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Abstract

If I mistakenly hear you ask for directions to the "shore" when instead you asked for directions to the "store," the miscommunication is probably an innocent mistake. If, on the other hand, a man misunderstands a woman's refusal of his sexual advances as consent, the mistake seems like it might be deeper. In my dissertation, I look at cases of miscommunication to develop a theory of conversational context and the norms that constraint contexts. I argue that miscommunication can only be adequately understood in terms of an agent-centered notion of conversational context—and not in terms of the shared attitudes of the participants. I then propose an account of the normativity of context to explain why some agent-centered contexts are permissible and some are not. Finally, I engage with Grice's Cooperative Principle, arguing that, consistent with my view of agent-relativized contexts, such a view is misguided. Instead, I argue that we should adopt what I call the *Coordinative Principle*.

My central contention is that we can better explain many cases of miscommunication by appealing to an individualized, agent-relative understanding of linguistic context according to which each participant in a conversation has their own set of attitudes that they use to produce and interpret utterances. According to widely accepted paradigms, conversational context is shared between participants; contexts may include shared assumptions, beliefs, records of past moves, etc. However, these views overlook the fact that many beliefs and attitudes that are not—and sometimes cannot be—shared can still influence the conversational context. Consider implicit bias: plausibly, implicit biases can influence one's communicative behavior as an element of the context. A man who implicitly conceives of women as coy but sexually impressionable may be more likely to interpret an attempted refusal of his sexual advances as coy flirtation rather than a sincere refusal.

The fact that the man's beliefs are not shared by the woman does not make it the case that they do not play the functional role the context plays in the man's interpretation of the woman's conversational contributions. Moreover, as I show, the man need not even think that the woman accepts the content of his beliefs in order to treat them as included in the context. Nevertheless, the man does treat the content of these beliefs as elements of the context of the exchange, allowing him to (mis)interpret the woman's utterance as consent.

I then develop an account of communicative normativity to distinguish the innocent cases from the criticizable. I focus in particular on the normativity involved in updating contexts with new content to show that there are requirements of social and rational agency to update one's context in particular ways given new events within the conversation. These social requirements can often be related to moral requirements, which explains why we understand the case of the man who failed to recognize a woman's non-consent has done something that is (at least potentially) morally wrong.

I end my dissertation by considering whether my account is consistent with a widely accepted principle adopted by many theorists–Grice's Cooperative Principle. Many of the cases I consider throughout the dissertation appear to be, in some sense, *un*cooperative. Yet the Cooperative Principle appears to presuppose that conversations are cooperative (in some sense) and, moreover, that this involves an at least partial sharing of conversational context. Since I argue that contexts need not be shared, there is a clear tension between my view and the Cooperative Principle. I argue that we can reframe the Cooperative Principle as a Coordinative Principle without losing explanatory force, while avoiding the inconsistency between my view of context and the Principle.

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Introduction

There are two related developments currently underway in philosophical discussions of language and linguistic communication that mirror developments within other areas of philosophy. The first, echoing a process that has been underway in epistemology for some time, is the move toward incorporating discussions of applied and social epistemology into previously purely theoretical debates. This is related to the development in moral and political philosophy in which some theorists have advocated for doing philosophy in a way that is engaged with the non-ideal conditions of the world, rather than focusing exclusively on idealizations. In moral and political philosophy, this has stemmed largely from the recognition that idealizations of political concepts and conditions often implicitly rely on and obscure the non-ideal circumstances that gives rise to the very possibility of certain modes of moral and political reasoning (Mills 2005).

In philosophy of language, these developments began several decades ago, sometimes with work that engaged as much with feminist and legal theory on speech and free speech as it did with current work in philosophy of language.[1] Between the early nineties and the early 2010s, there was a steady but slow building of interest in applied, non-ideal philosophy of language, largely still from a feminist perspective.[2] Yet despite this slow progress, work in philosophy of language is by and large

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[1] MacKinnon 1989, for instance, writes somewhat explicitly from the perspective of feminist philosophy and philosophy of law, offering analyses that engage somewhat with speech act theory. Langton 1993 took up this discussion to engage more extensively with speech act theory while maintaining a feminist perspective.

[2] For instance, in discussions of silencing see Maitra 2009, 2012, McGowan 2009, Bird 2002. For discussions of the linguistic meaning of 'woman', see Diaz-Leon 2016, Haslanger 1995, 2000. For discussions of pronouns as politically significant, see Dembroff and Wodak 2017, 2018, Bennett 2016. This is a very partial list, both in terms of the topics that have been discussed and the authors and papers that have contributed to the discussion.

still highly idealized and abstract, focusing on idealized semantic properties as the primary and central determinant of meaning. Despite that studies of pragmatics, by necessity, engage more extensively with context-specific details of instances of linguistic communication, it still tends to be idealized insofar as pragmatic theorizing, like semantic theorizing, is in general theorizing about how communication *works*, and less frequently about how communication fails. Most of the theorizing about language we see in philosophical discussions of semantics and pragmatics has to do with the structure and content of *successful* communication, often (though not always) involving somewhat idealized, abstract agents. Of course, the importance of theorizing about semantic properties, compositional principles, and logical connections that should apply broadly in language is clear. Yet in making these the central feature of linguistic theorizing, philosophers of language have tended to neglect theorizing about the way that communication breaks down, and the way that social identity and social relations can and do influence communication.

For instance, the semantics-centric idealized view of linguistic analysis does not easily account for a claim that I take to be deeply intuitive: that power influences communication. Power influences not just what *is in fact* communicated between participants, but also the very possibility of certain kinds of communicative interaction. For instance, it is widely accepted within theoretical approaches to linguistic analysis that there is *common ground*, or shared assumptions and goals, between conversational participants.[3] I engage with this view in some detail throughout the dissertation. But what I do not note in the dissertation, and what is not often acknowledged in discussions of common ground, is that the relative power between the parties not only can, but

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[3] Stalnaker 1978, 2002, 2014.

inevitably will influence what that common ground is and who has greater control over establishing and adjusting the common ground. Social or political power may translate to the linguistic power to influence what content makes its way into the common ground. Moreover, because identifying the common ground requires identifying features of the perspectives and experiences of the other party, those who are more adept at occupying the perspectives of others will be better communicators. Because historical marginalization and oppression can force people into occupying the perspective of their oppressors,[4] this means that power and privilege have relatively direct effects on who can most effectively communicate and what can be effectively communicated between participants.

These are the sorts of linguistic issues that I find myself most interested in. In the papers that follow, I set groundwork for doing some of this work. Methodologically, my work, especially Chapters 1 and 2, can be understood as applied, non-ideal philosophy of language. In these chapters, I appeal to realistic cases of linguistic exchange, focusing in particular on cases of full or partial miscommunication rather than on cases of fully successful communication. Given that degrees of miscommunication are common, even ubiquitous, in our everyday linguistic exchanges, an adequate account of conversation should be able to shed light on cases of miscommunication as much as cases of successful communication. This is particularly true when we observe that there are systematic patterns of miscommunication or faulty communication. Such patterns suggest that these miscommunications do not just occur when one party's normal communicative processes break down by mistake; if it is systematic, then we might expect that there are systems that interfere with normal communicative process, and thus, we might think that there are non-linguistic factors that

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[4] Du Bois 1903, Fanon 1952, Hartsock 1987.

are having a systematic communicative effect. If, for instance, it turns out that there are systematic miscommunications in which women attempt to issue a refusal and their utterances are not interpreted as refusals,[5] this suggests that there is something non-linguistic that is systematically interfering with linguistic interactions in which women are asked to do or consent to something. However, if we do not interrogate instances of total or partial miscommunication as carefully as we interrogate idealized communicative phenomena, we can easily overlook these systematic interferences. Moreover, we might easily oversimplify what factors are relevant in theorizing about linguistic and communicative phenomena.

One way in which non-linguistic features will frequently and significantly impact linguistic exchanges is through conversational context. Context is, roughly understood, the set of information that is presupposed or assumed by conversational participants. It is often taken to be the *common ground* of a conversational exchange—the set of propositions that participants jointly accept to be true for the purpose of the exchange. What is included in the context influences what kinds of interpretations are possible and likely within a given conversational exchange. Thus, it is clear that non-linguistic features, such as the beliefs and desires of participants, influence what kinds of things can be communicated. When we assume that conversational contexts are shared between participants, however, this obscures the fact that participants often come to a conversation with dramatically different experiences and presumptions. These differences are supposed to be irrelevant on a common ground view. After all, if certain experiences differ between conversational participants, then they won't be common ground, and thus, they won't be included in the context.

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[5] See especially Langton 1993, Hornsby and Langton 1998.

However, when it comes to what individuals *treat* as included in the context, it is not always possible for individuals to distinguish which beliefs, experiences, and presuppositions are shared and which are not. Thus, whatever plays the functional role of context in conversation is unlikely to be shared between participants. In Chapter 1, I give a fuller argument against shared context views, and I defend a view of context which I call *Interpretive Context*.

Not only are interpretive contexts not shared between conversational participants, we can also see that an interpretive context is something that conversational participants are, in a sense, responsible for. Conversational participants do not merely find themselves in an interpretive context, and merely find themselves participating in a conversation in a particular way; rather, engaging in conversation is an exercise of *agency*, in particular, communicative agency. As communicative agents, we have certain responsibilities, including a responsibility to update our interpretive contexts according to new conversational moves on the part of interlocutors, and to aim to ensure that we include nothing in our interpretive context that would require that we interpret an interlocutor's utterances using assumptions or presuppositions to which they would object. In Chapter 2, I identify features of conversation and the agential role of being a participant in conversation that make clear that conversational participants have social-rational *obligations* to update their interpretive context appropriately, given new conversational moves. The argument in Chapter 2 is not meant to exhaust the obligations that conversational participants have as conversational participants; rather, it is a limiting of the domain of conversational obligations for the sake of clarity, space, and topical consistency.

Chapter 3 came about as I was exploring the implications of my account of interpretive context, as well as the implications of understanding conversation as an activity, and in particular, as

a social activity involving obligations to others. It struck me that Grice's Cooperative Principle is, in one sense, a straightforward articulation of instrumental rationality, as it relates to conversations. This makes sense, as Grice calls himself a "rationalist," and expresses an interest in establishing that conversational participants are rationally justified in participating cooperatively in conversations. However, Grice's understanding of what counts as cooperative is not particularly clear from his discussion. Moreover, the reception of "Logic and Conversation," and Grice's account of cooperation more broadly, has seen a wide range of interpretations of the notion of cooperation. Despite that is fairly common for philosophers of language to presuppose cooperativity in the linguistic exchanges they consider, there is not widespread agreement about what that means. One reasonable interpretation we can draw from the Cooperative Principle, as I spell out in Chapter 3, is that conversation is a shared activity in which participants must share conversational goals or aims. When participants cooperate, they are cooperating with one another in an attempt to jointly work toward the realization of some conversational goal. But as will become clear from my discussions in Chapters 1 and 2, there is a tension between understanding conversation to be cooperative in this sense and my understanding of conversational context as individualized. One reason to adopt my view of interpretive context is because it allows us to theorize about defective linguistic exchanges in which parties' contexts are seriously misaligned. By presupposing that conversations involve shared goals, we seem to already set this aside as a value. Moreover, shared goals are *shared*. We can naturally find a theoretical home for shared goals in a shared-context account of conversation like Stalnaker's account of common ground. On an interpretive context account, no part of the context, including goals, need be shared. For this reason, in Chapter 3, I propose an amendment to the Cooperative Principle in which I set aside the presupposed shared goals or aims and instead require that

participants are properly *coordinative*. That is, they recognize their interlocutors as communicative agents in their own right, with conversational goals of their own to be taken into consideration. I call this principle the *Coordinative Principle*.

The Coordinative Principle has at least three advantages over the Cooperative Principle: first, it allows for greater theoretical consistency for anyone who, like me, wishes to adopt an interpretive context account. Second, it allows for theorizing about non-cooperative conversations as well as cooperative conversations. If it turns out that participants share conversational goals, the Coordinative Principle can deal with that. However, it also allows theorizing about conversations that don't involve a shared goal. The third advantage is one that I do not discuss in the chapter, but bears mentioning: the normative status of the Cooperative Principle is not entirely clear; it appears to be intended as a prescriptive principle,[6] but sometimes does the work of a descriptive principle.[7] However, the normative force of the Coordinative Principle is clear. In severely uncooperative conversations, the Coordinative Principle is generally violated. These are also cases in which the participant who violates the Coordinative Principle seems to be doing something that is, in some sense, *wrong*. Thus, we can understand the Coordinative Principle as straightforwardly a prescriptive constraint.

This dissertation is intended to explore some of the many ways in which normativity intersects with language. In this dissertation, I focus particularly on social and rational normativity, but readers will note throughout that there are many normative domains that I bump up against:

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[6] The Cooperative Principle itself is phrased as an imperative: "Make your conversational contributions such as is required…" (Grice 1989, 26).
[7] As Grice puts it, "it is just a well-recognized empirical fact people do behave" in a way that is consistent with the Cooperative Principle (Grice 1989, 29).

social, rational, epistemic, and even moral normativity. I am interested in each of these, but for the time being I limit myself in order to set the theoretical groundwork for further discussions by considering, first, the nature of conversational context, second, how we might go about understanding context as normatively governed in any sense, and third, how this relates to the notion of cooperation in philosophy of language.

Chapter 1: Misattributed Consent and Interpretive Context

In January 2018, with the #MeToo movement in full swing, the website *Babe* published an exposé in which a young woman, pseudonymously called Grace, describes her experience on a date with the actor and comedian Aziz Ansari (Way 2018). Upon returning to Ansari's home after dinner, Grace reports, he was sexually aggressive with her, and he did not acknowledge or respect her verbal and non-verbal communication that she was uncomfortable and did not want to continue their sexual encounter. One thing that distinguished this case from most other allegation of sexual misconduct that have come to light since the beginning of #MeToo is that it is plausible that Ansari genuinely thought the encounter was consensual—he texted Grace the day after their date to let her know that he enjoyed their time together. This is odd behavior for someone intentionally ignoring their sexual partner's non-consent, though by no means proof that it was unintentional.[8] Even if Ansari's misconduct was a result of miscommunication, however, this does not mean that Ansari did nothing wrong; it means that his failure was, in part, a communicative failure.

But what kind of communicative failure could Ansari be guilty of? I do not mean, of course, that he just got something factually wrong; I mean that he *did* something wrong in interpreting Grace as he did or in treating Grace's contributions to their linguistic exchange as he did. But how could this be? If it is true that Ansari's violation of Grace's consent was a mistake, that he misunderstood something about her, her desires, or what her attempted refusals were meant to

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[8] There are other explanations for his text of course: he may have texted her in order to establish plausible deniability of wrongdoing, or else to taunt her.

communicate, then how can we say that he did anything wrong? We do not generally think that linguistic interpretation involves much intentional deliberation or volition; it is something that we do somewhat automatically. Of course, some utterances are more difficult to interpret than others, or involve an ambiguity that requires a conscious reasoning process. Yet even when conscious, intentional reasoning is required, hearers are normally looking for the most likely explanation for what the speaker must have meant, not for a creative interpretation of the speaker's utterance that will best match the hearer's desires. It is uncontroversial that one can *be* wrong in their interpretation of an utterance, but if they really are simply attempting to identify the speaker's most likely intended meaning, then how can we claim they have *done* something wrong? It is true that people sometimes willfully misinterpret others. One might think that Ansari willfully misinterpreted Grace if it was clear that he understood her refusals as refusals, yet pretended otherwise in order to, for instance, press her into giving in to him. Yet this is not a genuine case of misinterpretation. In willful misinterpretation, the hearer does, or easily could, recognize the speaker's intended meaning, yet they attempt to characterize the speaker's utterance as though it is meant to communicate something different.[9] This is a case in which the hearer has done something wrong, but it doesn't appear to describe Ansari's behavior.

If the majority of ordinary, good faith linguistic interpretation does not (or not obviously) involve intentional action, then one might wonder how someone could do something wrong in interpreting an utterance. In this paper, I take seriously the possibility that some violations of

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[9] Clearly I do not do justice to the topic of willful misinterpretation here. For the sake of space, I rely on my readers' intuitive acceptance of my characterization. Yet because this is not the topic of the present discussion, it should not seriously impact my main argument if readers do not share my intuitions.

consent result from miscommunication, and I argue that conversational participants can be blameworthy for these miscommunications. This stems, I argue, from including content in their conversational *context* that they ought not to include. In order to establish this claim, however, I first offer an alternative way of conceptualizing the notion of conversational context which I call *interpretive context*. As we will see, context is widely understood as a set of propositions that is shared between participants in a given conversation. In order for participants to be responsible and potentially blameworthy for their conversational contexts, however, they must be relativized to individuals. I use cases of miscommunication about consent, which I call *misattributed consent*, as a jumping off point for motivating why we need an account of interpretive context. As I show, interpretive context offers resources for understanding, first, what is going on in misunderstandings like that between Ansari and Grace in the first place, and second, how we should understand what it is that Ansari is doing wrong.

In section 1, I give a sketch of the existing and widely accepted view of context as a shared set of information or propositions. In section 2, I clarify the notion of misattributed consent and I offer examples of the phenomenon. In section 3, I introduce the notion of interpretive context as a placeholder and I show why in cases of misattributed consent (though not exclusively cases of misattributed consent), the shared account of context is unsatisfying. In section 4, I fill in a bit of detail on the notion of interpretive context, how to determine an interpretive context, and the responsibility individual agents have for their interpretive contexts.

