason without being necessary to every rational activity. This view puts pressure on explicating the notion of a resource for reason. This matter can be postponed, for it is relevant to interlocution only in special cases.

There are deeper questions about rational entitlement that I cannot pursue in depth here. One can ask why one is entitled to rely on rational sources (or resources for reason), in view of the fact that they can be mistaken or misleading. This is tantamount to a traditional skeptical question about how putative rationality or justification is associated with truth. One can apparently imagine systematic misconnections between being justified (entitled), according to ordinary canons, and having true belief. Why then should one ever think that ordinary canons provide ground for belief? I will not take on skepticism here. I will assume that we are rationally entitled to rely on reason, memory, and perception. The Acceptance Principle is an extension of this assumption: we are rationally entitled to rely on interlocution because we may presume that it has a rational source.

Now I turn to filling in the justification for the Acceptance Principle. First, if something is a rational source, it is a *prima facie* source of truth. For a condition on reasons, rationality, and reason is that they be guides to truth. Explicating this idea is notoriously difficult; but I do not apologize for it. An epistemic reason for believing something would not count as such if it did not provide some reasonable support for accepting it as *true*. The same point applies to rational entitlements for belief. The entitlements that I am discussing are epistemic, not matters of politesse. If one has a reason or entitlement to accept something because it is, *prima facie*, rationally supported, one has a reason or entitlement to accept it

as true. A source is a guide to truth *in* being rational. Rational mistakes are possible. But if there is no reason to think that they are occurring, it is rational to accept the affirmed deliverances of a rational source. For other things equal, reason can be reasonably followed in seeking truth.

It is not just the rationality of a source that marks an *a priori* *prima facie* connection to truth. The very content of an intelligible message presented as true does so as well. For content is constitutively dependent, in the first instance, on patterned connections to a subject matter, connections that insure in normal circumstances a baseline of true thought presentations. So presentations' having content must have an origin in getting things right. The *prima facie* rationality of the source intensifies a *prima facie* connection to truth already present in the *prima facie* existence of presented content.

The remaining main step in justifying the Acceptance Principle lies in the presumption that the source of a message is a rational source, or a resource for reason. I think that one is *a priori* *prima facie* entitled to presume that the interlocutor is a rational source or resource for reason—simply by virtue of the *prima facie* intelligibility of the message conveyed. That is enough to presume that the interlocutor is rational, or at least a source of information that is rationally underwritten.

The idea is not that we reason thus: "If it looks like a human and makes sounds like a language, it is rational; on inspection it looks human and sounds linguistic; so it is rational." Rather, in understanding language we are entitled to presume what we instinctively do presume about our source's being a source of rationality or reason. We are so entitled because intelligibility is an *a priori* *prima facie* sign of rationality.

If something is *prima facie* intelligible, one is *prima facie* entitled to rely on one's understanding of it as intelligible. One is entitled to begin with what putative understanding one has. But anything that can intelligibly present something as true can be presumed, *prima facie*, to be either rational or made according to a rational plan to mimic aspects of rationality. Presentation of propositional content presupposes at least a derivative connection to a system of perceptual, cognitive, and practical interactions with a world, involving beliefs and intentional activ-

ity.¹¹ 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 practices. To be what they are, such practices must—with allowances for some failures—accord with norms of reason or rationality.

To summarize: We are apriori prima facie entitled to accept something that is prima facie intelligible and presented as true. For prima facie intelligible propositional contents prima facie presented as true bear an apriori prima facie conceptual relation to a rational source of true presentations-as-true: Intelligible propositional expressions presuppose rational abilities and entitlements; so intelligible presentations-as-true come prima facie backed by a rational source or resource for reason; and both the content of intelligible propositional presentations-as-true and the prima facie rationality of their source indicate a prima facie source of truth.¹²

¹¹The expression may be derivative in that a nonrational machine might express linguistic content. But such machines are ultimately made by beings who have propositional attitudes.

¹²I think that the distinction between merely having attitudes with intentional content and being able to understand and present them is deeply significant, and marks a deeper level of rationality than that associated with merely having propositional attitudes and inferential abilities. But I need not explore this point here.

I have not here argued in depth for the connections between content, propositional attitudes, and rationality because they are a widely accepted theme in much contemporary work. The idea that language is inseparable from propositional attitudes, which are inseparable from assumptions about rationality is present, for example, in the work of Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Donald Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1980) and *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, Clarendon Press, 1984). Elsewhere I have sought to show how having linguistic and propositional content is necessarily associated with individuals' having *de re* propositional attitudes to objects of reference and with their interacting practically and perceptually with such objects. See my "Belief De Re," *Journal of Philosophy* 74 (1977): 338–63, and "Other Bodies," in *Thought and Object*, ed. Woodfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982). The main novelty of the above argument lies in its first step—the claim that we are apriori entitled to rely on our understanding and acceptance of something that is prima facie intelligible—and in its drawing an epistemic consequence from the constitutive,

Intelligible affirmation is the face of reason; reason is a guide to truth. We are apriori prima facie entitled to take intelligible affirmation at face value.

We could be apriori entitled to false beliefs. Sounds or shapes could have no source in rationality but seem intelligible. A quantum accidental sequence of sounds could correspond to those of Hamlet's most famous speech.¹³ But the fact that we could be mistaken in thinking that something is a message, or in understanding a message conveyed, is compatible with our having an apriori prima facie rational right to rely on our construal of an event as having a certain meaning or intentional content. And where a message has meaning or intentional content, we are entitled to presume apriori that it has a rational source, or is a resource for reason.

Just as the Acceptance Principle does not assume that truth is in a statistical majority, the justification of the Principle does not assume that most people are rational. We could learn empirically that most people are crazy or that all people have deeply irrational tendencies—not just in their performance but in their basic capacities. Human beings clearly do have some rational entitlements and competencies, even though we have found that they are surprisingly irrational in certain tasks. The justification presupposes

conceptual relations between content and rationality that others have long explored and elaborated.

¹³In *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, part 3, Hume imagines hearing an "articulate voice" from the clouds and asks whether one can avoid attributing to it some design or purpose. He never objects to this inference, though he objects to much of the theological purposes it was put to. He would, however, regard it as a non-apriori causal inference. One of the reasons that he would invoke for thinking that the presumption of a rational source could not be based apriori on prima facie intelligibility is that one could learn empirically that the "voice" was meaningless. This reason is powerless against my conception of the presumption, for I agree that the presumption is empirically defeasible. Apriority has to do with the source of epistemic right; defeasibility is a further matter. For recent criticisms of Hume's view, see A. J. Coady, "Testimony and Observation," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 10 (1973): 149–55; Frederick F. Schmitt, "Justification, Sociality, and Autonomy," *Synthese* 73 (1987): 43–85. I think that empiricism cannot possibly explain all our justified acceptance of what we read or hear. The idea that we should remain neutral or skeptical of information unless we have empirical grounds for thinking it trustworthy is, I think, a wild revisionary proposal. I also think that empiricism cannot account for norms for children's relying on others in the acquisition of language or knowledge.

that there is a conceptual relation between intelligibility and rational entitlement or justification, between having and articulating propositional attitudes and having rational competencies.

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 *apriori* entitled, except when reasonable doubt arises, to abstract from the possibility that it may be in the interlocutor's rational interest to lie?

This issue is more complex than I can see through now. I will make some general observations, and then sketch one line of reply. (I think there are others.) The Acceptance Principle and its justification are formulated so as to be neutral on whether what is "presented as true" comes from another person. Its application does not depend on an assumption that the source is outside oneself (although further articulation will, I think, give this source a place in the account). Many of the differences between content passing between minds and content processed by a single mind derive from differences in modes of acquisition and in necessary background conditions, that do not enter into the justificational force underwriting an entitlement.

An account of an entitlement that includes, as a special case, relying on the word of others must, however, 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, 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? One can have empirical reasons to think someone is not lying. One could have nonrational tendencies to believe, which with luck might get one by. But can one have *apriori* *prima facie* rational entitlement to accept what one is told, without considering whether the interlocutor is lying—lacking special reasons to think he is?

Apart from special information about the context or one's interlocutor, neutrality (as well as doubt) is, I think, a rationally unnatural attitude toward an interlocutor's presentation of something as true. (Compare: lying for the fun of it is a form of craziness.) Explaining why, in depth, would involve wrestling with some

of the most difficult issues about the relation between “practical” reason and reason. I will broach one line of explanation.