1.1 Shared Context Views

Most widely accepted accounts of conversational context rely on the idea that context is shared between participants. Context,[10] in the sense that I am interested for the present discussion, is generally understood to be a set of information or propositions that serve two interrelated purposes: first, context is a set of background assumptions or presuppositions that conversational participants can draw on as presupposed content when making and interpreting utterances (Stalnaker 1978). Second, context is a kind of record of the conversation, where new utterances are added to the context and can subsequently be presupposed as part of the set of background assumptions or explicitly referenced later on in the conversation (Lewis 1979, Stalnaker 1978). These purposes are interrelated because the context is understood as dynamic: new contributions should be appropriate given the presuppositions in the existing context, and the contextual record should be adjusted to record new contributions (Stalnaker 2002, Roberts 2012). I focus primarily on understanding the context as the set of assumptions or presuppositions that participants draw on in making conversational moves in order to get clear on the primary functional role that context is supposed to play in communication. There are difficult questions regarding the relationship between the public record of a conversation and the propositions that we can draw on for interpreting utterances.[11] I do not wish to take these questions up at present.

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[10] This is only one thing theorists have in mind when they use the term 'context'. The notion of context Kaplan (1989) has in mind in his account of meaning as a function from context to content, for instance, is a different notion, as is Lewis's (1980) context/index conception of how utterances are interpreted. I do not speak at all to these views presently. It could be that my account has implications for whether and in what way we accept the Kaplan or Lewisian accounts, but I think this is not likely, and I will not take up the question here.

[11] See Camp (2018) for a discussion of the relationship and distinctions between the common ground the conversational record.

I will be focusing on Stalnaker's (1978, 2002, 2014) account of context as *common ground*. On this view, "a proposition is common ground between you and me if we both accept it (for the purposes of the conversation), we both accept that we both accept it, we both accept that we both accept that we both accept it, and so on" (Stalnaker 2014, 25). For ease, I will call such iterated acceptance by both parties "mutual acceptance." What it takes for a proposition to be common ground between us is that we mutually accept the proposition in question. Moreover, a participant is said to *presuppose* a proposition when they "accept (for the purposes of the conversation) that it is common ground" (Stalnaker 2014, 25). That is, if participants mutually presuppose a proposition, by definition that proposition is common ground between them.

Stalnaker's notion of *acceptance* is a distinctively conversational notion, not an epistemic notion. Despite that he models the account loosely on the notion of common knowledge or common belief, he does not think that belief is either necessary or sufficient for conversational acceptance. In order for something to be included in the common ground, it need only be mutually accepted *for the purpose of the conversation*. Thus, I could accept for the purpose of the conversation a proposition that I know to be false. Perhaps I wish to humor you, or perhaps we are mutually engaging in an imaginative conversation in which we consider what the world would be like, say, if certain laws of physics were different. I can accept *for the purpose of the conversation* that the force of gravity on earth is different than it actually is in order to explore this imagined world, even though I do not *believe* that the force of gravity on earth is different than it is, nor do I believe that you believe it. In this case, each of us accepts a proposition that we do not believe—that the force of gravity is different than it actually is—and we decline to accept a proposition that we do believe—that the

force of gravity is what it actually is. Nevertheless it is common ground between us in this imaginative conversation that the force of gravity is different than it actually is.

The contents of contexts can come from a variety of sources. Some of the propositions included in the context of an exchange are derived from utterances made during the course of the conversation itself. In our imaginative conversation about gravity, there must have been utterances within the conversation itself that allowed us to add to the common ground the alternative gravitational force on Earth. But other elements of the context will be picked up somewhat automatically from one's surroundings. If we are talking together by a lake when a seaplane loudly and unexpectedly lands, neither of us needs to say, "A seaplane just landed in front of us," in order for us both to accept the proposition expressed by such an utterance. Still other elements of the context will be imported from our larger cultural context. Most adults know who the United States President is, and so that information can be automatically imported into just about any conversational context. Similarly, just about all adults know that the sky is blue and the earth revolves around the sun. Rarely in conversation will one need to say or do anything to get these propositions into the context. We can think of these propositions as part of a cultural or global context, the contents of which generally are, or easily can be, imported directly into any new conversational context. How much cultural context can be included in the common ground, and what kind of cultural context, depends largely on the individuals involved in the conversations and their assumptions about one another. Thus the philosophy graduate student can import a great deal of philosophy-specific cultural context into the common ground of a conversation even with a new acquaintance within philosophy, but they could not do so with a new friend from the gym who is not an academic.

The way in which elements of these global or cultural contexts can be included in local conversational contexts should be clear enough for our purposes, but there is a bit more to say about how new conversational moves influence and are influence by the context. Conversational moves influence the context by adjusting the common ground in some way. Assertions, for instance, are often understood as proposals to add a new proposition to the common ground (Stalnaker 1978). Thus, with each new assertion, a proposition could, in principle, be added to the common ground. Accounts of dynamic semantics and dynamic pragmatics build on Stalnaker's picture in order to make even clearer the dynamic nature of context. On this view, not only is every utterance apt to adjust the context in some way, what counts as a permissible utterance is significantly constrained by the context. On this view, the context is an ordered set or "stack" of questions, and each utterance is supposed to be an attempt, to move forward the project of answering one or more of those questions, usually by answering the question at the top of the stack (Roberts 2012). Thus, permissible utterances are constrained by the questions that are currently salient on the stack, and permissible utterances further influence the stack by adding new questions or answering, and thus removing, questions from the stack.

In successful cases of communication, with every utterance, the speaker and hearer add the same new content to the context in tandem. However, when conversational participants make mistakes, this tandem updating is thrown off, often leading to disagreements about what should be included in the conversational context, and eventually, disagreement about the meaning of new utterances. Stalnaker calls these misaligned contexts *defective contexts* (2002, 717). When these sorts of disagreements happen, participants have miscommunicated. Sometimes we can explain these miscommunications by pointing to a certain utterance that the speaker meant in one way, and give a

story about why the hearer interpreted it in another way: perhaps they misheard the utterance, or it was insufficiently specific for the hearer to be expected properly interpret it. In other cases, participants simply have false beliefs about one another, and this leads them to expect that different pragmatic contents can be derived from a given utterance.

In either case, it is clear that a context is defective, on this general picture of conversational dynamics, in any case in which participants fail to adequately *share* the context. The sense in which the common ground view is a view on which context is shared should be clear by this point: participants must share the common ground in the sense that, in order for a proposition to be common ground in the first place, both participants must accept it. But even more than this, participants must share the common ground because in order for a proposition to be common ground, both parties must accept *that it is common ground*. Participants may, of course, be wrong about what is common ground, but in order for something to be common ground, both participants must accept that it is.

As I will attempt to show, this view of context as a set of shared propositions is unsatisfactory. If what we are trying to capture in giving an account of context is the set of propositions that are used to produce and interpret utterances, then an individualized account would give a more accurate and psychologically plausible account. Not only do we frequently presuppose propositions that our interlocutors do not presuppose, we don't necessarily need to accept that these propositions are shared by our interlocutors in order for them to be permissibly used as part of the context of conversation.

1.2 The Phenomenon of Misattributed Consent

In order to illustrate why we should reject shared context views, it will be helpful to dive into a couple examples. I'll be spelling out in some detail a phenomenon I call 'misattributed consent.' 'Misattributed consent' refers to the phenomenon that occurs when one party to a linguistic exchange takes another to have given their consent to some activity by making an utterance, while the second party does not take themself to have consented with that utterance. Despite the many, widely publicized examples of misattributed sexual consent, the phenomenon is not unique to sexual contexts. Misattributed consent would be at play if A started dancing with B, falsely believing that B had agreed to dance; if C walked in to D's house without knocking because they were once granted permission to do so, where D intended for this permission to apply only to a single event; or if professor E, after asking her class whether they would mind adding an extra mandatory meeting and receiving no objections, schedules the extra meeting despite that no one felt comfortable telling the professor that they could not or did not want to have an extra meeting. There is a wide range of contexts in which misattributed consent can occur, and the severity of the violation that results can vary enormously.

Analyzing examples of misattributed consent can be difficult: many of the most compelling and high profile cases are of sexual consent, which can be a fraught and contentious topic, often laden with a great deal of emotional and ideological baggage. I take these potential difficulties to be theoretical virtues of the cases: differences in ideological presuppositions often directly contribute to the kinds of miscommunications with which we are concerned. Gender and sexual norms, far from obstructing the communicatively relevant features of the case, make clear how these norms

contribute to interpretive contexts. Thus, I'll start by presenting an example of misattributed consent in a sexual context. I'll then give an example from a medical context, offering different but complementary features of the phenomenon.

1.2.1 Consent in Sexual Contexts

I take the case of Aziz Ansari, described above, to be a paradigmatic case of misattributed consent. We cannot know the precise nature of the communicative exchange between Grace and Ansari, so instead I will offer a generalized version that is broadly consistent with the kind of miscommunication at play in Grace's report, though the details of the interaction differ. Later, I'll give an intuitive gloss of the case I offer that may or may not accurately describe the case of Ansari and Grace.

Bad Date:

A and B are walking home after a date. A's apartment is on the way to B's. As they approach it, they have the following exchange:

A: Would you like to come up for a drink?

B: Um, I'd like to have one more drink with you, but really, just a drink.

A: Of course, that's no problem.

As soon as they make it into the apartment, A pushes B against the wall and begins kissing her. B pushes him away, saying:

B: Wait, I thought we were just having a drink?

A: Right, sure, let me get some wine.

After pouring two glasses, they sit on the couch together talking for a few minutes, when A once again begins kissing B while pushing her back on the couch, and attempts to unbutton her pants. At this point B gets up and leaves, feeling frustrated and ignored. A is confused about why B left.

Let's stipulate that A and B genuinely miscommunicated: A believes that B consented to sexual activity with him, and B believes that she declined a sexual proposition from A. Yet at no point in the exchange did either A or B explicitly mention sex, nor did B ever utter, "Yes," or "No." Although this sort of exchange should be relatively familiar,[12] I'll specify how I understand the exchange in *Bad Date*.

Let's stipulate that A and B did not miscommunicate on the first utterance in the exchange: A intended his utterance, "Would you like to come up for a drink," as an invitation for B to come in with the understanding that they will likely have sex, and B recognized it as such. It is immediately after this that the miscommunication begins. Suppose that B, who was interested in continuing the conversation but not in having sex with A, attempted to reject the implicit request for sex while accepting the explicit request for a drink by uttering that she would come up for "just a drink." A's acknowledgment of B's utterance initially appears to indicate that they have successfully communicated until they get inside and he pushes her against the wall to kiss her. B, recognizing that something went wrong in the communicative exchange, tries to reorient the conversation by

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[12] It is something of a trope in pop culture and media that someone, especially a man, treats a situation as one in which sex is inevitable. See Beck 2018 for a variety of cases in which pop culture treats sex as inevitable or owed whenever a man wants it, and North 2018 for an argument that the Aziz Ansari case is an instance of an ordinary experience of this type. North relates this to research that shows that merely holding certain misogynistic beliefs can make a man more likely to falsely identify a woman as having consented to sex. See Lofgreen et al 2017.

reiterating her interest in "just having a drink." Again, A acknowledges this in a way that makes it appear as though he has understood her until his nonlinguistic actions—in this case pushing B onto the couch and attempting to unbutton her pants—makes it clear that he either misunderstood or chose to ignore B.

It is undoubtedly true that in many (perhaps most) cases in which someone persistently attempts to engage in sexual acts despite repeated refusals of his advances, the instigator knowingly ignores his interlocutor's refusals. However it is possible that in some of these cases, the instigator continues to instigate as a result of a mistake—albeit a mistake that is the result of problematic beliefs or attitudes. Suppose, for instance, that A believes that women are coy about their desires, and that it is proper for a woman to hesitate, or even physically resist, before accepting a sexual proposition. If A holds these beliefs, it is not difficult to see how his actions might be a result of misunderstanding rather than an intentional ignoring of B's wishes. Given that A believes that B ought to hesitate before accepting any sexual invitation if she is interested in A, he might think that her utterance, which she intended to indicate acceptance only of the offer for a drink, is entirely consistent with her sexual consent. After all, she must find a way to keep open the possibility of sex without being too obvious about her acceptance. This is true, as well, after he kisses her and she reiterates her intention just to have a drink with him; in his mind, she is not attempting to end the expectation of a sexual encounter, she is flirtatiously making him try a little harder. This takes place in the context of a date, so it is plausible that B *has*, at certain points in the evening, flirted with A. A might take this to be evidence that B's resistance is intended as flirtation rather than refusal. This calls to mind the refrain sometimes used as a defense in such cases—as though one cannot flirt without consenting to sex—"But she was flirting with me!" In A's mind, there is no inconsistency

between B's resistance and her consent, which A took her to have granted when she accepted his invitation to come up to his apartment.

1.2.2 Misattributed Consent in Medical Contexts

Informed consent in medical contexts is more strictly regulated than in sexual contexts. Although in both cases, we treat violations of consent as morally wrong and often legally prosecutable, the standards in medical cases are more explicitly outlined. In addition to reducing liability, these explicit guidelines can help to address any tension between doctors' commitment to maintaining life and well-being on the one hand, and the patient's right to bodily autonomy on the other (American Medical Association 2016). Although the comparatively more straightforward rules governing informed consent in the medical domain might make instances of misattributed consent less common, it can also be helpful for clarifying just where the communication of consent breaks down when problems arise.[13]

Blood Transfusion

> *C is a Jehovah's Witness who, based on religious convictions, is unwilling to receive blood transfusions. It is a well-established fact between C and their doctor, D, that C is a Jehovah's Witness. Because C has mentioned C's beliefs in a medical context, D correctly infers that C probably does not receive blood transfusions.*

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[13] Moreover, one might think that one reason informed consent in the medical domain is so highly regulated is largely precisely because of past cases of misattributed consent between a patient and a medical professional.

However, because C has never required a transfusion, D has never confirmed this. Moreover, D knows that there are some Jehovah's Witnesses that reject the Watchtower teaching that it is a sin to accept blood (Elder 2000).

Now, C is visiting D, complaining of swelling in their leg, sometimes accompanied by minor pain. D does some tests, and comes back to C:

D: It appears you have a benign tumor known as a lipoma in your leg. Although it is not cancerous and is unlikely to do much damage, when they are this large and painful, it is often a good idea to remove them.

C: What would that involve?

D: I recommend surgical removal in your case. As you know, any surgery is accompanied by risks. Your case is relatively simple, but major complications with bleeding or clotting are possible, which we would ordinarily want to treat with a blood transfusion. But I consider that to be highly unlikely.

C: Okay, I'll do the surgery.

Two weeks later, C comes back for the surgery. Surgeon E is conducting the surgery. The tumor is larger than D initially thought, and lies very close to the femoral artery. E nicks the femoral artery, requiring a blood transfusion, which is performed. When C comes to and learns that they have received a blood transfusion, they are furious. D and E are confused, believing C to have consented to the procedure.[14]

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[14] Some might think this case is unrealistic, since consent forms are universally required within the United States for any procedure involving the possibility of a blood transfusion, as well as any surgery at all. However, surely consent forms are required in such circumstances precisely because of the potential for problems arising like that in *Blood Transfusion*. Thus, a skeptical reader should feel free to set this example in the past, before consent forms were required for medical procedures to

Let's stipulate that in *Blood Transfusion*, C believes they consented to the surgery, but did not consent to a blood transfusion. D believes that C consented to the surgery and, if necessary, to a blood transfusion. During their conversation, C knows that D knows that C is a Jehovah's Witness. For this reason, C reasonably believes that D believes C will not accept blood transfusions. When D explains the risks of surgery, including the fact that it may, but probably will not, require a blood transfusion, C interprets this as an explanation that, *if* a complication comes up, *then* the solution of a blood transfusion is not open to C. This, C thinks, means that the procedure is a bit more dangerous for C than for many others, which is why D made sure to finish by saying, "But I consider that to be highly unlikely." C understands this utterance as a reassurance, as though D were saying, "The risk to you is higher than normal if there are complications, but the risk of complications is low enough that we shouldn't need to worry about it." Thus, C thinks they have no reason to think that D would take their consent to the surgery as consent to a blood transfusion.

D, on the other hand, believes at the beginning of the exchange that C will not accept a blood transfusion, but they hold that belief loosely because they know that some Jehovah's Witnesses do accept transfusions. Thus, when C agrees quickly to the surgery after D attempted to make clear C's increased risks, D takes this to be sufficient evidence that C is willing to accept transfusions. D would have expected C to ask questions and confirm that they would not accept a blood transfusion otherwise.

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take place. However, it is not clear that this is necessary. The efficacy of consent forms in actually securing informed consent is debated. See Hall et al. 2012.

Blood Transfusion bears similarities to *Bad Date*. Like A, D recognizes that their interlocutor consented to *something*—in this case, surgery, instead of a drink—but thinks that C consented to more—a blood transfusion. Unlike *Bad Date*, however, in which A's behavior could be characterized as the following of a sexual script,[15] D's misinterpretation is more accurately characterized as a failure to follow the relevant script: the professional guidelines for what it takes to seek and grant informed consent in medicine. It is up to the medical professionals to secure consent, not the patient. In failing to follow-up with C to ensure that D understood which procedures C consented to, D failed to follow the well-defined script provided by the medical profession. Unlike the script A uses in *Bad Date*, the script for securing medical consent is designed to enable medical professionals to secure straightforward, unambiguous consent from patients.

1.3 Interpretive Context

The phenomenon I've described, particularly as it manifests in *Bad Date,* calls to mind themes from Langton's (1993) and Hornsby and Langton's (1998) discussions of pornography as a subordinating speech act. They discuss situations in which women, despite attempting to say "no" to sex, are not understood as having refused. They argue that pornography[16] has the effect of adjusting

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[15] See Maitra (2004) for a discussion of the silencing effects of sexual scripts influenced by pornography.