Reason necessarily has a teleological aspect, which can be understood through reflection on rational practice. Understanding the notion of reason in sufficient depth requires understanding its primary functions. 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.¹⁴

The Humean reply that reason functions *only* to serve individual passions or interests is unconvincing. Reason has a function in providing guidance to truth, in presenting and promoting truth without regard to individual interest. This is why epistemic reasons are not relativized to a person or to a desire. It is why someone whose reasoning is distorted by self-deception is in a significant way irrational—even when the self-deception serves the individual’s interests. It is why 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. One can presume that a presentation of something as true by a rational being—whether in oneself or by another—has, *prima facie*, something rationally to be said for it. Unless there is reason to think that a rational source is rationally disunified—in the sense that individual interest is occasioning conflict with the transpersonal function of reason—one is rationally entitled to abstract from individual interest in receiving something presented as true by such a source.

Another consideration pointing in the same direction is this. A condition on an individual’s having propositional attitudes is that the content of those attitudes be systematically associated with veridical perceptions and true beliefs:¹⁵ true contents must be pre-

¹⁴Although I think that my claim about this constitutive function of reason is *apriori*, I do not maintain that it is self-evident. It can be and has been coherently questioned, as I will note. But the claim has substantial initial plausibility, and I believe that this plausibility is deepened through reflection, including reflection on challenges to it.

¹⁵These true beliefs could fail to be the individual’s own, but they must occur somewhere in the development of the content—for example, in the evolution of the cognitive apparatus.

sented and accepted as true within some individual; indeed, the very practice of communication depends on preservation of truth. If a rational interlocutor presents intelligible contents as true, one can rationally presume that the contents are associated with a practice of successfully aiming at and presenting truth. Now an inertial principle appears applicable: since the intelligibility of a presentation-as-true indicates a source of both rational and true content presentations, one needs special reason to think there has been deviation from rationally based, true truth-presentation. Other things equal, one can rationally abstract from issues of sincerity or insincerity.

The apriori entitlement described by the Acceptance Principle is, of course, no guarantee of truth. It is often a much weaker sign of truth, from the point of view of certainty, than empirically justified beliefs about the interlocutor. The lines of reasoning I have proposed justify a *prima facie* rational presumption, a position of non-neutrality—not some source of certainty.

Even if the Acceptance Principle is not an empirical principle, it may seem that particular entitlements sanctioned by it, “applications,” must inevitably be empirical. To know what one is being told, one must use perception. One must perceive words as expressing content presented as true. In interlocution, perception does inevitably figure in acquisition of understanding and belief. Perception is necessary to minimal understanding; and minimal understanding is essential to belief and justification. But our question concerns perception’s role in justification or entitlement. I will first consider its role in justification in our narrow sense, and then turn to its role in entitlement.

One might reason that since the Acceptance Principle counts it rational for a person to accept what is presented as true, and since one can know what is presented as true by another person only through perceiving an event in time, a person must rely for justificational force on perception of particular events to apply the principle.

This reasoning rests on a confusion about the status of the Acceptance Principle and its justification. The Acceptance Principle is not a premise in an argument applied by recipients of information. It is a description of a norm that indicates that recipients are sometimes entitled to accept information from others *immediately* without argument. The justification of the principle is not

an argument that need be used by interlocutors, but an account of why the practice of acquiring information from others is rationally justified.¹⁶ It is well known that we do not store the physical properties of sentences we hear or read.¹⁷ The content of the linguistic forms is what is important. We seem normally to understand content in a way whose unconscious details (inferential or otherwise) are not accessible via ordinary reflection. To be entitled to believe what one is told, one need not understand or be able to justify any transition from perceptual beliefs about words to understanding of and belief in the words' content. One can, of course, come to understand certain inferences from words to contents. Such empirical meta-skills do enrich communication. But they are not indispensable to it. To be justified in understanding, we have to reason empirically about what we perceive only when communication runs into trouble, or when special, contextual, nonliteral expressive devices are used (see note 21). Other things equal, we are entitled to presume that what seems intelligible is understood. Justification in the narrow sense is not basic to the epistemology of interlocution.

But the question of entitlement is more subtle. In ordinary perception of physical objects and properties we have sense experiences that are not ordinarily the objects of reference or the basis of a justifying inference to perceptual beliefs to which we are entitled. Yet having such experiences, or having perceptual beliefs,

¹⁶Here is a more sophisticated objection along the same line. Suppose that a belief acquired from others may count as knowledge, though one often lacks sufficient grounds, on one's own, to underwrite the belief as knowledge. Suppose that one knows one lacks autonomous grounds for such a belief. Then one's knowledge that the belief was acquired from others would have to be used to enable one's belief to count as knowledge, in view of the known fact that unless the belief had been acquired from others, one's lack of autonomous justification would be insufficient for knowledge. (It is assumed that knowledge that a belief was acquired from others must be empirical. Let us grant the assumption for now.)

This reasoning again rests on a level confusion. If one has acquired one's belief from others in a normal way, and if the others know the proposition, one acquires knowledge. No further reasoning about the practice is needed for the knowledge. No reasoning that does not show that the entitlement has lapsed can undermine the entitlement (though it might mistakenly undermine one's belief that one was entitled).

¹⁷Kenneth I. Forster, "Lexical Processing," in *An Invitation to Cognitive Psychology*, vol. 1, ed. Osherson and Lasnik (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1990).

contributes to the justificational force of our empirical beliefs:¹⁸ A perceptual belief's being perceptual is an element in its justificational power. The belief's being causally or constitutively associated with sense perception is part of the force of our entitlement to the belief.

In interlocution, we are also causally dependent on perception. Our entitlements are thus dependent on perception. But in my view, perception contributes nothing to the epistemic force of the fundamental "default" entitlement.

Perceptions or perceptual beliefs about physical objects are constitutively dependent on bearing natural lawlike causal relations to objects of perception—to their subject matter, physical objects. The contents of the beliefs and perceptions are what they are partly because of these relations to specific physical objects or properties. Our entitlement to rely on perception and perceptual beliefs is partly grounded in this causally patterned, content-giving relation which is partly constitutive of perception.

When we receive communication, the situation is different. The objects of cognitive interest—the contents and their subject matters—are not the objects of perception. We do not perceive the contents of attitudes that are conveyed to us; we understand them. We perceive and have perceptual beliefs about word occurrences. We may perceive them as having a certain content and subject matter, but the content is understood, not perceived. The subject matter, word occurrences, of our perceptual experiences and be-

¹⁸Davidson and Sellars deny that having sensations plays a role in justifying perceptual beliefs. I am not convinced by their reasons as applied to entitlements to perceptual belief. See Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in *Truth and Interpretation*, ed. Lepore (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 311; and Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), 164ff. For an alternative to their views, see Steven L. Reynolds, "Knowing How to Believe with Justification," *Philosophical Studies* 64 (1991): 273–92. My view here does not, however, rest on giving sensations (particularly seen as nonintentional) a role in perceptual entitlement. One need not think of sensations as entities, though I do. It is enough that the perceptual character of perceptual belief contribute to the force of the entitlement. Moreover, I am not convinced that there is an epistemic *transition* from perceptual experience to perceptual belief in the ordinary case. One can, of course, learn to suspend such belief. But perceptual experience seems a constituent element in perceptual belief; and perceptual belief seems to be a default position.

liefs bears a nonconstitutive (quasi-conventional) relation to the content and subject matter of the beliefs to which we are entitled as a result of communication. So the accounts of our noninferential entitlements to perception and to interlocution must be different.

One might note that the relation between perceived words and their contents or subject matters must involve some sort of explanatory relation. So one might be tempted to think that although one does not typically infer the content from the words explicitly and consciously, the entitlement must somehow be based on this explanatory relation. But it would be a mistake to embrace this temptation without reflecting carefully on the special character of the relation as it occurs in interlocution. The relation between words and their subject matter and content is not an *ordinary*, natural, lawlike causal-explanatory relation. Crudely speaking, it involves a mind.

There are, of course, complex causal-explanatory relations that may be used to infer the content or subject matter of an interlocutor's speech from perceived word occurrences. One could give an account of entitlement centered on possible inferential interpretations, or on reason-giving explanatory connections between words and content. The interpretation might not be accessible to the recipient, but it could represent a reasonable route from the received message to a putative truth. Such an account—broadly familiar in current discussion—would make the entitlement empirical, because it would appeal in the account of justificational force to an inductive connection to perceived word occurrences.

I do *not* doubt that such accounts are true. I doubt that they are fundamental. I think that what is fundamental is not a metalinguistic connection between word occurrences, taken as objects of perception, and their contents or subject matters. What is fundamental is an apriori prima facie entitlement to rely upon putative understanding, and an apriori prima facie connection between putatively understood contents and rational sources of truths. Understanding is epistemically basic. Traditionally, a justification or entitlement was apriori if it could be derived from conceptual understanding—however experientially dependent the understanding might be. The issue over apriority begins with conceptual understanding and asks whether perceptual experience is needed to supplement the understanding for one to be justified or entitled to one's belief.