[16] Note that they restrict their discussion to pornography that involves the degradation of women, treating this as a necessary feature of material that is rightly considered "pornography." For the sake of space, I will not engage with some of the problems that arise with this stipulation, but it is worth noting that their claims do not apply to non-degrading sexually explicit material or a great deal of gay pornography.

the conditions under which certain speech acts can be heard and understood,[17] with the result that an attempt to perform those speech acts is made difficult or impossible. In particular, they claim that pornography sets up sexual contexts in such a way that an utterance of "no" cannot count as a refusal because in the sexual narrative put forward by the majority of pornography, a woman's utterance of, "no" really means, "yes," if is treated as a meaningful utterance at all. Although I have not specified whether A consumes pornography, that might be one source—though likely not the only source—of his beliefs about women's sexual desires and appropriate sexual behavior for women. Kukla (2014) generalizes and adapts the sort of approach Langton and Hornsby propose, arguing that a phenomenon she calls "discursive injustice" occurs whenever a speaker, despite being properly positioned to make a speech act of a certain type, cannot secure uptake as having produced a speech act of that type in part as a result of their social identity. Our case could accurately be understood as an instance of discursive injustice, since B is properly positioned to refuse A's sexual advances, but she is unable to secure uptake as having refused in part due to her social identity.

Despite that *Bad Date* might plausibly be an instance of the phenomena that Langton, Hornsby, and Kukla describe, neither Langton and Hornsby's account of illocutionary silencing nor Kukla's account of discursive injustice can give a full account of the phenomenon of misattributed consent. For one thing, the specific accounts they offer do not obviously give helpful accounts of *Blood Transfusion*. It may be that C fails to secure uptake in part as a result of their social identity as a Jehovah's Witness, but this is not clear; it seems that D is attempting to be especially sensitive to the

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[17] In particular, Langton (1993) argues that pornography adjusts the felicity conditions for sexual refusals, while Langton and Hornsby (1998) argue that pornography creates a linguistic environment in sexual contexts that undermines reciprocity, which enables hearers to identify and grasp speakers' communicative intentions.

variety of experiences of Jehovah's Witnesses by recognizing that some Jehovah's Witnesses do, and some do not, accept blood transfusions. Moreover, given that Langton and Hornsby's discussion is primarily a discussion of the effect that pornography has in the silencing of women, their account clearly does not speak directly to the case. Moreover, because they discuss pornography as a speech act that silences, if *Blood Transfusion* were to be an instance of (non-pornographic) illocutionary silencing, we would expect that there might be some utterance or set of utterances that itself silences C's attempts to make themselves heard.

As we can see, these accounts of silencing and discursive injustice are useful and many of the points they make are intuitively compelling. Yet missing from each of these discussions is a foundational question: how is it that conversational participants so frequently find themselves in situations involving deep barriers to proper communication in the first place? If, as Stalnaker and many others argue, contexts are shared between conversational participants, then why is it that a woman can utter "No," in a context, intending it to have the force of a refusal, and her male partner could be unable to recognize the utterance as a refusal? If participants share a context, and if contexts are supposed to help ensure that hearers properly interpret speakers' utterances, then either participants in these cases do not share a context, or their shared contexts are not enabling them to properly interpret one another. In what follows, I attempt to address this missing feature of Langton, Hornsby, and Kukla's accounts.

As I have spelled out above, the common ground view treats context as shared between conversational participants. Yet miscommunication happens when participants treat different information as included in the context. For instance, A treated the proposition, *Women are coy and indirect about their sexual desires*, as an element of the context while B did not. Shared-context views like

the common ground view tend to acknowledge that it is what participants *treat* as included in the context—that is, what they presuppose—that makes a difference to an individual's communicative behavior, rather than what is in fact common ground between participants. On Stalnaker's view, what a participant presupposes *just is* what that participant treats as shared between parties to the conversation. This is one reason to think that the context is the common ground. However, it is not clear that this view is accurate. As I'll show, there are cases in which participants treat proposition which they do not take to be shared in the context they use to interpret their interlocutor.

At present, I'll use 'interpretive context' as a placeholder, to stand for whatever it is that plays the role that context is supposed to play in the interpretation of utterances—whatever set of propositions[18] agents treat as pertinent background for the interpretation of an utterance. As I consider various things that agents do and do not treat as pertinent background information for the interpretation of an utterance, we will see that we can fill in the placeholder notion with a number of details. Namely, interpretive contexts are agent-relative rather than shared, and it is not necessary for an agent to believe that the propositions in their interpretive context are shared. Thus, we can conclude that the notion of context that is operative in interpretation cannot be a shared-context notion.

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[18] Non-propositional content may also be included in the interpretive context. I set aside this possibility at present for the sake of simplicity and in order to keep my critique focused specifically on Stalnaker's common ground account, which explicitly incorporates only propositions as constituents of common ground.

Claim 1: Elements of interpretive contexts need not be common ground

To see that interpretive contexts are not shared, we need only look at *Bad Date*. In that case, A includes a number of unshared propositions in his interpretive context. The propositions, *women are coy* and *it is appropriate for women to resist before accepting a sexual invitation* are two propositions that A treats as pertinent for interpreting B, and are thereby included in A's interpretive context. These propositions might reasonably be understood as part of a global or cultural context that A automatically imported into his conversation with B. After all, these are tropes in a wide range of situations, from literature and movies, to news media, to a great deal of discourse on women's sexuality. It is not difficult to imagine why A would import these propositions into his context, given how widespread they are. The acceptance of such propositions leads to a bit of a problem for women, however: if a woman wants to be treated as a sincere, direct, and assertive conversational participant in any scenario that might be understood as a sexual or romantic scenario, then she must find a way to be interpreted as making sincere, direct assertions despite that she is already presupposed by many men to be coy, indirect about her desires, and likely to resist before accepting sex. If she is already assumed to be coy, then some attempts at assertiveness will not make sense to her audience—the woman's utterance may be interpreted in a *less* straightforward way in order to preserve the assumption of her coyness.

We see this when A interprets B's, "I'll come up for a drink, but really, just a drink," as an acceptance of A's sexual invitation. He has interpreted her utterance in light of his sexist beliefs about women which were imported directly from a wider context. In many cases, directly importing propositions from cultural contexts is harmless, and can even be helpful in interpreting others, so A might feel justified in importing this proposition and using it to interpret B's utterance. Yet the fact

that B does not accept the propositions that A imported is enough to see that that there are cases in which propositions included in the interpretive context are not included in the common ground, indicating that if we want to understand the role that context plays in interpretation, then a shared-context model is not the best one to use.

Yet perhaps I have been too hasty to claim that I've shown anything interesting about context. All I've shown, after all, is that interpretive contexts can include propositions that a conversational participant falsely believes to be included in the common ground. But this is no objection to shared-context views: this is just an instance of a defective context. Shared context views can allow that defective contexts exist any time one or more participants have false beliefs about what is common ground. As long as the participant still *believes* that the unshared proposition is included in the common ground, the shared context account may still be able to account for the case. As I'll now show, however, it is not necessary that A believes that these unshared propositions are included in the common ground, and thus, shared context views face a genuine challenge.

Claim 2: Agents need not believe that all elements of their interpretive contexts are included in the common ground

Camp (2018) argues that some propositions can be "manifest to both parties" without being included in the common ground. Camp focuses on the phenomenon of insinuation, arguing that insinuated content is often deniable—the speaker can deny that they intended to insinuate anything and insist that they meant only to communicate the content literally expressed by the utterance. Camp argues that deniability exploits the difference between mutual acceptance, which is required for a proposition to be included in the common ground, and mutual belief, which is not (56). In interpreting an insinuation, the hearer will often come to believe the insinuated content, but will not

acknowledge that they believe it, that is, they will not accept it. The result is that it can be common knowledge among conversational participants that they all believe a certain proposition, but none of them will admit to that fact. Instead, they will deny it—indicating that they are resisting its inclusion in the common ground—and carry on with the conversation as though only the mutually accepted propositions are shared.

Yet it is not necessary for a proposition to have been insinuated for it to have the features Camp describes. Suppose we treat A's endorsement of the propositions, *Women are coy* and *It is appropriate for women to resist before accepting sexual invitations*, in the same way that insinuated content is treated. A believes the propositions, and he (rightly or wrongly) thinks that B believes the propositions. Nevertheless, he declines to treat them as common ground or publicly acknowledge his acceptance of the propositions. There might be several reasons for this: A might recognize—and take B to recognize—that it is becoming increasingly *faux pas* to overtly endorse such attitudes toward women, though he is still comfortable—and thinks that B is comfortable—privately endorsing them. Or, more likely, keeping such propositions out of the common ground is part of what is supposed to be the fun of seduction for people with such views. There is little point to overtly endorsing the proposition *it is appropriate for a woman to resist before accepting sexual invitations*. If this is a part of the common ground, then it is not clear what role the resistance is supposed to play in the seduction process. If it is mutually accepted and explicitly articulable that women are supposed to resist, then the resistance will not appear sincere or believable because it is mutually accepted that it is *not* sincere. Thus, even if A believes that there is common belief between A and B that these sexist propositions are true, he does not accept the propositions for the purpose of the conversation, and nor does he believe that B accepts them for the purpose of the conversation.

Nevertheless, crucially, he still treats the propositions as pertinent for interpreting B's first utterance, "I'd like to have one more drink with you, but really, just a drink." Thus, we can see that agents need not believe that all elements of their interpretive context are common ground.

Claim 3: Agents need not think a proposition is mutually believed in order to include it in their interpretive context

Above, I've given a case in which A (rightly or wrongly) believes that the propositions in question are mutually believed, but does not believe that the propositions are mutually accepted. While this is inconsistent with the common ground view, perhaps it is consistent with a different shared-context view. One might argue, for instance, that context is not common ground. Instead, when interlocutors mutually believe a proposition that is explicitly left out of the common ground, that is all that is necessary for it to be included in the (shared) context.

Yet it is not necessary that A believes even that B believes that women are coy, or that women ought to play at resisting before accepting sex. Consider another example in which A believes that in addition to being coy, women aren't always aware of what they really want or what they really mean. If A were challenged on his behavior toward B, he might claim, "She didn't know what she wanted! When she said she only wanted a drink, I could tell her real meaning—she wanted me." In this case, A concedes that B doesn't endorse all of the propositions that he used to interpret her utterance. Yet he still maintains that they aided him in deriving her "real meaning." In other words, A included in his interpretive context propositions that, by his own lights, are not shared by B.

One might worry that in this case, when A speaks of B's "real meaning," he is not referring to her linguistic or communicative meaning. He may take there to be some kind of deeper, unstated, non-linguistic meaning. In this case, perhaps A understands what the proper interpretation of B's utterance is, and is simply making inferences based on what he takes B's communicative intentions to be.

I am not sure just what kind of non-linguistic "meaning" this might be, so I am a bit skeptical of this claim. Nevertheless, even supposing this case does not go through, I will now show that participants can permissibly include unshared propositions in their interpretive context, *even when* they do not believe that the unshared proposition is accepted by their interlocutor. This should be sufficient to establish that propositions need not be mutually believed in order to be included in the interpretive context.

Claim 4: Participants can permissibly include unshared propositions in their interpretive context

Before establishing the permissibility of including unshared propositions in one's interpretive context, I'd like to consider a worry with the approach I have adopted so far: I have attempted to motivate the insufficiency of the common ground view by appealing to cases in which the context is already defective. In cases of miscommunication, we already know that contexts often, if not always, face problems. On Stalnaker's view, the correct response to an instance of misattributed consent is to attempt to locate and resolve the discrepancy between A's interpretive context and B's. If we could do that, then the common ground would be restored, there would be no more miscommunication, and the challenge to the common ground view would dissolve.

As it happens, I think that this is false. I think that my reasoning in sections 3.2 and 3.3 clearly suggest that there might be cases in which the context is *not* defective (for instance, cases in which A rightly believes that B believes it is appropriate for women to resist before accepting sex, and in which he is right in believing this is a case in which B is flirtatiously playing at resisting), and nevertheless the common ground view fails. However, in order to drive home this point, I will now show that even in situations in which communication moves forward normally and successfully, participants sometimes include unshared content in their interpretive contexts.

In her discussion of hermeneutical injustice, Miranda Fricker (2007) points to sexual harassment to illustrate her target phenomenon. Prior to and into the mid 20th century, victims of sexual harassment were often also the victims of hermeneutical injustice because neither the term 'sexual harassment' nor the concept the term expresses were in wide usage or recognized by the vast majority of people. As a result, there were no conceptual resources to identify sexual harassment or make sense of its features or effects. Sexual harassment was often passed off as harmless flirtation, which made it difficult for those who had been targeted for harassment to be taken seriously as victims of any harm. Fricker gives the example of Carmita Wood, whose experiences were integral to the coining of the term 'sexual harassment.' After quitting her job due to systematic sexual harassment carried out against her, as well as a series of physiological and psychological effects she suffered as a result, Wood was unable to collect unemployment benefits or to conceptualize the harm that had been done to her. This was in part due to her inability to articulate her loss of employment as resulting from her harassment, because she was unable to conceptualize her experiences in her job as harassment at all. It was only after sexual harassment had begun to be a

recognizable phenomenon and the term 'sexual harassment' was becoming recognizable that it became an object of study and a legitimate complaint for those who had experienced it.

I imagine that shortly after the term 'sexual harassment' was coined, those who were familiar with the concept might have used their new hermeneutical resources to interpret their acquaintances' utterances. The following is, I take it, perfectly understandable for those who understand the concept of sexual harassment, yet it does not precisely or coherently state much about the speaker's experience:

> My boss keeps touching my back and making flirtatious comments. It's started to make me feel uncomfortable. I don't know, I can't explain it. It's innocent, harmless flirting. He's really a nice guy. But somehow, I'm not sure, it just feels…gross.

Simply endorsing the proposition, *unwanted lewd or suggestive remarks or behavior of a sexual nature constitutes a type of harassment*, allows the hearer to understand not only that the speaker has experienced sexual harassment, but also an ability to interpret the speaker's meaning when she herself says that she cannot fully explain what she means. But endorsing this proposition is not easily done without an understanding of the concept of sexual harassment. Thus, those with the hermeneutical resources to do so can—and perhaps ought to—interpret the speaker of the utterance above in light of these resources.

Similarly, teachers and therapists are often tasked with using the conceptual resources that they have and that their students and clients lack to interpret utterances more accurately than they would be able to without those conceptual resources. What is going on in these cases is that hearers

have conceptual resources that speakers lack and use these resources in the very act of interpreting speakers' utterances. In other words, the hearer accepts a proposition, perhaps *unwanted lewd or suggestive remarks or behavior of a sexual nature constitute a type of harassment*, which 1) is not shared between the speaker and the hearer, 2) they do not believe it is shared between the speaker and the hearer, 3) they do not believe the speaker believes the proposition at all, and 4) this is nevertheless an appropriate proposition to treat as an element of the hearer's interpretive context. In fact, in this case it is not only appropriate for the hearer to include this unshared proposition in their interpretive context, it may even be required that if they have the relevant hermeneutical resources, they use them in order to accurately interpret the speaker.

1.4 Interpretive Norms

In Section 3, we started by using a placeholder notion of 'interpretive context' and found that the placeholder notion is inconsistent with a shared-context account:. propositions included in an agent's interpretive context need not be shared, nor does one need to *think* all elements of their interpretive context are shared. Thus, we can understand the notion of interpretive context to be better understood as an *agent-relative* notion of context, as opposed to a notion of context as shared. In this section, I will show how conceiving of communicative context in terms of agent-relative interpretive context, rather than on a shared-context view, offers a natural way to conceptualize context as norm-governed. This allows us to identify why the misunderstandings in *Bad Date* and *Blood Transfusion* strike us as more than mere misunderstandings—they are misunderstandings that result from a violation of interpretive norms.

In Chapter 2, I give a more extended defense of norms governing communicative behavior. Although the particular norms and obligations discussed in that chapter are not put in terms that transfer precisely to the problems I have identified in cases of misattributed consent, it should be clear how they apply in these cases as well. In the present section, I discuss a norm I call the Constraint on Hearer Context. I do not have space in what remains of this section to offer a thorough defense of the normativity of conversational exchanges; this is the project of Chapter 2. Instead, the discussion of the Constraint on Hearer Context is meant to offer the reader a rough idea of the kind of norm that is likely violated in cases of misattributed consent. It is intended to illustrate how, by adopting an interpretive context account, we can explain the misunderstandings in our examples not as mere misunderstandings, but as a kind of blameworthy misunderstanding. In order to see this, we must first look at an apparent worry with the interpretive context view.

1.4.1 Determining Interpretive Context

A concern arises when considering the interpretive context view: I have given no constraints on what can be included in an interpretive context. So far, anything that a hearer treats as a part of the context, whether it is shared or not, can be included in their interpretive context. But this allows for the possibility that an interpretive context could have nothing to do with the common ground whatsoever, and this seems a bit odd. Nothing I have said rules out the possibility that one party to a conversation might include *only* propositions that are unshared—and, perhaps, propositions that

they have no reason to think are shared—in their interpretive context.[19] By giving no constraints on what can be included in an interpretive context, we allow that A can include a whole array of sexist propositions in his context, and nothing prevents him from including even more outlandish propositions, even those that do not have their source in a wider cultural context.

Even if there are no constraints on what interpretive context an agent could conceivably adopt, however, that does not mean that there are no constraints on what interpretive context an agent *should* adopt in order to effectively communicate. There is an intuitive pull to the idea that there is something wrong with A's and D's interpretive contexts. As I'll argue, this wrongness is a normative wrongness: A and D have done something communicatively wrong by violating a communicative norm.