The epistemic status of perception in normal communication is like the status it was traditionally thought to have when a diagram is presented that triggers realization of the meaning and truth of a claim of pure geometry or logic. Perception of physical properties triggers realization of something abstract, an intentional content, expressed by the sentence, and (often) already mastered by the recipient. Its role is to call up and facilitate mobilization of conceptual resources that are already in place. It is probably *necessary* that one perceive symbolic expressions to accept logical axioms—just as it is necessary to perceive words in interlocution. But perception of expressions is not part of the justificational force for accepting the contents. In both cases, no reference to a possible meta-inference from expressions to contents is needed in an account of justificational force. The primary entitlement in interlocution derives from *prima facie* understanding of the messages, and from a presumption about the rational nature of their source—not from the role of perception, however necessary, in the process.¹⁹

¹⁹The analogy goes with certain disanalogies. Understanding a simple logical truth yields a justification; understanding a communicated message yields an entitlement. This is because in the logic case justificational force derives from the content itself, whereas in interlocution justificational force derives from one's right to putative understanding and from the presumed status of the source of the message, not (typically) from the content itself. A corollary is that knowledge of a simple logical truth does not depend on anything further than understanding and believing it, whereas knowledge based on interlocution depends on there being knowledge in the chain of sources beyond the recipient. In neither case is correct perception of words or correct understanding of what they express necessary to the justification (or entitlement). In neither case is correct perception of words necessary even for knowledge. But in the interlocution case (because knowledge depends on inheriting knowledge from a source), correct understanding of what the interlocutor conveys by the words is necessary for knowledge based on interlocution. (Correct understanding of words or interlocutor is not necessary for knowing whatever logical truth one happens to associate with them, if one understands the logical truth sufficiently.) The important analogy between the logic and interlocution cases is that perception of words makes understanding possible, but justificational force can be derived from the individual's understanding without supplementary appeal to perception. I am abstracting, in this discussion of applications, from cases where understanding a particular content itself involves perceiving—for example, perceiving the referents of demonstratives. Such understanding is not purely conceptual; and as a consequence, the relevant entitlement to the particular belief is partly perceptual.

In interlocution, perception of utterances makes possible the passage of propositional content from one mind to another rather as purely preservative memory makes possible the preservation of propositional content from one time to another. Memory and perception of utterances function similarly, in reasoning and communication respectively. Their correct functioning is necessary for the enterprises they serve. Their failure could undermine those enterprises. They preserve the content of events (past thoughts in proof, word utterances in interlocution)—events that *can* become objects known empirically. But the basic epistemic role of memory and perception in these enterprises is not to present objects of knowledge. They function to preserve and enable—not to justify.

In interlocution, the individual's basic default entitlement normally derives from the presumptive intelligibility of a message understood, not from anything specific in the words perceived. Unless reasonable doubt arises about the reliability or interpretation of the source, the specific perceptions of utterances need not be relied upon in contributing force to the receiver's entitlement to his understanding of or belief in what is communicated.

Perception might be thought part of the justificational force of our entitlement in another way. The justification of the Acceptance Principle says that one is entitled to accept intelligible contents "presented as true." We must perceive a speech act as involving a presentation-as-true to be justified under the principle. Why does it not follow that our entitlement to accept what we are told in particular cases relies for its force on perceptual beliefs?

The issues here are again very complex. But the short answer to the question is that one's intellectually grounded entitlement to one's understanding of content includes an entitlement to understand presentations-as-true. Understanding content presupposes and is interdependent with understanding the force of presentations of content. So entitlement to the former must presuppose entitlement to the latter. In many normal cases the epistemology of our entitlement to understanding assertive force has a default status that is parallel to that of our entitlement to understanding content. Perception is no more basic to understanding assertive force than it is to understanding conceptual content. The default position is that presumed understanding of both content and force is epistemically fundamental. Empirical justification for an interpretation of content or force is demanded only when elements in

the context demand reconsideration or supplementation of the default understanding. I find the parallel compelling. But I will sketch in two steps a picture of how default understanding of a presentation-as-true can sometimes be derived from no more than default understanding of propositional content. This picture is not needed, but it may enrich the account.