The claim that there are communicative norms of one sort or another is not a novel claim; it is difficult to get far in the study of pragmatics without encountering a claim that in order to understand the content pragmatically conveyed by an utterance, we must assume that the speaker was following some set of norms and determine what they must have meant, given that they were following these norms (Grice 1975, Bach and Harnish 1979, Horn 1996, Saul 2002, Sperber and Wilson 1995). Yet the way in which utterance interpretation is norm-governed differs depending on whether we take the notion of context that is operative in linguistic interpretation to be the shared-context notion or the individualized notion of interpretive context. On a shared-context account of

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[19] Of course, there may be psychological constraints. It might be psychologically difficult or unlikely for a barista, upon hearing, "Hi, could I have a latte," to use an interpretive context that treats information about whale physiology as relevant to the interpretation of the utterance. That is not to say it couldn't happen, but it is difficult to see how, or what sort of role this information would play in interpretation.

interpretation, the context of the conversation is held fixed, while norms of conversation govern how the production and interpretation of utterances align with that context. To follow conversational norms, one must simply apply one's knowledge or beliefs about the shared context properly in producing or interpreting an utterance. That is, the speaker should produce an utterance of a certain kind (one that is cooperative, relevant, true, etc.), according to the current state of the conversation (that is, the conversational context). The interpreter's job, then, is to determine what, given the conversational context and the conversational norms, the speaker must have meant by some utterance.

On an interpretive context view, we get a different picture. Norms are implemented not just in making the right interpretive moves, given the context and utterance, but also in determining what the context should be in the first place. On the interpretive context picture, norms are implemented in the construction of the context itself. Participants can violate communicative norms not just by interpreting utterances poorly, given the context, but also by constructing contexts that do not align well with the conversation.

There are two reasons why this kind of normativity is available in an interpretive context view but not a shared context view. The first is that on a shared context view, the context is determined in a more or less external, objective way: whatever propositions are *in fact* mutually accepted by participants are common ground. On the interpretive context view, there is much more leeway with regard to what is possible to include in the context, but this means that we must have greater normative constraints on what should be included. Second, because contexts are not determined in this external, objective way, they must be determined, in some way, internally. This opens up the possibility that conversational participants might be in some way responsible for their

contexts. In order to make the case that participants are blameworthy for violating normative constraints in the construction of their contexts, they must be responsible for their contexts.

1.4.2 The Constraint on Hearer Context

In this section, I will begin to look at the norms that govern the formation of interpretive context and show how these norms can help explain intuitions about the misunderstandings that take place in *Bad Date* and *Blood Transfusion*. I will not have space to give a full analysis of the norm that I identify here. Rather, I show that a normative conception of communicative contexts can help us see why some miscommunications strike us as more problematic than others.

Shared-context accounts are effective at capturing something intuitively right about communication: that communication is, at its best, a constructive and coordinated sharing of content between individuals.[20] This coordinated sharing is most effective when participants have coordinated on the what presupposed content they bring to bear on the interpretation and production of utterances in the conversation. It is much easier and more efficient to share new content when each participant is on the same page about what they can assume the other participants presuppose. The problem with shared-context views is that this picture of conversation as cooperative sharing is an overly idealized vision of what happens in conversational communication. It is not standardly the case, nor a necessary feature of a conversation, that participants prioritize identifying contextual information that can reasonably be expected to be shared. However, an idealization can shed light on normative constraints on communication. After

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[20] See Chapter 3 for a discussion of what I take to count as coordination.

all, if idealizations show what happens when communication goes *well*, then we might expect that prescriptive norms recommend ways for agents to aim to make their situations closer to the ideal.

For this reason, I propose a prescriptive constraint on what can be included in a hearer's interpretive context in an effort to aim for the idealizations found in shared-context views. As I have argued above, even in cases of successful communication, it is not necessary that the interpretive context include only elements of the common ground. Thus, the constraint we need to put on interpretive context should not limit the permissible elements of the context to only elements that the participants believe to be shared. Rather, what we need is a constraint that limits *which* unshared propositions can be permissibly included in the context. Take the case I gave above of the victim of sexual harassment reporting her experiences without being able to fully articulate them. In that case, the hearer is permitted to include propositions in their interpretive context that are not shared by the speaker, but this does not mean that they can include just any unshared proposition. They are permitted to include propositions that are necessary for accurate interpretation of their interlocutor, which would be deemed acceptable by the speaker if it were explained to her. I take it that in general, a speaker would not object when their utterance is interpreted in light of the conceptual resources that are useful or necessary for making sense of their experiences.

So far, we have seen that we want a hearer to be permitted in including 1) any mutually accepted proposition, and 2) any proposition that the speaker would deem acceptable if they were aware and of their interlocutor's inclusion of that proposition in their interpretive context and understood the content of the proposition. The Constraint on Hearer Context captures these conditions:

> **Constraint on Hearer Context:** A speaker *s* is entitled[21] to expect that a hearer *h* will not include any proposition *p* in the communicative context unless *s* could recognize the reasonableness of the inclusion of *p,* were *h* to defend to *s* why they included it.

In order to give a fully satisfying understanding on this constraint, I should say what it takes for a speaker to "recognize the reasonableness" of the hearer's including some proposition in their interpretive context and specify the notion of entitlement I have in mind. Yet, as I noted, I articulate this constraint not to give a fully satisfying understanding of the norms governing communicative contexts, but rather, to give a sense of how these norms can distinguish cases of miscommunication like those that take place in *Bad Date* and *Blood Transfusion* from, on the one hand, miscommunication that does not result from violations of norms, and on the other hand, cases in which a hearer permissibly uses unshared propositions to interpret others.

It is clear that in both *Bad Date* and *Blood Transfusion*, we will see violations of the Constraint on Hearer Context. In *Bad Date*, A includes a set of unshared sexist propositions in his interpretive context. If A were made to defend his inclusion of these propositions to B, there would be little he could do. He may rehearse the reasoning we did above to make sense of his behavior, noting that he assumes women are indirect and coy when it comes to their sexual desires. Yet this hardly counts as a defense; after all, if A were to give such a defense, B could reasonably follow up by asking, "Why?" The best A could do would be to explain that his sexist beliefs stem from the common cultural

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[21] At present I remain neutral with respect to the nature this entitlement. In Chapter 2 I defend a view of communicative entitlements in greater detail, ultimately arguing that communicative entitlements are rational and social entitlements.

trope, and he either couldn't help but include them in his interpretive context due to indoctrination—which is no defense at all—or that he assumed that B would accept the same propositions—which could only be a fully acceptable defense if A had a strong reason to believe B accepted the propositions or if it was close to unimaginable to A that B might not share his sexist presuppositions.[22] In the case at hand, however, neither is the case. Thus, A violated the Constraint on Hearer Context.

Similarly, in *Blood Transfusion*, D's "defense" of their reasoning to C could, at best, follow the reasoning process we stipulated above. Yet it is still not much of a defense. C would be justified in responding with further questions: "But why would you jump to the conclusion that I would accept a blood transfusion in that case? Why would you not confirm with me? Is it not your duty as a physician to confirm that I am not receiving any procedure to which I do not consent?" D's explanation may mitigate C's anger by allowing C to understand how the miscommunication came to pass—often understanding is enough to combat the frustration that can result from misunderstanding. Yet C would still be justified in treating D's interpretation as a communicative failure.

At the same time, the hearer who understands the concept of sexual harassment will be on sound footing. The hearer only includes propositions that the speaker could recognize as reasonable; given the content of the speaker's utterance, which articulated experiences of sexual harassment, the

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[22] Note that there will be significant cultural variation with respect to how strong A's reason needs to be for believing that B accepts the proposition. There may have been periods in time when the presumption of women's coyness was so deeply rooted in the cultural consciousness that A would not have needed much additional reason to think B accepted the proposition. However, in the 21st century, and especially since the explosion of #MeToo, there is enough counterevidence to the trope in the cultural milieu that A is no longer justified.

hearer had good evidence that the speaker, once she understood what sexual harassment is, would recognize the reasonableness of including the definition of sexual harassment in the hearer's interpretive context.

1.5 Conclusion

I have offered two examples of misattributed consent and showed that the intuitive explanations of these examples are better accounted for by appealing to an agent-relative interpretive context account rather than a shared-context account. I have further shown that an account of interpretive context requires a different kind of conversational norm than other views. The Constraint on Hearer Context requires that anything included in an individual's interpretive context must be defensible to their interlocutor. This picture is more effective in showing, first, how miscommunication is possible in real-world cases, and second, why miscommunications of this sort strike us as criticizable, rather than as mere mistakes.

Finally, placing normative constraints on the construction of contexts offers us a way to move forward in an effort to determine when we can or should hold someone responsible for actions taken as a result of miscommunication or failed attempts at communication. I have shown that A, and by extension, Aziz Ansari, violated interpretive norms, and in so doing, did something wrong; had they followed interpretive norms properly, they would have interpreted their interlocutors properly. This means that they are responsible, in some sense, for their failure to understand. Just what kind of responsibility this is remains to be seen, but we now have useful tools for interrogating this problem.

In the next chapter, I offer a more thorough justification for the view that there are normative constraints on conversational exchanges that allow us to explain why defective conversational exchanges are sometimes blameworthy. The normative constraints I consider in Chapter 2 are not the same as the Constraint on Hearer Context. In fact, they constrain how new updates are made to one's interpretive context as a result of new utterances, rather than the inclusion of propositions in one's context that may not have their source in previous utterances made during the conversation. Nevertheless, the reasoning in Chapter 2 offers some normative grounds for positing communicative norms. These grounds should offer justification for a requirement like the Constraint on Hearer Context as well.

Chapter 2: Conversational Norms and the Obligation to Update

In Chapter 1, I argued that we should re-evaluate how we understand the notion of conversational context. What plays the functional role that context is supposed to play in utterance interpretation cannot be shared between conversational participants—it cannot be the common ground. Instead, we should understand context to be relativized to individual agents. I employed this understanding of context to help explain how certain kinds of misunderstanding—in Chapter 1, I focused on misunderstandings regarding the speech acts of consent and refusal—are not just cases of misunderstanding, but cases of *blameworthy* misunderstanding. Although I offered a suggestion for one prescriptive normative requirement, the violation of which can result in blameworthy misunderstanding, my defense was incomplete. For one, the requirement was put in terms of an entitlement on the part of the speaker, yet I did not specify what kind of entitlement. Nor did I specify anything about what the normative grounds of the Constraint on Hearer Context might be, or what the normative force of the Constraint is. In this chapter, I argue for a different, though related, conversational obligation which I call the Requirement to Update. Unlike the Constraint on Hearer Context, which constrains what propositions can permissibly be included in the context, the Requirement to Update is a requirement to update one's context in appropriate ways given new contributions to the conversation.

To see why we need a distinct normative requirement on how participants update their contexts based on new contributions to a conversation, consider a familiar example:

IGNORED ASSOCIATE

A is a woman who works in a male-dominated field, and most of her colleagues at work are men. In a meeting one day, she makes an assertion, expressing proposition *p*. Although her contribution doesn't yield a great deal of discussion and she feels like the importance of her point wasn't taken seriously, she has no reason to think she was ignored until one of her colleagues, call him B, makes a nearly identical utterance to hers. The man leading the meeting, C, cuts in to say, "B makes a great point. I think this should really influence the way we think about this issue going forward."

The events that take place in *Ignored Associate* are familiar to most women, and particularly to women who work in fields or offices in which their colleagues are primarily men. In these cases, a woman's speech can go unheard in a room full of men, despite the fact that precisely the same utterances are treated seriously when they are later put forward by men.[23] We might want to give an account of what is going wrong here by appealing to the phenomenon of silencing (Maitra 2009), discursive injustice (Kukla 2014), or testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007[24]). But whatever each of these approaches has to say about what is going on in *Ignored Associate*, they can't account for the fact that cases like this should be communicatively bizarre. If we accept standard ways of conceptualizing

[23] Several studies and a great deal of anecdotal and journalistic reporting has backed up this point (Rowe 1981, Burris 2012, Sandberg and Grant 2015, Chira 2017, McClean et al 2018).

[24] Fricker (2007) does mention an example that resembles *Ignored Associate* as an example of what she calls, "everyday testimonial injustice in the workplace" (46-47), though Fricker does not give a detailed analysis of the cases. While I think it plausible that there are fruitful things to say about this as a variety of testimonial injustice, it will shortly become clear why there is also a distinctive kind of communicative violation that goes beyond the phenomenon of testimonial injustice.

conversational dynamics, new utterances are supposed to change the state of the conversational context in particular ways. For instance, here is a set of principles that, together, spell out what should have happened in *Ignored Associate*:

1. An assertion is a proposal to add a proposition—the content of the assertion—to the context (Stalnaker 1978).
2. When a proposal is made to add a proposition to the context, participants in the conversation must respond to the proposal either by adding it to the context or objecting and leaving it out (Stalnaker 1978, Ginzburg 2012).
3. It is inappropriate to propose the addition of a proposition that is already included in the context (Stalnaker 2002).

If we accept all three principles, it becomes clear why *Ignored Associate* is so bizarre as a conversational exchange: A engaged in an ordinary conversational practice of making an assertion, yet her assertion got no uptake. It is not just that her assertion was misunderstood, or that it was dismissed; it seems not to have had any effect at all on the context of the exchange. It was clearly not accepted, or else B would not have been able to re-assert *p* felicitously. Yet if the participants had objected to *p*, then it is not clear why they wouldn't also object when B makes his assertion.

Ignored Associate is a case in which the parties to the conversation seem to have done something wrong: denying someone the ability to participate in a normal conversation is a way of undermining a kind of communicative agency. This undermining of agency constitutes a straightforward harm. After all, the ability to engage as a communicating agent is a central aspect of

being able to engage as an agent in the social world.[25] But *Ignored Associate* illustrates a further point: some communicative harm is directly related to conversational participants' engagement with the *context* of a conversation; sometimes a conversational participant can be blameworthy when they fail to properly understand and update the context of a conversation. Rachel McKinney (2015) argues that in some cases, conversational participants owe one another *interpretive labor*, and failing to perform interpretive labor for someone else is impermissible, in part because it is a failure to treat one's interlocutor as "an agent worthy of consideration, respect, and recognition" (94).

In this paper, I will explore the nature and source of this kind of conversational obligation. I will argue that *Ignored Associate* illustrates a violation of the Requirement to Update, which requires that participants appropriately update their conversational context in accordance with new contributions to the conversation. This requirement derives from a principle I call the Update Presumption—that there is a mutual presumption between participants that each will update their context in accordance with new contributions to the conversation—which can be thought of as an analog of Bach and Harnish's (1979) Communicative Presumption. However, while the Communicative Presumption is a precondition for attempting to engage in conversation in the first place, the Update presumption can be violated within a conversation, as is the case in *Ignored Associate*. One way the Update Presumption can be violated is when a participant violates the Requirement to Update, which is derived in part from the Update Presumption and an associated Update Entitlement. I'll argue that the Requirement to Update is a normative requirement on

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[25] Gunn (2018) makes roughly this point, arguing that that there is a unified explanation for the wrongs of epistemic injustice and the kinds of communicative injustice discussed by Maitra (2009), Kukla (2014), and others: all of these phenomena involve an undermining of what she calls *social-epistemic agency*.

conversational participants, the violation of which can result in criticizable engagement in a conversation.

To establish the claims I make in this paper, I'll start by carving out the domain on which I will be focusing, noting that the kind of update I am interested in is drawn from Stalnaker's notion of *acceptance*. This will allow me to distinguish, in the second section, the phenomenon under discussion from testimonial injustice, which is a related but distinct phenomenon. Next, I will articulate the Update Presumption and defend my claim that it is a default presumption that conversational participants make throughout conversations. I will then argue that the Update Presumption is not just a default presumption about conversational participants; it gives rise to entitlements on the part of speakers and associated obligations on the part of conversational participants, the Update Entitlement and the Requirement to Update, respectively. To make this claim, I will appeal to Michael Bratman's (2014) work on shared agency, noting that conversation has the relevant features of Bratman's notion of *shared activity* necessary to give rise to interpersonal obligations.

A terminological note before diving in: in Chapter 1 I defended the account of *interpretive context*. I argued that the proper understanding of 'context' in general is that of interpretive context. Thus, in this chapter, I will use 'context' throughout in a way that is consistent with my account of interpretive context. Throughout the chapter, I speak of individual agents updating contexts, and ultimately I speak of participants being blameworthy for features of *their* contexts. Those who object to my arguments in Chapter 1 need not dismiss this chapter entirely, however; they should be able to simply replace my use of 'context' with 'representation of the context', 'beliefs about what is included in the context', or even 'presuppositions' where necessary. The important thing is that

when an individual participant makes an update, they are adjusting the set of presuppositions that they take to be pertinent for utterance interpretation and production. For me, that means that the participant is adjusting their context, but for those who adopt a shared-context view, the participant only adjusts what they *take* to be included in the context.

2.1 Context Updates

In order to make clear what is at stake in this discussion, we must get clear on what it takes to update a context. This requires that we have at least a general understanding of what contexts are and, in particular, what it takes to adjust or update a context. In this section, I will give a broad understanding of the nature of context by giving an account of the notion of *acceptance,* which, according to Robert Stalnaker (1978) is the attitude a participant must take toward a proposition in order for it to be included in the context of an exchange.[26] Some of this will be a reiteration of the discussion provided in Chapter 1, but I will highlight features of context and acceptance that are particularly useful for establishing an understanding of what it takes to *update* a context.