First, entitlement to one's understanding of a message's content carries with it, indeed rests on, an entitlement to understanding intentional *events* as having specific content. Understanding speech acts or thoughts as they occur is the root of understanding content types. The necessary role of perception in enabling one to follow another's speaking or thinking is not fundamentally different from its role in enabling one to grasp the abstract content of another's sentence. All that I have argued on the latter score applies to the former. Perception's basic role is to make understanding possible and to trigger it on particular occasions. But the justificational force of one's basic default entitlement to understand something as an event with a specific content is not perceptual. It is intellectual in that it resides in one's putative understanding of conceptual content in application or use, in one's ability to think-with.

Second, understanding conceptual content—both abstractly and in contentful events or uses—involves understanding the content's mood. But for contents in the indicative (declarative) mood—as distinguished from interrogative or imperative mood—presentation-as-true is the defeasible default use. The connection between declarative mood and presentations-as-true is conceptual. The justificational force of the entitlement to rely on the connection is correspondingly conceptual, not perceptual.²⁰

²⁰ Donald Davidson has argued that there is no conventional connection between indicative sentences and assertive use. See "Moods and Performances" and "Communication and Convention" in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. His reason is that one can always use indicative utterances for nonassertive purposes. I find the argument unconvincing. A conventional connection between indicative mood and assertive use could be flouted. I believe that the connection between assertive use and indicative (declarative) mood is deeper and firmer than merely conventional. But it is a contextually defeasible connection.

I use the term 'presentation as true' to cover more than assertions and judgments. Obvious presuppositions, or conventional implicatures, are examples. When someone says to kill the shortest spy, he or she presents it as true that there is a shortest spy. In such cases, as well as the indicative

In the absence of overriding reasons, the default presumption stands. Nonassertive uses (jokes, irony, fiction) that drain declaratives of assertive implications must employ context to make themselves understood. The recipient must infer that the sentence is used nonassertively from empirical information about the context. Although affirmative use of declarative contents must, on occasion, also be inferred from special contextual information, taking a declarative sentence utterance as a presentation-as-true normally requires no such reasoning or empirical interpretation.²¹

Thus in many instances, one's entitlement to take something as a presentation-as-true in interlocation derives from understanding an event's content, and need not rely for its justificational force on perception of word occurrences. What one is entitled to on intellectual grounds is merely, *prima facie*, that a given content is presented as true. One gets nothing about the time, form, or circumstances of the assertion. All such information is epistemically grounded in perception of aspects of the context. But the fundamental entitlement to accept something as a presentation-as-true derives from understanding. It can even be derived sometimes from understanding of content (its tokening and the relation of its mood to presentations-as-true). The justificational force of the derivation does not depend on any supplementation from perception. Perception plays its role in making understanding possible and in justifying supplemental information about the form, existence, and context of the assertion.

cases, the entitlement to accept what is presented as true can be independent for its justificational force of perceptual connection to context (see note 21).

²¹This point allies with Grice's distinction between conventional and conversational implicature. See Paul Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words*, 28–31. Grice requires that to be “conversational,” an implicature must be capable of being “worked out” from considerations of the conversational context. Conventional implicatures may be inferred “intuitively” from the meaning of the words. I think that understanding based on conversational implicatures *must* be justified, usually empirically, whereas understanding based on conventional implicatures can rest on *apriori* entitlement. Analogously, I think that a construal of a sentence or content as ironic *must* be justified, usually empirically, whereas a construal of a sentence as asserted can rest on an *apriori* entitlement. A parallel story needs to be told about ambiguities. Our ability to understand many ambiguous sentences as they are meant, even apart from context, indicates that certain readings are default readings.

In appreciating these points, one must distinguish between knowing about the assertion as part of a pattern for explaining the psychology and behavior of the asserter, and using the interlocutor as a source of information. In the former enterprise, perception of an assertion as an action by a particular individual is commonly taken as an element in the justification of an explanation, or an object of interpretation. But in interlocution, perception need not play this role unless some reasonable doubt arises about the informant's message or the recipient's understanding (see note 25).

One can know through memory the events that help recall the previous step in a proof, thereby making those events objects of knowledge. One can know on the basis of perception that a particular person made an assertion at a given time. One can surely construct an empirical meta-justification (or entitlement) for one's belief based on interlocution: "She asserted that *p* (known empirically); it is *prima facie* reasonable to rely on others' assertions; so I should rely on her assertion." Such meta-justifications supplement one's epistemic position in interlocution. But they are not, I think, fundamental. Just as remembering events does not enhance the primary object-level justification in deductive argument, so relying on perception does not contribute to the justificational force of one's fundamental entitlement to one's understanding of content, or to one's acceptance of what is presented as true.