On Stalnaker's view, the context of an exchange is the set of mutually accepted propositions. Acceptance is an attitude of treating a proposition as true for the purpose of a conversation. The participant who accepts a proposition *p* need not believe that *p* actually is true in order to treat it as

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[26] Strictly speaking, Stalnaker's claim is that a proposition is included in the context—what he calls the "common ground"—just in case each participant accepts the proposition and each participant believes that all participants accept it, and each participant believes that each participant believes that all accept it, and so on. As I noted above, many views of context are *shared context views*. Stalnaker's is one of these, and thus differs from my own view. Nevertheless, I appeal to his notion of acceptance in an effort to get clear on what it is we are talking about when we are talking about context.

true for the purpose of the exchange. Conversely, a participant need not accept for the purpose of a conversation every proposition that she believes. We can illustrate the fact that belief is neither necessary nor sufficient for acceptance with an example. Consider the proposition expressed by (1):

1. The moon landing was a hoax.

If I believe the proposition expressed by (1), I need not accept it in each conversation in which I take part—that is, I need not include it in the context of every conversation. Consider: I may believe that the moon landing was a hoax, but I know that most of those with whom I engage do not believe this and will scorn me for my commitment to this view. This leads me to avoid presupposing the proposition expressed by (1) in most conversational exchanges and treating as true, for the purpose of conversation, that the moon landing really happened. This means that despite the fact that I believe that the moon landing was a hoax, I generally do not include it in my context in conversational exchanges.

And conversely, if I disbelieve the proposition expressed by (1), I may still accept it for the purpose of a given conversation and include it in the context. Consider: I may have a loved one who believes so strongly that the moon landing was a hoax that I cannot engage in a sustained conversation with them without treating it as true, for the purpose of the exchange, that the moon landing was a hoax. In order to connect with my loved one, I might frequently accept the proposition expressed by (1) for the sake of the conversation even if I disbelieve that the moon landing was a hoax. I treat it as true for the purpose of the exchange, and thereby include it in my context. But of course, this does not mean that I believe that the moon landing was a hoax.

This illustrates how the attitude of conversational acceptance, which determines what is included in the context of a conversation, differs from belief and why it is uniquely suited to represent the context: acceptance is an attitude that individuals adopt when they take there to be reason to think that the accepted proposition is pertinent to producing appropriate utterances and interpreting utterances appropriately in the conversation. On some views, acceptance is treated as an attitude that is transparent to the acceptor: if one accepts that *p*, then one also *believes* of oneself that one accepts that *p*.[27] I am not committed to the transparency of acceptance. Note that we can sometimes come to realize we have been treating a belief as though it is true for the purpose of the conversation, despite the fact that we did not previously mean to accept the proposition for the purpose of the exchange. For instance, one might come to realize that a prejudice or bias has influenced what they have included in the context of the exchange—thereby influencing how they interpret certain utterances—and thus, it has influenced what they can accurately claim to accept, even if they did not previously realize that they had adopted an attitude of acceptance toward certain propositions related to the bias. And of course, if one comes to realize that a bias or prejudice has been included in their context, there was a period of time when they included it in the context without realizing they were doing so. Surely it is possible, then, to accept a proposition without ever realizing that you have accepted the proposition—indeed, it seems likely that in most cases in which bias or prejudice influence one's context, one never comes to realize the influence that bias has on

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[27] To be precise, Stalnaker (2002) takes it to be the case that in order for something to count as part of the common ground, each participant must accept the proposition, and each participant must believe that it is mutually accepted. Because Stalnaker's understanding of acceptance is as an attitude that is meant to build into a shared context, it is transparent to a participant not just that *she* accepts the proposition, but that she accepts it *and* takes her interlocutor to accept it.

their context. Thus, it would seem that acceptance likely is not—or is not necessarily—a transparent attitude.

We have seen what it is to accept a proposition and why it makes sense to think that a participant's context is determined by what propositions they accept for the purpose of a conversational exchange. But we have not yet seen the role that acceptance plays in the dynamics of context or what it takes to update a context. This notion of acceptance applies not just to the elements that are already in the context; we also add new propositions to the common ground by accepting them. For instance, when a conversational participant makes an assertion, Stalnaker understands this speech act as a move to propose that the content of the assertion is added to the context (1978). In response, a participant can either accept the proposal, and thereby accept the proposition, or a participant can object to the proposal and thereby reject the proposition.[28] If the hearer accepts the proposition, it is immediately added to their context.[29] If the hearer objects to the proposition, it is kept out of the context.

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[28] Ginzburg 1996, 2012 argues that there is a third option: often participants respond to assertions by opening them up as a topic of dialogue. For instance, if the assertion is contested, but not so contested that the hearer is comfortable rejecting the assertion outright, they might try to open it up for a discussion about whether it is true. Think, for instance, of someone who responds to an assertion with, "Really? Are you sure?" This is clearly not an acceptance of the proposition, but is also not a straightforward rejection; the responder is aiming to open up a further conversation about the truth of the proposition. A further question I will not take up at present is whether there is a distinct category of response to an assertion in which the hearer *does not accept* the proposition expressed, but also neither rejects the proposition nor opens it as a topic of conversation.

[29] On my view of interpretive context, this is a straightforward matter: a proposition is added to an individual participant's context just in case that participant accepts the proposition for the purpose of the conversation. On Stalnaker's view, in which context is a shared common ground between participants, the explanation is slightly more involved. An individual's acceptance is not enough to ensure that a proposition will be included in the context. Rather, there must be mutual, transparent acceptance. All parties must accept the proposition and all parties must *believe* that all parties accept the proposition.

Although I will be engaging most directly with resources drawn from Stalnaker's conception of conversational dynamics, I would be remiss to discuss the phenomenon of conversational contexts updates at any length without acknowledging the contributions to this topic made in the literature on dynamic semantics and dynamic pragmatics.[30] Dynamic semanticists offer developments upon the basic notion of context updating that we have seen so far (Roberts 2012). This view conceptualizes context as a structured set of information that represents both the aim of the exchange and the information already put forward in the exchange. On this view, each conversation, at any given stage, has an ordered set, or "stack," of questions. The top question is the Questions Under Discussion (QUD), and cooperativity requires that participants aim to make their contributions helpful for answering the QUD. This may involve proposing an answer directly, or it may involve articulating a direction to explore in order to answer the QUD or an additional question that must be answered in order to address the QUD. In any case, contributions are understood as attempts to move forward the conversation in an attempt to answer the QUD, and as such, each contribution should result in some kind of update of the context set—either to take a question off the stack of questions, to add to the stack a question that must be answered in order to answer another question on the stack, or to offer contribution that moves participants closer to removing one or more questions from the stack. The QUD framework is broadly consistent with Stalnaker's account, but it offers additional resources for modelling the account.

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[30] Some might wonder at this choice to engage with the Stalanakarian discussion of update over the dynamic approach, given that the dynamic approach offers a more expansive and intricate understanding of the process of updating. My reasoning for this is that my discussion of context updates requires only a basic understanding of context updates at a contextual level, but I do not require a full framework for the analysis of updates, as well as consistency with Chapter 1.

The process of updating the context on the basis of new conversational contributions will be the central phenomenon I'll be focusing on in this paper. When I speak of 'updating,' I will often refer to the updating of the context via acceptance, since one must accept a new proposition in order to add it to the context. Yet it is important to note that updating includes *any* act that updates the context. I noted above that I am adopting from Stalnaker (1978) the view that an assertion counts as a proposal to add the proposition expressed to the context. In this case, update happens at several levels. First, participants update by adding the fact that the speaker made the assertion in question to the context. The making of the assertion is itself a "manifest event"—an event that should be recognized by all participants in the exchange as having happened, such that the fact of its occurrence should be added to the context. Next, they must make a further conversational move to update the context—either to accept the proposal and add the proposition to the context, or else to reject the proposal and exclude the proposition from the context. Either case counts as an update.

To see why it is crucial to update on the basis of rejection as well as acceptance, consider again *Ignored Associate*. What makes the case so strange is not that the content of A's assertion was not accepted; declining to accept the content of an assertion should, generally, be an available option for hearers. What is strange is that no update occurred at all. Consider what would have been permitted if the participants had updated properly, but rejected the content of A's assertion. In this case, B and C would have first included in their contexts the fact that A had made a proposal to add p to their contexts. They would then be under conversational pressure to resolve the proposal. Suppose they objected to p, thereby rejecting A's proposal. That fact should now be input into their contexts. Yet this makes it the case that, without some adjustment of other features of the situation, it should be difficult for p to subsequently be added to their contexts. This is why we find it odd that

B was able to assert *p* shortly after A unsuccessfully did so: provided that he added the fact of A's assertion to his context, either he rejected the proposal of *p* or he did not. If he did not, he should have added *p* to the context already, and thus be unable to re-assert it, but if he did, his context should reflect his rejection of *p*, subsequently making it difficult for anyone else to assert *p*.

2.2 Testimony and Epistemic Injustice

By highlighting the importance of the attitude of acceptance and the process of updating in context, I can now highlight an important difference between the topic of the present paper and those of the epistemology of testimony and epistemic injustice. I introduce these topics in order to note why, despite appearances, they are not identical to the discussion at hand. As will become clear over the course of this section, there are obvious ways in which these topics and phenomena are related, and it may be that in many cases, the violations of conversational obligations I'll be discussing will occur alongside, or partially constitute instances of epistemic injustice. Yet I hope to clarify the domain of my inquiry in part by distinguishing it from topics in epistemology.

In the epistemology of testimony, the fact that someone makes an assertion is often understood to give their addressees some reason (even if not sufficient reason) to *believe* the proposition expressed by their assertion. This is especially clear when we consider that many theorists take there to be a relatively strong norm of assertion: if it is impermissible to assert a proposition that one does not know (Williamson 1996), for instance, then in making an assertion that *p*, the speaker represents herself as knowing that *p*. In that case, provided the audience takes the speaker to be warranted in her assertion, they have a reason to take her to know that *p,* and thus,

they have a reason to believe that *p* is true. By focusing on a case like *Ignored Associate* with the resources from the epistemology of testimony in mind, one might think that what is going wrong in *Ignored Associate* might be a variety of testimonial injustice (Fricker 2007). On Fricker's account, testimonial injustice occurs when a speaker is assigned a credibility deficit due to features of their social position. Because A is a woman, her hearers treat her as less credible, which makes it the case that her assertions will be less likely to be believed compared with those of a male associate. She may ultimately be disbelieved as a result of this credibility deficit assigned due to her gender.

Despite certain commonalities between the phenomenon of testimonial injustice and the one illustrated in *Ignored Associate*, I do not take the primary reading of *Ignored Associate* to be merely one of testimonial injustice. The problem I am attempting to identify in the case is not that A was not believed, while B was. The problem is that A was not *heard*, while B was.[31] Testimonial injustice occurs when a conversational participant is assigned a credibility deficit, with the result that their contributions are less likely to be believed. Peet (2017) has expanded this account by relating it to the phenomenon of interpretive injustice, in which a participant's contribution might be interpreted

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[31] This resembles a distinction Wanderer (2011) makes between instances of epistemic injustice in which a speaker is ignored and those in which she is dismissed. Interestingly, Wanderer characterizes Fricker's (2007) account of epistemic injustice to describe cases in which a testifier's testimony is ignored on the basis their perceived credibility. Wanderer introduces a category of epistemic injustice in which a person's testimony is overtly rejected based on their social positioning. Given that my characterization of the terrain posits that Fricker's characterization of testimonial injustice is one in which the testifier's testimony is rejected, while I introduce a phenomenon in which a contribution is ignored, we might think that the terrain is a bit more complicated. Perhaps, at one end of the spectrum, is Wanderer's phenomenon of overt rejection of a speaker's testimony. In the middle are cases in which, due to their perceived credibility deficit, a testifier's utterance is simply not taken seriously, though it is heard. I am focusing my attention at the other end of the spectrum, where testimony is, for all intents and purposes, not even heard.

in a way they did not intend as a result of their social position.[32] But the problem that we encounter in *Ignored Associate* is neither of these. A is neither disbelieved nor misinterpreted; her utterance has no impact on the conversation at all.

A's utterance did not result in the kind of context update that is necessary if one's contributions are to make any difference at all in a communicative exchange. This means that the A's perceived credibility plays no role in the actual process of interpretation or in the determination of whether she should be believed; if her contribution is not taken up as something to be accepted or rejected, believed or disbelieved, then there is no reason for her hearers to evaluate her credibility, and thus, no opportunity for any credibility deficit to be assigned nor invoked. There is a nearby relative of *Ignored Associate* in which the problem at play is a problem of testimonial injustice, in which A is not believed by her interlocutors because they assign her a credibility deficit on the basis of her gender. In fact, in most cases like *Ignored Associate*, the phenomenon is probably not going to be purely a case of epistemic injustice or totally devoid of epistemic injustice. They will likely overlap. Yet the feature that distinguishes the cases I am interested in discussing at present is a feature that is not shared with testimonial injustice: the feature that A is ignored in such a way that she does not seem to be treated as a testifier in the first place.

Note that the problem I am identifying in *Ignored Associate* would present even if B, in presenting the very same assertion as A, faced objection when he asserted *p*. This is because the central problem in the case is not that A was not believed by particular individuals in the exchange, the problem is that A's utterance had no *effect* on the conversational context of the exchange. If B's

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[32] I make a similar point in Chapter 1.

assertion had been rejected, this would still be a case in which A's contribution had no effect on the context, while B's contribution did: the fact that B proposed to add *p* was added to the context, and the fact that participants objected to the proposal was added. It should be clear by now that the pressure to update one's context on the basis of new contributions is not an epistemic pressure; it is not (or not straightforwardly) a pressure to believe everything that is said. Instead, it is a pressure to respond in the right kind of way—either by accepting a proposition as true for the purpose of the conversation or by rejecting it. As I'll show, this communicative pressure has its roots in social and rational normativity.

2.3 The Update Presumption

It is widely accepted that in order to engage in conversation, we must presume a considerable amount about one another and about the world. For instance, Bach and Harnish (1979) argue that members of a linguistic community must mutually presume of one another that they are speaking the shared language of that community whenever they are engaged in conversation with one another. Bach and Harnish call this the Linguistic Presumption. They also argue that in order to intelligibly interpret another person's utterance, an individual must presume that their speaker spoke "with some recognizable illocutionary intent" (1979, 7). They call this the Communicative Presumption. Moreover, the common understanding of Grice's (1975) Cooperative Principle is that in order to interpret another person, we must presume that they are producing utterances

cooperatively—that they are making utterances that they take to be true, relevant, etc. in order to cooperatively engage in a productive exchange of information.[33]

Moreover, there is also a presumption that conversational participants share a significant amount of information about the world. Stalnaker's (1978, 2002) account of the common ground of an exchange has been influential in discussions of this point. On Stalnaker's view, common ground is necessary because it allows a participant to determine, for instance, what it means to presume cooperativity—what propositions they should presume their interlocutor takes to be true, relevant, etc. Moreover, presuming that an interlocutor shares certain facts is necessary not only for the hearer but also for the speaker. If one is to produce cooperative utterances, then they must have an understanding of the common ground in order to know what they need to cooperate *with*.

Stalnaker's notion of common ground is one that is dynamic, changing over time as participants make new contributions, thereby adding new propositions to the context. The context changes over time as a result of what happens within the conversation and the updates that participants make to the context as a result of new contributions. I propose that there is another presumption that conversational participants must make: the presumption on the part of all participants in a conversational exchange that all other participants update what they take to be included in the common ground based on new utterances. I call this the *Update Presumption*. Perhaps it is odd or surprising that I would argue that there is a *presumption* that participants update. After all, one might think that is simply a descriptive fact about conversation that participants update on the basis of new information; updating a context to track new contributions *just is what it is* to engage in a

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[33] For a fuller discussion of the Cooperative Principle and how it should be understood in light of my commitments about context, see Chapter 3.

conversation. The fact that there is a presumption that participants must update on the basis of new contributions thus appears to be almost trivial: if this is a descriptive fact about how conversations are updated, it might not be clear why we need to articulate it.

I think we need to articulate the Update Presumption in the same way that Bach and Harnish needed to articulate the Linguistic Presumption and the Communicative Presumption. It seems close to trivial to specify that in order to interpret a speaker's utterance one needs to presume that they are speaking a language that the hearer will be able to identify and understand. It seems close to trivial to specify that that in order to interpret a speaker's utterance one needs to presume that the speaker intended to communicate some recognizable content.[34] These presumptions seem close to trivial in the sense that they seem to be built into the very notion of what we take ourselves to be doing in communicating linguistically with one another. But note that it is also important to be able to articulate these presumptions in order to articulate how effective communication happens. Bach and Harnish take these presumptions to be essential building blocks for important theoretical work. Just as the presumptions they articulated are, in a sense, *supposed* to be obvious, I aim to do the same. In articulating the Update Presumption, I do not mean to introduce any new or controversial idea—that part will come later. Rather, I aim to articulate something that is already treated as an assumption in the philosophical literature. Namely, that in conversational exchanges we have an Update Presumption:

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[34] Bach and Harnish's Linguistic and Communicative Presumptions, like the Update Presumption, are not strictly trivial. It is true that we can misapply these presumptions. For instance, sometimes a hearer will falsely presume that a speaker is speaking a language the hearer can understand. So the presumption cannot be literally trivial. However, any time participants are *communicating* within an exchange, the linguistic and communicative presumptions can be trivially applied. If they couldn't, the participants could not communicate.

> *The Update Presumption* (UP): The mutual belief between conversational participants that each participant updates their context in a way that is appropriate given events within the conversation.

When I make an utterance, in other words, I presume that you will update the contents of your context, and you presume that I will have updated the contents of my context. This appears trivial in the sense that it seems like this just is what it is to be engaged in a conversational exchange. It is not clear why I should produce any utterances at all if I don't expect that you will update on the basis of them, and it is not clear why you would enter into a conversation with me if you don't expect me to update on the basis of your utterances, or still less, if you don't expect me to update on the basis of *my own* utterances.[35] If you didn't expect me to update on the basis of my own utterances, it is not clear that you take me to be a rational conversational participant at all, and you surely don't take me to be a person with whom you can engage in a rational project of gaining knowledge through conversation.

But what does it take to update "in a way that is appropriate given events within the conversation?" If what I mean is that there is a mutual belief between conversational participants that each will update their understanding of the context *in the way that the speaker intended*, then despite

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[35] Perhaps it is not obvious that there is a presumption that the *speaker* must update on the basis of her own utterances. After all, surely speaker's already believe, or have reason to put forth, the content of their utterance. But remember that acceptance is not the same as belief. The updating I am concerned with is not merely an updating of belief states of individuals, but with the updating of conversational contexts. Often, what happens when a speaker makes an utterance is that they take a belief they already hold and, in uttering it, aim to add it to the context of all participants.

the apparent obviousness of the presumption, it would be false. Intuitively, and as we saw above, one permissible move in the update process is to object to new assertions, with the effect that context isn't changed in the way that the speaker intended. The speaker of an utterance ordinarily intends that their audience will add the content of their assertion to the context as an accepted proposition. In objecting to an assertion, the hearer declines to add the proposition expressed by the assertion to their context, thereby declining to do that which the speaker intended for them to do.

What then do I mean when I say that we presume that participants will update in a way that is appropriate? I mean two things: in order to update appropriately, a participant must update based on manifest events, and they must update based on the content of speech acts.

Updating Based on Manifest Events

When something happens in the environment of a conversation that can be reasonably expected by both parties to have been noticed by both parties, this is known as a *manifest event* (Stalnaker 2002). Usually, when a manifest event occurs, the fact of its occurrence is immediately added into the context of the conversation;[36] it becomes mutually accepted that the event occurred, and participants can, and often will, refer back to the event without any additional introduction of the event or its features. Events are likely to count as manifest when they are highly notable or

[36] Camp (2018) notes that not all manifest facts can be referenced. If, for instance, I say or do something embarrassing in your presence, and is clear to both of us that I would rather you didn't know that I said or did it, you might graciously treat it as though it is not manifest to you. In some cases this may allow us to act as though the event is not a part of the context of our exchange, perhaps even saying, "I didn't see/hear anything." For the purposes of conversation, this effectively makes it the case that it is not included in the conversational context at all.

highly salient to the exchange. For instance, if a riot breaks out in the street outside where you and I are meeting for coffee, this is a manifest event. I can say, looking toward the street,

2. Do you think we'll be able to get home safely?

Moreover, I don't need to introduce *why* our safety getting home is a pertinent question, because the riot is a manifest event for us: it is already included in our contexts. In contrast, if a friend had just texted me letting me know of riots half a mile away, I could not utter (2) without first mentioning to you that I'd learned of these riots.[37] Otherwise, you would have no reason to accept, with me, that there is a question of our safety. In fact, even if a friend texted both of us to let us know of the riots, if I do not have good reason to think you've seen the text, I cannot utter (2). I must first say something like,

3. Did you see D's text? There are riots half a mile away. Do you think we'll be able to get home safely?

One way that an event can be manifest to all conversational participants is if it is an element of the conversational exchange itself. When a conversational participant performs a speech act, this counts as a manifest event (Stalnaker 2002, 708). Once a speech act has been performed, the fact

[37] Note that if I were to try to utter (2) without first explaining, the most natural response would be for you to ask, "Why wouldn't we be able to get home safely?" thereby asking me to explain precisely that information which I failed to provide you with before.

that it was performed is manifest to both (or all) parties and clearly is pertinent to the context of the conversation, since it was presented as a pertinent contribution to the conversation. Thus, once the speech act is performed, the fact that it was performed should be added to the context.[38] According to the Update Presumption, each participant not only adjusts their understanding of the context to reflect the new utterance, she also presumes that the other will do so as well.

Suppose, for instance, that in a conversation between E and F, E makes the following assertion:

4. There are riots a half mile down Main Street.

Normally, F will immediately treat the fact that E asserted (4) as a new element of the context—they will, by default, *update* the context to reflect that E has asserted (4). Moreover, both parties will normally *presume* of their interlocutor that they have added the fact that E asserted (4) to their context. This is true regardless of whether F is inclined to believe E and regardless of whether or not F already knows that there are riots down Main Street.

E and F update the context based on the utterance of (4) because its utterance is a manifest event. To simply neglect to add manifest events into one's context is to ignore something about the

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[38] I set aside for now an important but difficult complication: sometimes, although it is manifest to all parties that the speaker said something, it is not manifest to all parties which speech act the speaker performed. If, for instance, the speaker intended to issue a request but the hearer takes the speaker to have issued an order, then there may not be any particular speech act that is manifest to both parties. See Johnson (2019) for a discussion of speech act pluralism. Even in such a case, it should be manifest to both/all parties *that* a speech act was performed, even if there is no agreement about *which* speech act was performed.

conversational exchange that has been explicitly introduced as a part of the context. It is not only strange to ignore it, it may also be irrational; conversation is often understood as a rational goal-oriented activity (Grice 1975) in which parties attempt to reach certain conversational goals or to learn more about the world by sharing information with one another (Stalnaker 2002). To neglect to add pertinent information (in this case, the fact that E asserted (4), not the information provided by the utterance of (4)) is to decline certain information that is presented as though it is relevant to this project of realizing communicative goals. To do so is, in a way, means-end irrational, since one has intentionally entered into a rational goal-oriented activity with another person, then ignored what that person presents as important for pursuing the goals of the activity.

There are, of course, exceptions. If F is clearly distracted when E asserts (4), or if F has just put on headphones, or if E, so surprised by the news of the riots, forgets that F doesn't speak English, then E has less reason, or perhaps no reason, to think that F now treats the fact that E asserted (4) as a part of the context.[39] Nevertheless, under standard conditions, when E asserts (4), E and F can mutually presume that the other has updated the context to include the fact that E asserted (4).

Updating Based on the Content of Speech Acts

But it would surely be strange if all that happened was that E and F added the fact that E asserted (4) to the context. This is because, as we saw above, assertions can be understood as

[39] Note that in these sorts of circumstances, it might still be the case that E can expect that F heard that E said something or other, which itself counts as a manifest event. This is why F might respond, "What was that? I missed it," or, "Français, s'il vous plait."

proposals to add the content of the assertion to the context (Stalnaker 1978). What it is to update the context with the fact that E asserted (4) just is to add to the context a proposal regarding what else to add. That is, when we update the context based on speech acts *as manifest events*, we are updating the context with possible ways to further influence the context. Once the fact that an assertion has been made is added to the context, this puts participants under a kind of conversational pressure, due to the very nature of the speech act in question, to resolve the proposal, either by adding the proposition expressed by the assertion to the context or by declining to add it (Stalnaker 1978, Ginzburg 2012).

The pressure to resolve the proposal (at least in the case of assertion) falls primarily on the hearer, since the speaker, by offering the proposal, has clearly come out in favor of adding the proposition expressed by the assertion to the context. At certain points Stalnaker's claim is slightly stronger: assertion is not just a proposal that can be accepted or rejected; rather, what it is to make an assertion, "is to reduce the context set[40] in a particular way, provided that there are no objections from the other participants in the conversation" (Stalnaker 1978, 186). That is, Stalnaker suggests that assertion is a proposal, where the acceptance is the default result unless a hearer objects.

I should note that nowhere, as far as I can tell, does Stalnaker claim that a rejection must be an explicit or overt rejection. It may be the case that a proposal counts as having been rejected even

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[40] Note that I have been talking about updates in terms of "additions," while here Stalnaker speaks of "reducing" the context set. This is not actually a difference in the substance of the way that we understand context. The difference is that I have been speaking in terms of the *addition of propositions*, which is equivalent to the *reduction of possible worlds*. Stalnaker here is speaking of the context as a set of possible worlds rather than a set of propositions, though these will end up being equivalent, since what it is to add a proposition to a set of (consistent) propositions is to reduce the number of worlds consistent with that set.

if a hearer internally, without verbalizing any objection, can count as having rejected the proposal.[41] However, according to the Update Presumption the speaker has reason to presume that the hearer has appropriately updated their context in light of the speaker's contribution. This means that the hearer has either added the proposition to the context or rejected the inclusion of the proposition in the context. If they do not voice, or otherwise overtly indicate, objection, this will often be sufficient for the speaker to presume that the content of their contribution will be added to the hearer's context. The explanation for this is in part the practical consideration that in general, this approach will lead to greater communicative success while minimizing communicative effort. After all, if conversation is, among other things, an effort to bring participants' contexts into ever closer alignment, then when an assertion is made to which the hearer objects, they should make clear their objection in an effort to align with their interlocutor. Thus, absent such an objection, the speaker would have no reason to expect that the hearer rejects the proposal.

To reinforce the force of this reasoning, consider the conversational burden that would be required if this presumption were false, and a failure to outwardly object were not standardly sufficient evidence to think that the hearer accepts the proposition. This would mean that

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[41] This is consistent with Stalnaker's account of common ground, on which something is common ground just in case it is mutually believed to be common ground. Provided that a hearer does not accept the proposition expressed with an assertion, this is sufficient to make it the case that the proposition is not a part of the common ground. However, there is some reason to think that, on a Stalnakarian picture, we should expect that there is a default requirement that participants give some sort of overt indication of objection. This is because, since, in order for a proposition to be included in the common ground, it must be believed by both parties to be accepted by both parties, a participant who silently objects to an assertion should recognize that their interlocutor might believe that the hearer accepts the proposition. The silently objecting hearer, then, would have reason to expect that the common ground could become misaligned by virtue of their failure to openly object. Thus, it is more effective and efficient to preserve the alignment by making an overt objection in most cases.

conversational participants would require some kind of overt assurance of the acceptance of each assertion that is made. Given the cognitive and conversational limitations of humans, we might expect that merely to reduce the effort required to accept an assertion, there should be a default presumption that the hearer accepts unless they provide reason to think they haven't accepted. This presumption seems to fit with the facts: it does not seem that conversational participants do offer overt assurance of acceptance with each assertion made; often they hear an assertion and simply take it up, moving along with the conversation. The descriptive facts, then, suggest that conversational participants do not always need to offer overt assurance of their acceptance of assertions.

In addition, the influence of context in conversational dynamics might be expected to reduce the need for overt acceptance of new assertions. After all, ordinarily and ideally, there is a great deal of overlap in the contexts of conversational participants. This overlap is supposed to enable participants to anticipate which new utterances are likely to be relevant, helpful, and easily understandable by their interlocutors. If we accept that participants can often expect that there is a large degree of overlap between participants' beliefs about the conversation, including the context and the goals of the exchange, requiring overt acceptance would be almost redundant; common belief allows us to assume a great deal, including that our interlocutors will object when necessary.

Note that overt objection need not be vocalized. Raising one's eyebrows and shaking one's head, for instance, are usually perfectly good ways of objecting in face-to-face conversations. A skeptical look might be enough to indicate to a speaker that their proposal was rejected. Moreover, the Update Presumption should *not* be understood as strong enough to offer an indefeasible presumption that the proposition expressed by an assertion is accepted unless there is overt objection. Again, suppose that F was checking their phone when E asserted (4), and became

distracted just after E's assertion. They added the fact that E asserted (4) to their context but got distracted before they could consider the assertion as a proposal. Once they come to, it would not be inappropriate for them verbally object, even if the conversation has progressed during the time they were distracted. In other words, this is a case in which E should not presume that F has accepted the content of (4), even if E can know that they added the fact that E asserted (4) to the context.[42]

We should now be able to see two things that the Update Presumption allows participants to presume: 1) that both parties (normally) treat the fact that an utterance was made as part of the context, and 2) that both parties (normally) adjust the context according to the intended effect of the speech act,[43] provided that there was no indication of objection or other defeating conditions on the conversational exchange. So far, we have an understanding of how participants normally update their contexts as a result of new speech acts that broadly aligns with the Stalnakarian picture. Stalnaker, of course, does not talk in terms of the *presumption* that participants will update appropriately. He seems to think that they simply will; this just is how conversational dynamics

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[42] One might think that a further objection is the role that power plays in a conversational exchange. If E is the volatile and abusive boyfriend of F, for instance, who often becomes violent when he thinks that F is challenging his authority, it does not seem like E should be justified in assuming that F will verbally object when she rejects the content of his assertion, since doing so might be dangerous for her. However, I do not think that this gives a counterexample or exception to our expectation that F will update based on the utterance, even if F internally objects. While it may be true that E should not presume that F *believes* (3), it seems entirely appropriate to expect that E will presume that F accepts (3) *for the purpose of the conversation*. As I have noted, conversational acceptance does not require belief, and if E becomes violent if F objects to (3), we have every reason to think he will become violent as well if F fails to treat it as true, for the purpose of the conversation, that there is a riot going on a half mile down Main Street.

[43] Note that I have limited myself to instances in which the hearer's understanding of the intended force of the speaker's utterance is aligns with the speaker's intention. I certainly do not mean to presuppose that all cases are like this.

work. The significance of the difference between Stalnaker's view that updating is a simple descriptive fact about conversational dynamics and my view that there is (warranted) presumption that participants update will become clearer shortly.

2.4 The Requirement to Update

We have seen that there is reason to think that conversational participants presume, and have a kind of practical justification in presuming, that the other conversational participants will update the context in a way that is warranted by the conversational exchange. In this section, I will argue that this presumption is not only justified, it gives rise to a social and rational *entitlement* to expect of one's interlocutors that they will update appropriately. Moreover if a conversational participant is entitled to expect certain things of their interlocutor, this suggests that their interlocutor has an obligation, of some kind, to bring their actions into alignment with this expectation.

Why should we think that the fact that conversational participants are justified in presuming certain things gives rise to entitlements or obligations? And in what sense are they justified? After all, it is not clear that other conversational presumptions give rise to similar obligations—Bach and Harnish (1987) articulate the linguistic presumption—that there is a mutual belief in a linguistic community that participants in the community will speak their shared language in conversation. But this presumption certainly does not obligate members of any community to only ever speak the language of that community. It does not necessarily even oblige members of that community to only

ever speak the language of the community with other members of the community.[44] So why should we think that the UP should obligate conversational participants to update in any particular way?

In order to make the case for my claim, I will appeal to a line of reasoning from Michael Bratman (2014), who argues that participants engaging in shared intentional action sometimes (though not necessarily) take on obligations to act in particular ways as a part of the activity in which they are engaged. I will not be arguing for the claim that conversation is a variety of shared activity. Yet as we will see, in order to follow Bratman's line of reasoning, there is no need to establish first that conversations are a variety of shared activity. This is because Bratman does not argue that there is anything about shared activity that gives it a distinctive kind of normativity; rather, he derives the obligations participants in shared activities have to each other from ordinary rational principles and moral obligations. Thus, I will be arguing that shared intentional action and conversation share relevant features in common, allowing me to use roughly the same reasoning Bratman uses to establish that conversational participants have (in at least some circumstances) obligations to one another.

2.4.1 Rationality

According to Bratman's view, G and H have a shared intention if each of G and H has an intention that together, G and H intend to engage in action *J*, and if these intentions are *interdependent*

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[44] This is clear when there is a dominant language in a linguistic community, but some members of the community are also members of a different linguistic community.

in the right way.[45] That is, G's intention to *J* with H is dependent on H's intention to *J* with G, and vice versa. Moreover, the persistence of G's intention over time must depend on the persistence of H's intention over time, and vice versa. As Bratman notes, this will result in a rational pressure that each intend and act in certain ways, and that each is *responsive* to the other's actions and intentions (Bratman 2014, 108). Bratman notes that sharing an intention with another person puts one in a position in which their intentions are interconnected with others. Because rationality requires that we act in a way that is consistent with our intentions, and because in shared activity, our intentions are interconnected with those of others, our rationality becomes dependent on the intentions of others. Suppose, for instance, that G and H intend to walk their dog together. Suppose further that in order for them to walk their dog together, they must put the collar on the dog and fetch the leash. By convention, each of them always does one of these things. Suppose on this occasion, G put the collar on the dog. This means that, by convention, H should fetch the leash. There is now a rational pressure on H to do so: if H intends to walk the dog with G, and in order to walk the dog with G, H must fetch the leash, then H would be failing to act in accordance with H's own intention if H failed to fetch the leash. Moreover, if H fails to be responsive to G's actions, and goes to find the collar instead of fetching the leash, H has, again, had a sort of rational breakdown. This might seem overly strong. After, all, it is surely not uncommon for someone in H's position to absentmindedly fail to notice that G has put the collar on the dog. But note that this is, in broad terms, a rational breakdown: H is not doing what H rationally must do in order take the dog on a walk with G. What it is to absentmindedly fail to notice G's actions *is* to fail to be properly rationally responsive to G's

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[45] There are many other conditions on Bratman's account of shared intention. This is all that is necessary for our argument to go through.

activity. This is not to say that H thereby fails to be a rational agent at all; only that in this case, they are not acting in accordance with the rational requirement on them: to act in accordance with their intention, in part by taking into account their interlocutor's actions and intentions.

Whether or not conversation resembles other shared actions in all of the ways reflected above, note that it crucially resembles shared action in the sense that it is an activity in which each participant has an intention of some sort—to realize some conversational goal or aim—the realization of which requires that the participant is responsive to and in part dependent on their interlocutors' (conversational) actions and intentions. That is, participants have an intention, the realization of which requires that they *update* adequately based on the contributions of the other party. Although I have not established that this intention that a conversational participant has is an intention that is shared with another participant, I need not establish that in order to appeal to Bratman's argument. Bratman relies on the fact that an individual bears a rational pressure to do what is required to realize *their own goals*. The conversational participant bears the same pressure. Thus to fail to update adequately based on the contributions of the other party is, by the reasoning we saw above, a rational breakdown of a kind.

To see this, consider a case: Suppose M wishes to go to a park but doesn't know which parks are nearby, so they ask N. If M subsequently ignores what N says, this is rationally indefensible. After all, M has an intention (to go to the park) and undertook a particular action (consulting with N) as an instrumental step toward the relevant action (going to the park). If M fails to do their part in the conversational exchange (namely, update based on N's response), then they are failing to do what is necessary, given M's own intention!