Let us return from our entitlement to understanding to our entitlement to believe what we hear, given that we understand it. When we receive a message, we often know a lot about the context of the reception, the biography of the source, the antecedent empirical plausibility of the information. This knowledge is inevitably perceptually grounded. Does this fact make our entitlement to believe what we receive from others inevitably perceptual? I do not think so. Our initial entitlement does not depend on this knowledge for its justificational force.

In areas like politics, where cooperation is not the rule and truth is of little consequence, or philosophy, where questioning is as much at issue as belief, we engage in complex reasoning about whether to accept what we hear or read. Reasonable doubt becomes a norm. But these situations are not paradigmatic. They are parasitic on more ordinary situations where acceptance is a norm.

The default position is justified acceptance. Often we need empirical reasons to defeat reasonable doubts that threaten our right

to acceptance. But sometimes empirical reasons simply reinforce and overdetermine the default entitlement. Our being justified does not then rest indispensably on empirical background information.²²

I turn now from our entitlement to applications of the Acceptance Principle to the role of interlocution in the acquisition of knowledge. In the absence of countervailing considerations, application of the Acceptance Principle often seems to provide sufficient entitlement for knowledge. Most of our knowledge relies essentially on acceptance of beliefs from others—either through talk or through reading. Not only most of our scientific beliefs, but most of our beliefs about history, ourselves, and much of the macro-world, would have insufficient justification to count as knowledge if we were somehow to abstract from all elements of their justification, or entitlement, that depended on communication.

Our entitlement to ordinary perceptual belief is usually sufficient for perceptual knowledge. It is usually sufficient even though we may be unable specifically to rule out various possible defeating conditions. If there is no reason to think that the defeating conditions threaten, one has knowledge despite ignoring them. Something similar holds for acquisition of belief from others. Other things equal, ordinary interlocution suffices for knowledge.²³

In knowing something through interlocution, the recipient has his own entitlement to accept the word of the interlocutor, together with any supplementary justification the recipient might have that bears on the plausibility of the information. Let this include all the reasons available to the recipient, together with all the entitlements deriving from his own cognitive resources. Call this body (i) the recipient's *own proprietary justification*.

²²The scope for intellection-based justification in interlocution is wider than these remarks may suggest. I think that in certain cases special confidence in an interlocutor can be justified on grounds that are inductive but, with subtle qualifications, intellectual. I discuss these matters further in "Computer Proof and Apriori Knowledge."

²³The fact that most of our knowledge is dependent on others and has distinctive epistemic status is increasingly widely recognized. See C. A. J. Coady, "Testimony and Observation"; John Hardwig, "Epistemic Dependence," *Journal of Philosophy* 82 (1985): 335–49; Michael Welbourne, *The Community of Knowledge* (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1986). For a wildly implausible, individualistic view of the epistemic status of testimony, see John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* 1.3.24.

If the recipient depends on interlocution for knowledge, the recipient's knowledge depends on the source's having knowledge as well. For if the source does not believe the proposition, or if the proposition is not true, or if the source is not justified, the recipient cannot know the proposition. The recipient's own proprietary entitlement to rely on interlocution is insufficient by itself to underwrite the knowledge.²⁴ In particular, the recipient depends on sources' proprietary justifications and entitlements (through a possible chain of sources). The recipient depends on at least some part of this body of justification and entitlement in the sense that without it, his belief would not be knowledge. The recipient's own justification is incomplete and implicitly refers back, anaphorically, to fuller justification or entitlement. Call the combination of the recipient's own proprietary justification with the proprietary justifications (including entitlements) in his sources on which the recipient's knowledge depends (ii) *the extended body of justification* that underwrites the recipient's knowledge.

At the outset, I explained apriori knowledge in terms of apriori justification or entitlement. The question arises whether apriori knowledge based on interlocution is underwritten by the individual's proprietary justification or by a justification that must include some nonproprietary part of the extended body of justification.