2.4.2 Obligation

Bratman further argues that shared intentions often involve obligations between parties to the shared intentions. This is because in many cases, when participants share an intention, they have, in effect, given one another certain assurances (Bratman 2014, 110): the assurance that they will maintain their intention as long as the other participant does, and that they will do their part—they will do what they (rationally) must in order to realize the shared intention. Once there is a mutual assurance between participants that they will act in certain ways, this justifies each party in relying on the other, and they become answerable to one another; they take on an obligation to one another.

Bratman specifies that these are moral obligations because they are derived not from any features unique to shared intention, but from the ways in which shared intentions can involve interrelations between participants that we independently recognize as moral. I accept that in many cases, these assurances will result in moral obligations. After all, the assurances participants offer to one another is often morally relevant: participants may give one another assurance that their intentions have the proper kind of interdependence by making promises, for instance. But it is not obvious to me that these obligations *must* be moral, particularly in cases of conversation. The assurance that conversational participants engage in in conversation more closely resembles the collection of attitudes Karen Jones picks out in discussing trust, reliance, and the *counting-on relation*, in which one party counts on another. Jones argues that reliance and trust are ways of being dependent on others that are subject to norms, but not always moral norms. Trust, she argues, "is about making agency *effective* by drawing on the agency of others rather than about making it *good*" (Jones 2017, 102). This effectively captures the dynamics of conversation: when we rely on others in conversation, we are relying on others to help us to more effectively realize our conversational goals.

This reliance does not necessarily touch on moral interests. Instead, it is a way of joining our agency with others' in order to make it more effective. Rarely in conversation do parties offer a robust or explicit assurance to one another that they will engage in the conversation in any particular way, or help their interlocutor reach any particular conversational goals. Instead, in conversation one tends to rely on their interlocutor to help them realize their conversational goals, but that reliance is not necessarily due to any kind of overt, morally weighty assurance.

Consider again M, who wants to find a park and determines that they will locate a nearby park by approaching a stranger, N and asking them. M has, in a sense, made themself reliant on N for realizing their goal, but N does not have a moral obligation to help M.[46] Thus, if N chooses not to help M, or if N, giving M's inquiry negligible thought, gives M bad directions, it is not clear that N has done anything morally wrong (though they might have, depending on circumstances). As Jones (2017, 104) points out, the mere fact that M relies on N does not necessarily make it the case that N thereby does something wrong or violates M's trust by failing to do everything in their power to answer M's question well. M might be relying on N, in Jones's terms, *presumptuously*. Jones argues that relying on someone presumptuously can be a way of taking advantage of the other person's "trust-responsiveness" in order to manipulate them into acting in accordance with one's wishes.[47]

Yet the fact that conversational participants do not necessarily incur moral obligations to one another does not mean that they do not incur any obligations at all. They may, and I argue they do, incur a kind of *social* obligation. In conversation, we put ourselves in positions of reliance on

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[46] Even if the request itself constitutes a reason for N to help, it strikes me as a stretch to claim that, no matter the circumstances, N will, all things consideredi, have an *obligation* to help M.
[47] Of course, it is not necessarily the case that asking questions of strangers is manipulative. It need not be, but it *can* be.

others because communication is not something we can do without others. It is simply a practical necessity that we encounter when attempting to communicate. By necessity, we rely on others to help us in pursuing our conversational goals, and it might often be appropriate or, at the very least, understandable, to feel a sense of frustration at the thwarting of one's goals when other conversational participants don't do all in their power (conversationally) to help one realize one's goals. [48] But absent a more robust obligation—which can certainly be present in conversation—it would be inappropriate to take someone to have wronged one *morally* for failing to do all in their power to help one reach their conversational goals.

This does not mean, however, that the conversational pressure to observe the Update Presumption, and to otherwise help others realize their conversational goals, is merely a pressure of practical necessity. It is also a fairly robust social obligation. I noted above that Jones argues that trust is important for making agency effective. Conversation is also involved in the development and effectiveness of agency: by engaging in conversation, we can both augment our own agency, making it more effective, and we can augment and affirm the agency of others. Conversation is, after all, central to the development and exercise of sociality and social agency in humans. Thus, by failing to act in accordance with the Update Presumption, or, for that matter, many other conversational

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[48] How justified one might be in feeling this sense of frustration depends in large part on the nature of the conversational exchange and the assurance involved. Those willingly engaged in an established conversation are engaged in a social practice involving social norms, including to aid their interlocutor in reaching their conversational goals, provided that doing so does not endanger *their own* goal realization significantly. The social obligations of someone who has not willingly entered into a conversation, but instead is accosted on the street by someone asking for directions, has notably fewer social obligations to their interlocutor.

presumptions, a conversational participant runs the risk of taking advantage of their interlocutor's reliance, potentially undermining the agency of the interlocutor.

Thus, we should think that there are social, but not necessarily moral norms governing this conversational reliance because, as we have seen, in conversation one relies on others to augment their rational and agential capacities by joining with another to pursue their goals. To illustrate this, consider again E, who asserted (4) to F:

4. There are riots a half mile down Main Street.

There is a rational pressure on F to update in response to E's assertion, and E knows this. Knowledge of this pressure need not be consciously endorsed or articulable; it is implicit knowledge each of us has in conversation. Moreover, Stalnaker's account—or any account that attempts to model updating behavior in conversation—is meant to be a model of ordinary conversational behavior. That is, it's something close to a descriptive account of conversational dynamics. E does not need to consciously endorse the proposition *there is rational pressure on F to update the context according to my utterances*, because this is just what it is to be engaged in an ordinary, successful conversation. E made the assertion because assertions are supposed to have effects on our interlocutors, and in particular, on how our interlocutors understand what is included in the context of the conversation. In other words, there is, as we saw above, a *presumption* that F will update based on E's utterances.

This is what gives E an assurance that F will update adequately: what it is for F to engage properly in an exchange is, in part, for them to update appropriately based on E's utterances.

Moreover, not only must E presume that there is rational pressure on F to update appropriately, there *is* rational pressure on F to do so. Thus, E can move forward in the conversation assured of what they already must presume: that F will update appropriately based on E's utterances. But why should we think that this assurance gives rise to social obligations? Why should we not assume that this assurance is simply the source of the Update Presumption, and has not significant normative effect beyond that?

To see the reason for thinking that these assurances can give rise to obligations, we must consider that the nature of conversation is interactional. One party cannot, on their own, engage in a productive conversation. In engaging in a conversation with another, one makes herself reliant on the other for furthering her communicative goals and the gaining of epistemic and practical resources that are often included in the goals of conversation. When E asserts (4) to F, E is making themself reliant on F for something—perhaps for helping E to get home safely, or for working out what to do with one another, or for commiserating (or celebrating) with one another. In failing to update based on E's assertion, F is failing to play the role that E is relying on them to play. Although this reliance can be presumptive, it is often necessary for the affirmation of E's agency, both practical and epistemic. Stalnaker articulates that one central purpose of speaking is "to get people to know things that they didn't know before" (2002, 703). But people do not simply make utterances out of the blue to others in order to get them to know things; people participate in conversation, saying things that they think might contribute to their interlocutor's knowledge base, and also hoping to learn new things as a result of their interlocutor's utterances. In other words, in conversation we are, normally, reliant on one another to help us exercise our epistemic agency in at least two ways: by growing our knowledge base, and by being taken seriously *as an epistemic and*

communicative agent.[49] Moreover, in conversation we rely on others to help us exercise our practical agency by enabling us to accomplish our practical goals in conversation.

We have seen above how conversation, and being conversationally reliant on others, can help us grow our knowledge bases. I have not yet discussed at length the role of conversation in being taken seriously as a communicative agent and in helping to realize communicative agency, yet this is crucial to understanding the depth of certain communicative harms. When F fails to update based on E's assertion, F is failing (or refusing) to treat E as a communicative agent. E made themself reliant on F, was justified in presuming that F would update properly, and, under many circumstances, had a kind of *de facto* assurance that F would update properly.[50] In failing or refusing to do so, F effectively undermined E's communicative agency. We can see this even more clearly in *Ignored Associate*. In this case, B and C have failed to update properly based on A's assertion: they either failed to add the fact that A made her utterance to the context, or they failed to treat this as a proposal to add a proposition to the context by neither accepting the proposition nor making any objection. They treated her as though she were not a participant in the conversation at all, despite that she was entitled to be part of the conversation and made an effort to do so. B and C thereby

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[49] Hanna Gunn (2018) calls this our *social-epistemic agency*. Social-epistemic agency, on this view, is understood as the capability to bring about desired changes through communicative and epistemic actions (xi). She argues that her view of social-epistemic agency can offer a unifying account of epistemic and communicative injustice.

[50] I take there to be a *de facto* assurance that F will update properly any time E and F are engaged in an ongoing conversation and F has not signaled that they withdraw their assurance. In general, E will not have even *de facto* assurance that F will update if E and F are strangers and E approaches F out of the blue. However, if E and F are in an ongoing conversation and F has been an ordinary and trustworthy interlocutor throughout, there is likely a *de facto* assurance that F has offered to E.

refused to acknowledge A's communicative agency. In being a part of the conversation, A was entitled to expect certain things of her interlocutors, namely:

> Update Entitlement (UE): Conversational participants are (socially) entitled to expect that their interlocutors will update appropriately given events within the conversation.

Moreover, by virtue of being engaged in a conversation with A, B and C have an obligation not to violate A's entitlements. Thus, in failing to update based on her assertion, B and C have failed to satisfy the Requirement to Update:

> Requirement to Update (RU): Conversational participants ought to update appropriately given the utterance of new speech acts performed in the course of a conversation in which they are engaged.

As we have seen, UE is derived, in part, from the UP: if the presumption that conversational participants are updating based on our contributions is what makes conversations make sense and what allows the exchange of information that constitutes conversation, then conversational participants have, to a significant degree, the assurance that their presumption is right. Moreover, this puts a participant P in a position to be reliant on their interlocutor Q, since Q has, by being a part of the conversation, enabled (and perhaps encouraged) P's reliance on Q's appropriate participation in the conversation, including by appropriately updating. This reliance is sufficiently strong to engender a (defeasible) practical and epistemic entitlement (namely, the UE) on the part of

conversational participants that their interlocutors will update based on new contributions and the attendant social obligation (the RU) on the part of the interlocutors to update appropriately, thereby engaging in the conversation as a shared activity (in the relevant sense) and treating the speaker as a full communicative agent in their own right.

2.5 Taking stock

Note that my approach to characterizing the normative requirements on participants to update has several layers:

First, there is a **practical pressure** that participants presume that other participants will update based on new contributions. This practical pressure is derived from the descriptive fact that conversation is just the sort of thing that involves updates; in order to treat an exchange *as* a conversation, and to move forward that conversation, one must presume that all other interlocutors are participating. A violation of this practical necessity does not obviously produce any kind of harm, nor is it a problematic or criticizable violation of a norm. Rather, a violation of this practical pressure will often indicate that the talk exchange at hand is simply not a conversation. A speaker who is talking to herself, for instance, will not presume of others in the vicinity that they are updating based on her utterances. Despite that this practical requirement is weak, it helps lay the groundwork for the rest of the normative pressures.

Second, there is **a (means-ends) rational pressure** for all participants a) to observe the UP, thereby presuming that their interlocutors will update appropriately based on their utterances, and b)

to update their contexts appropriately. Because conversation is a social, coordinated activity in which participants rely on one another to aid them in realizing their conversational goals, there is rational pressure to produce utterances that will help them realize their conversational goals and assume that their interlocutors will recognize this. Moreover, there is rational pressure on conversational participants to update based on their interlocutors' utterances, since failing to do so is a failure to do that which is instrumentally necessary in pursuing one's conversational goals—namely, taking into consideration their interlocutor's contributions. Thus, speakers should, rationally, treat their interlocutors as though they will update their contexts appropriately on the basis of these utterances *and* update their own utterances appropriately given the utterances of interlocutors. The violation of the pressure to update, or the pressure to observe the UP, is thus irrational.

Third, the **Update Entitlement** holds: participants do not just presume that their interlocutors will update appropriately, they are *entitled* to expect that their interlocutors will update appropriately. This is, in part, because the rational requirement articulated above is sufficiently strong to engender an entitlement. In presuming that one's interlocutor will update appropriately, one is simply presuming that they are acting in a conversationally rational way. To fail to presume that one's interlocutor will update appropriately is to fail to presume that they are acting rationally in engage in the conversational exchange. On the other hand, presuming that one's interlocutor is updating appropriately puts one in a position both to have one's own agency augmented and to augment the agency of the other through joining one's agency with the other in conversation.

Fourth, the **Requirement to Update** holds as a **social obligation**: participants have an obligation to update appropriately, given the utterance of speech acts performed in the course of a conversation in which they are engaged. The UE gives rise to this requirement. If a speaker is

legitimately entitled to expect that a participant will update appropriately based on new conversational contributions, then this must be associated with an obligation, of a sort, on the part of the hearer to update appropriately. As I noted above, this is not a straightforwardly moral obligation—even if there will be instances in which the RU is a moral obligation, I certainly have not sufficiently argued for a moral requirement here. Rather, the RU is a kind of *social* obligation that participants have within conversations. Because of the kind of thing that conversation is—a social, rational goal oriented activity in which we draw on the agency of one another and make it more effective—conversational participants have social entitlements and social obligations by virtue of being engaged in conversation.

With these characterizations of the pressures involved in conversational updating in mind, we can see clearly what is going wrong in *Ignored Associate*: B and C violated the practical pressure articulated as the first of the pressures. On its own, this may not be a problem, since, as I noted, a failure to observe practical pressures is not necessarily problematic. However, B and C also violated the second pressure: the pressure to be rational. By virtue of being committed to the conversation, there was a rational pressure on them to coordinate with other participants, attending to their contributions. In failing to do so, they acted irrationally. Further, A had an entitlement to expect that B and C updated appropriately given her utterance, and B and C violated their social obligation to A to update on the basis of her utterance.

Of course, so far I have given no explanation of the distinct harm that seems to be in play given that A is a woman, and women are disproportionately subjected to the sort of treatment portrayed in this example. So far I have only said that B and C have violated a social obligation that they could violate in conversation with anyone. At this point, I appeal to Rebecca Kukla's

understanding of discursive injustice (2014). According to this view, it is (in part) by virtue of a speaker's social identity that her audience's uptake of her speech act diverges from her intended speech act. For instance, when a woman who has the proper social entitlements to issue an order does so, her audience may still interpret her utterance as a request due to the fact that she is a woman and they are unused to or uncomfortable with the fact that she has the proper entitlements to issue orders to them. In other words, discursive injustice occurs when a speech act receives uptake as having a different force than was intended in part due to the relatively disempowered social identity of the speaker.

My case differs from Kukla's in that I am not considering a case in which the intended force of A's speech act was different from the force that B and C attributed to the act. Instead, A's utterance received no uptake at all; it simply wasn't heard. Moreover, my analysis does not address gender roles, social subordination, or any other systems of privilege and power. If the gender roles were inverted in *Ignored Associate*, B and C, as women ignoring A, might plausibly still be violating normative principles governing conversation. However, it is intuitively plausible—indeed likely—that some of the considerations Kukla brings up in her discussion are in play in mine as well. For instance, features of social positioning often enable or incentivize certain conversational participants to dismiss other participants in the way that B and C dismiss A. Because it is deemed socially appropriate for women to be diminutive, to not play a central role in decision-making, etc., particularly in a work environment dominated by men, it may be an available option for B and C to effectively tune A out in a way that they might not ordinarily tune out a man. While it is, of course, possible for a man to be similarly dismissed in a meeting, the frequency of such dismissals is much

lower and the consequences less severe, since such a dismissal would not result from or reinforce historical systems of the subordination of women.

Yet this brings up an important point. While, as I have said, we can certainly imagine a case in which women are blameworthy in failing to update based on the contribution of a man, it is not difficult to imagine as well a case in which women fail to update based on the contribution of a man in a way that is not necessarily blameworthy, but is conversationally appropriate. Take another case:

> *Ignored Associate 2*
>
> O is a man who works primarily with women. Although he is less experienced than most of his colleagues, he demonstrates a sense of entitlement both to set the agenda of many meetings and to be taken seriously, even when the topic of his contributions is unrelated to the conversation at hand. In a meeting one day, O has been dominating the discussion. Most of his contributions have been *non sequiturs* or otherwise unproductive for making progress on the topic under discussion in the meeting. In order to attempt to efficiently move the conversation forward, his colleagues have begun to ignore him. At one point he makes an assertion that *q*. The other participants do not engage with O's assertion, though there is no particular reason to think it was ignored until another colleague, P, asserts that *p*, and the point is taken up and discussed at length in the meeting.

Unlike in *Ignored Associate*, O was not necessarily wronged in *Ignored Associate 2*. His sense of entitlement seems to be overdeveloped, causing him to be an unhelpful and unproductive contributor to conversations in general, and this meeting in particular. Nevertheless, he is a

participant in a conversation. How, given my analysis, can I make the case that A was wronged and O was not?

First, what it takes to update *appropriately* may be different in a case like this, compared with some others. This is because O has given his colleagues ample evidence to suggest that he is not a reliable participant in their conversation. Given that many of his comments are *non sequiturs*, it is likely that O himself is not adequately updating based on events in the conversation, and his contributions to the conversation suggest that he is not participating in good faith. Second, in most such exchanges, we might imagine that the other participants in the conversation are increasingly offering subtle indications that they do not take O or his contributions seriously; O has shown himself not to be a reliable participant, and the other participants have indicated to O that he should not rely on them to treat him seriously. Thus, in continuing to offer contributions, O no longer is justified in presuming that his interlocutors are updating properly. Consequently, he is not entitled to expect that they are updating properly. Finally, it is still open to me to say that O *was* wronged, only the wrong to O is not as great as the wrong to A because, as a woman underrepresented in workplace decision-making, ignoring her contributions is more likely to undermine her agency than ignoring O's contribution.