The extended body of justification—the one that reaches beyond the individual—is the relevant one. If I am apriori entitled to accept an interlocutor's word, but the interlocutor provides me with empirically justified information, it would be wrong to characterize my knowledge of the information as apriori. Similarly, if my source knows a proposition apriori, but I must rely on empirical knowledge to justify my acceptance of the source's word, it would

²⁴Because the interlocutor must have knowledge and because of Gettier cases, the interlocutor must have more than true, justified belief if the recipient is to have knowledge. The recipient's dependence for having knowledge on the interlocutor's having knowledge is itself an instance of the Gettier point. The recipient could have true justified belief, but lack knowledge because the interlocutor lacked knowledge.

In requiring that the source have knowledge if the recipient is to have knowledge based on interlocution, I oversimplify. Some chains with more than two links seem to violate this condition. But there must be knowledge in the chain if the recipient is to have knowledge based on interlocution.

be wrong to say that *I* know the proposition apriori—even though I have knowledge that is apriori known by someone. It seems most natural to think that a strand of justification that runs through the extended body into the individual's proprietary body of justification must be apriori for the recipient's knowledge to be apriori. People who depend on interlocution for knowledge of mathematical theorems but do not know the proofs can have apriori knowledge in this sense. The source mathematician knows the theorem apriori and the recipient is entitled apriori to accept the word of the source, in the absence of reasons to doubt. Most of us knew the Pythagorean theorem at some stage in this manner. When apriori knowledge is preserved through reports which the recipient is apriori justified in accepting, the receiver's knowledge is apriori.

The Acceptance Principle is clearly similar to what is widely called a "Principle of Charity" for translating or interpreting others. The most obvious difference is that the former applies to situations in which one is not taking another as an object of interpretation, but rather as a source of information presumed to be understood without interpretation. This situation is basic for communication.²⁵ Radical interpretation is not, I think, the paradigmatic situation for theorizing about linguistic interchange.

We rely on being so formed that we take in information from others without interpretation. Unlike the Principle of Charity, the Acceptance Principle presumes not only that we are like others in being rational. It presumes that we preserve content, other things equal. This presumption works because we share with others around

²⁵The principle of charity is illuminatingly used by W. V. Quine, in *Word and Object* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), chap. 2; and Donald Davidson, in "Radical Interpretation" (1973), in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. In holding that interpretation is the basic situation for understanding linguistic interchange, Davidson writes, "The problem of interpretation is domestic as well as foreign: it surfaces for speakers of the same language in the form of the question, how can it be determined that the language is the same?" (Similar passages can be found in Quine.) Davidson presupposes that determining whether we are communicating successfully when we appear to be is a question in place from the beginning. This seems to me mistaken. Such a question arises only when there is some reason to doubt that we are sharing information and preserving content. The default position is that understanding can be presumed until something goes wrong. Incidentally, I do not assume that anything as global as a communal language need be thought of as fundamental. That is a further issue.

us our cognitive tendencies and means of expressing them, and a common environment. But we do not have to *justify* a claim that these conditions for success are in place to be entitled to rely upon our understanding. (Analogously, we do not have to justify a claim that the environment is normal and we are adapted to it in order to be entitled to rely on perception.) It is enough if we learn how to understand. Once we are in a position to understand, we are entitled to the following presumption *a priori*, other things equal: We understand what we seem to understand. Or rather, other things equal, we need not use a distinction between understanding and seeming to understand. We need not take what we hear as an *object* of interpretation, unless grounds for doubt arise. Only then do we shift from content preservation to interpretation.

The Acceptance Principle entails a presumption that others' beliefs are justified, that others are sources of rationality or reason. The view that others' beliefs can be presumed to be true is familiar from the Principle of Charity. The presumption that others are reliable indices of truth rests on a presumption that they are rational sources. Their reliability is not some brute correlation between belief and world. We are entitled to treat others as reliable partly *because* we are entitled to presume that they are rationally justified or rationally entitled to their beliefs. We are entitled, most fundamentally, to think of others as sources of rationality or reason not because we take them as objects of interpretation and explanation, but because *prima facie* intelligibility is an *a priori prima facie* sign of rationality.

This focus on others is articulated from a first-person point of view. Each of *us* is justified in presuming that others are justified. But we are possible interlocutors too. The idea that others are *prima facie* justified in their beliefs makes general sense only if we presume generally: people, including each of us, are reliable rational sources of true justified beliefs. Obviously the conclusion requires qualification and elaboration. But the route to it is, I think, of interest. I arrived at it by arguing that we have intellection-grounded *prima facie* entitlements to applications of the Acceptance Principle, though they are empirically defeasible. I think that this approach to epistemology may help with some of the traditional problems of philosophy.

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