Whether the other conversational participants in *Ignored Associate 2* have some kind of social obligation to update depends on circumstances of the conversation. It may be that they retain this obligation, but it is significantly weakened by O's behavior, such that other considerations easily outweigh it. On the other hand, it may be that the other participants have sufficiently signaled that they no longer take O to play a role in the conversation due to his inability to productively

participate. In such a case, they may be released from the obligation to update based on his contributions.

2.6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have offered a number of principles that shed light on the role that context plays in conversational dynamics and the norms governing context. I have shown that there is, first, a presumption that conversational participants will update their contexts on the basis of new contributions to a conversational exchange. Moreover, since conversation is a norm-governed, rational, goal-oriented activity, this presumption plays a role in establishing what expectations participants in the exchange are warranted. Because of the interpersonal goal-oriented nature of conversation, participants must rely on one another in order for conversational exchanges to be productive and appropriate, and this is mutually recognized by all participants in an exchange. Thus, conversational participants have an obligation to participate appropriately in an exchange. This requires the proper updating of one's context when one is presented with new contributions to the exchange.

With this analysis in place, we can make sense of a wide range of conversational phenomena. For instance, *Ignored Associate* describes a common enough phenomenon, but one that is not easily analyzable within traditional frameworks for understanding conversational dynamics. This is because the phenomenon at play is one in which the conversational dynamics are simply not described by the traditional analyses. Because these analyses are idealized accounts of conversational dynamics that explain how conversational communication takes place under roughly ordinary circumstances,

the accounts are limited in their ability to explain non-standard, or uncooperative exchanges. By treating certain features of the traditional views of conversational dynamics not as descriptive accounts of conversation, but as prescriptive requirements on speakers, we can explain both what is going on in the cases, despite their divergence from standard accounts, and why they strike us as problematic.

Chapter 3: The Cooperative Principle Revisited

In the previous two chapters, I have focused on the notion of conversational context and the norms that govern context. In Chapter 1, I defended my account of interpretive context, according to which contexts are not shared between participants, but are relativized to individual agents. In Chapter 2, I argued that there are norms governing how we ought to update our interpretive contexts in response to new contributions, in part by appealing to theoretical resources from discussions of shared action. Although this chapter does not focus on the notion of conversational context specifically, it can be understood as an effort to ensure that a picture of linguistic communication that employs my notion of interpretive context can still account for the full range of linguistic phenomena that occur in conversational exchanges. In particular, in this chapter, I discuss the Cooperative Principle, which Paul Grice introduced in order to explain how conversational participants derive implicated content. On one influential reading of the Cooperative Principle, conversations are joint activities in which participants share one or more goals and cooperate to bring about those goals (Grice 1975). On this reading, it is only by assuming the cooperativity of participants' pursuit of shared goals that we can derive implicated meaning from speakers' utterances at all. Thus, built into the very possibility of implicature on this account is the presupposition that conversational goals are *shared*. On this view, it is not the case that *all* conversational goals must be shared. Each participant may have private goals in engaging in the conversation that need not be made public. The view is simply that participants must share *some* goal in order to orient their discussion and to move it forward.

It should be clear that the relevant shared conversational goals will count as common ground between participants: each participant must accept that they are engaged in an exchange with a given shared goal, and each must accept that their interlocutors accept that they are engaged in an exchange with the shared goal. But I argued in Chapter 1 that contexts in general need not be shared between participants, and there is no particular reason why we should think that goals, and only goals, must be common ground, despite that contexts in general need not be common ground. The worry is, at this point, that if, in order to derive implicatures, it is necessary that conversational participants share goals, then this might count against my view of interpretive context, in which I argued that no element of context is necessarily shared. In this chapter, I develop this worry and ultimately argue that it is misguided. In fact, there are reasons independent of my considerations in favor of adopting my view of interpretive context indicating that the view that conversations require a shared goal is false.

In this paper, I will revisit the Cooperative Principle (CP), and with it the notion of cooperativity that has persisted within philosophy of language for decades: that conversation is a shareed activity between participants in pursuit of shared goals. In this paper, I argue that this assumption is false. Although, as I argued in Chapter 2, conversations share features with shared activities, there is no necessity that participants in a conversation share goals. In fact, conversational participants sometimes have conversational goals that are fundamentally at odds. I will propose that we call conversation a variety of *coordinative* activity, rather than a cooperative activity. Participants in coordinative activities, unlike those in cooperative activities, need not share a goal. Instead, they coordinate with others in pursuit of their own goals. I propose a principle I call the Coordinative Principle. This principle preserves many of the attractive features of the Cooperative Principle: for

instance, it allows participants to derive one another's communicative intentions. But unlike the CP, it does not build in a robust cooperativity as a basic feature of conversational exchanges.

To make my case, I'll begin in section 1 by working through a common understanding of conversation as a shared activity that requires shared goals between participants. In section 2, I will illustrate the ways in which this understanding seems to be consistent with Grice's Cooperative Principle, and indeed, one common way of understanding the CP simply presupposes this understanding of conversation. In section 3, I present a series of apparently uncooperative conversations as challenges to the understanding of conversation as involving shared goals. In section 4, I offer an alternative principle to the Cooperative Principle: the Coordinative Principle. As I argue, this accomplishes what the CP does, without presupposing that conversations must involve a shared goal.

Note that there is little agreement in the literature about what it takes for conversation to be cooperative, and some views may not be challenged by my discussion here. This is fine. The particular critique I will articulate in this paper applies to all and only interpretations that take the Cooperative Principle to presuppose that participants share conversational goals. As we will see shortly, this is a highly plausible interpretation of the Principle, and one that makes some sense of Grice's use of the term 'cooperative'. However, Davies (2007) argues that discussions of cooperativity, and particularly discussions of Grice, have undergone a process she calls "cooperative drift," in which the understanding of the term 'cooperative' has drifted from its intended technical meaning toward an ordinary conversational meaning. She argues that the proper understanding of Gricean cooperativity has more to do with presumptions of rationality than presumptions of, for instance, interpersonal constructiveness or collaboration. Although Davies's discussion does not

focus in on the question of whether participants must share goals, it is plausible that on her understanding, goal sharing is not central to the Gricean framework. If this is right, then my critique in what follows will not speak to this understanding of the Cooperative Principle. However, many interpretations do maintain that there must be some kind of shared goal in conversation. These views will be my primary targets. However, because Davies argues that the use of the term 'cooperative' by Grice can be misleading due to its colloquial meaning, she and others who reject that conversations require shared goals might find my proposal here attractive because it involves an adjustment of terminology that gets away from the connotations of the colloquial term.

3.1 Conversation as a shared activity

3.1.1 Shared activity

In Chapter 2, I showed that conversation has some features in common with shared activities: conversation is a goal-oriented activity, in which participants' communicative intentions are, in some way, dependent on the intentions of one another. Although I did not argue in that chapter that conversation *is* a variety of shared action or joint activity, there are a number of theorists who have done so. Clark (1996), for instance, describes conversation as something we do in order to engage in joint activities, and suggests that conversation itself might count as a joint activity. Searle (2008) argues that language is a kind of primordial social contract that underlies all other social contracts, suggesting a basic sociality and jointness built into the very notion of language. As noted above, Grice (1989) speaks of conversation as a *cooperative* activity. And Margaret

Gilbert (1989) understands conversation to be a shared action between members of a plural subject in pursuit of a shared goal.

Gilbert adopts a very strong account of shared activity, and thus a very strong account of conversation as a shared activity. She claims that in order for an agent to "intelligibly set out to tell" something to another agent, both agents "need to be in a position to appropriately think of themselves as 'us*'" (1989, 215). Gilbert uses the technical term 'us*' to denote a plural subject. What it means for agents to comprise a plural subject is that "each of a number of persons (two or more) has, in effect, offered his will to be part of a pool of wills which is dedicated, as one, to that goal" (1990, 7). Insofar as agents are participating in an activity as members of a plural subject, they share goals or intentions between them. Searle (1990) calls these *we-intentions*, intentions held by a plural subject *as a plural subject.* On strong views like Gilbert's and Searle's, if participants do not share a goal in the strong sense of holding a we-intention, they cannot count as engaging in a shared activity. What it means for participants to count as being in a conversation with one another, then, is that they are engaged as a plural subject in which each participant uses language to pursue their shared goal.

Other theorists argue that there is no need to posit plural subjects or we-intentions in order to make the case that agents can engage in a shared activity. On most of these more moderate accounts, shared activity does require shared intentions, but shared intentions can be built out of ordinary, individual intentions. In general, shared intentions will require that both parties have an intention regarding *X*, and both parties' intentions are in part dependent upon the intentions of other parties regarding *X* (Tuomela and Miller 1988, Bratman 1992, 2014). But it is not necessary

that parties adopt these intentions *as a plural subject*, nor is it necessary, on some views, that participants adopt the very same goal regarding *X* at all.[51]

It is not controversial to suggest that conversation involves action; it has been well established within speech act theory that speech involves various acts (Austin 1962, 1979, Searle 1969, Bach and Harnish 1979). Yet individual speech acts are not shared actions; they are actions taken by individuals. To claim that that *conversation* is a shared activity is a stronger, though far from implausible claim. One important reason why I stopped short of defending the view that conversation is a variety of shared activity in Chapter 2 is that it is standardly accepted that shared activities involve shared intentions or goals, but, as I will claim, conversations do not necessarily involve shared goals. This point will require a defense. Before I do so, I will spell out further some implications of the notion, defended by Gilbert and others, that conversation is a shared activity.

3.1.2 Shared action and instrumental rationality

Despite the influence of speech act theory in encouraging us to think of speech as *action*, of some sort, there has been relatively little explicit discussion within philosophy of language about what kind of thing a linguistic action is or what it means for speech or conversations to count as actions. That said, certain principles within philosophy of language implicitly build in principles of rational action. For instance, as I will show over the course of the next two sections, Grice's

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[51] Bratman (2014), for instance, argues that shared goals are not necessary for shared activity. He argues that parties to the activity may have entirely different goals in undertaking an activity, provided that they have intentions concerning the shared activity that intersect with the other parties' intentions in the right kind of way.

Cooperative Principle can be understood as a principle articulating a kind of instrumental rationality in shared (linguistic) activity. Before we see this, I'll spell out the notion of instrumental rationality.

We generally think that agents should be instrumentally rational in the way they act. That is, if an agent has a goal, G, and they believe that some action A is required if they are to realize G, then they ought to intend to A or abandon G.[52] For the sake of this paper, I'll give the following simplified understanding of the requirement of instrumental rationality:

> Simplified Instrumental Rationality: perform the actions you believe are required for realizing your goals.

Instrumental rationality is a minimal notion of rationality because it does not require that one's goals meet any particular rational standards; all that is required is that, *given* the goals of an agent (no matter how irrational these may be), they should perform actions that will help them realize those goals. If it is true that conversations are activities, then in engaging in conversation, two things should be true in order to satisfy instrumental rationality: 1) We should take that conversation to be instrumental in realizing some goal or goals, and 2) within the conversation, speech acts should be intended to move forward one's conversational goals.

For instance, if Agent 1 wants to attend an event at the nearby community center but is not sure where the community center is, one way to realize their goal of attending an event at the community center is to do something non-conversational to find the community center, such as

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[52] This is a slightly simplified version of Bratman's (2009) phrasing, which takes into account the role that intention plays in instrumental rationality.

wandering the street or checking directions on the internet. Either of these options has the potential to be an effective way for 1 to realize their goal. Another way to pursue the goal of finding the community center, however, is conversational: 1 could ask someone where the community center is. In asking for directions, Agent 1 should perform speech acts that are likely to enable them to realize the conversational goal of getting directions. If Gilbert is right that conversation is a shared activity of a plural subject in pursuit of a shared goal, then 1 has attempted to form an us* with another person, forming a shared goal and shared intention with another. That is, if 1 asks 2 for directions, then 1 and 2 must consider themselves each to be part of a "pool of wills" that is jointly committed to realizing some goal. Perhaps this goal directly related to 1's goal: perhaps the conversation exists in order to help 1 determine where the community center is. Or perhaps the shared goal is more general: to share information, to learn about the world, etc. In either case, there needs to be some sense of instrumental rationality in this plural agent's pursuit of the shared goal. Once they constitute a plural subject, each party is on the hook to take actions that are required for pursuing their shared goal.

3.2 The Cooperative Principle

Grice's understanding of conversations seems to align well with the view that conversations are shared activities. For instance, he claims that conversations are, "characteristically, to some degree at least, cooperative efforts; and each participant recognizes in [a given conversation], to some extent, a common purpose or set of purposes, or at least a mutually accepted direction" (Grice 1989, 26). That is, like shared activities, conversations are cooperative activities in pursuit of a shared

purpose: participants share a goal, and each participates in the conversation in a way that is aimed toward the satisfaction of that shared goal, presumably over and above any unshared goals of individual participants.

Moreover, Grice's central principle that he posits, the Cooperative Principle (CP), can be reasonably understood as an articulation of a principle of instrumental rational as it applies to conversational contributions:

> Cooperative Principle: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. (Grice 1989, 26)

The CP includes the stipulation that participants should share an "accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange" and they should speak in such a way "as is required" given that shared goal. In other words, we can understand the CP as an articulation of a kind of instrumental rationality as it applies to conversational contributions. Note the structural similarity of a simplified CP to the simplified articulation of the principle of instrumental rationality articulated above:

> Simplified Instrumental Rationality: perform the actions you believe are required for realizing your goals.

> Simplified CP: perform the speech acts that are required for realizing the jointly accepted goals of the conversation (at each stage in the conversation).

It should not be surprising or particularly controversial that the CP can be understood as a principle of instrumental rationality. Grice took himself to be engaged in a rationalist project, trying to defend the CP as not only accurately describing conversational behavior, but also by defending its observance as *rational* (Grice 1975, 89). Surely if the CP is a principle of instrumental rationality, it is rational for agents to observe it.

One might wonder which kinds of goals are candidates to be a shared conversational goal. After all, not every goal that an agent has in conversation is shared; participants often enter into conversations with private goals that never are made public (i.e. to make a good impression). Yet on the understanding of the CP to which I am responding, there must always be *some* shared goal between participants. Grice offers a fairly broad range of candidates for what counts as a shared goal. Some are very specific and immediate, such as getting a car mended, others are much more general, such as to "identify [oneself] with the transitory conversational goals of the other" (29), and some goals that are still more broad and schematic, such as "giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others" (30). Whatever the goals of any particular conversation, Grice seems to claim that conversations do characteristically have shared goals.

None of what I've said so far, however, clarifies why the CP is so central to Grice's discussion or why it has been so influential in discussions of linguistic cooperativity. The CP plays a central role in Grice's larger discussion of how conversational participants derive the meanings of their interlocutors' utterances. Grice spells out what it takes to make one's contributions "such as is required" by giving four conversational "maxims" (Grice 1989, 26-27):

> Quantity: "Make your contribution as informative as is required…. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required."
>
> Quality: "Try to make your contribution one that is true."
>
> Relation: "Be relevant."
>
> Manner: Say things in a straightforward and understandable way. I.e. "Avoid obscurity of expression. Avoid ambiguity. Be brief…. Be orderly."

According to Grice, to make your contributions "such as is required" one should observe the maxims.[53] If one were to ignore that we have a general expectation that speakers will say things that they take to be true, relevant, etc., then it would be hard to understand them as being cooperatively engaged in a joint action with their interlocutor at all. Thus, according to Grice, we can generally *presume* that interlocutors are attempting to be cooperative. In part, this means that we presume that they are observing the maxims. This presumption allows a hearer to interpret a speaker's utterance even when it appears to be uncooperative. If an utterance appears to be a violation of the CP, but the hearer presumes that the speaker is following the CP, then it is appropriate for the hearer to re-

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[53] Though there is room for interpretation in how we should understand the relationship between the CP and the maxims: it is not clear whether the maxims are a way of spelling out the CP, or if they are necessary but not sufficient for following the CP, or sufficient but not necessary, and so on. Subsequent work by Horn (2004), Levinson (2000), and Relevance Theorists (Sperber and Wilson 1986), among others, have attempted to limit which maxims are actually necessary for deriving implicature, and which we should think of as playing a central role in understanding the CP. Moreover, Grice himself acknowledges that we may need maxims beyond the four he offers, suggesting that he does not necessarily think that these maxims may not be appropriately understood as a way of spelling out what the CP itself articulates.

interpret the utterance to mean something that does count as cooperative. This is the reasoning process that allows us to derive implicatures.

Such derivations are generally understood as inferences to the best explanation—a hearer will normally attempt to determine what the speaker is most likely to have meant to communicate with their utterance, given that their utterance was a cooperative contribution to the exchange, i.e. that they were observing the CP and the maxims. If an utterance appears to violate Relation, then the hearer should attempt to determine what the speaker must have been attempting to communicate with an apparently irrelevant contribution. Grice gives the following example (1975, 51):

A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.

B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

B's utterance, interpreted literally, appears irrelevant to the question of whether A has a girlfriend. A report on Smith's travel habits does not constitute a contribution about Smith's relationship status. Smith might pay visits to New York for any number of reasons—because he has family there, because he has work there, because he is considering buying a condo, and so on. It is only because A (and we readers) already *presume* that B is intending their contribution to be cooperative that it makes sense to think that B is saying something more. A mere report on Smith's travel habits is not relevant, and thus, the utterance appears not to be cooperative. But, since we assume that B is cooperative, we must assume that B is offering their observation of Smith's travel plans *as an apparently relevant contribution*. With that in mind, it is easy to see that B is not just communicating

Smith's travel habits; they are trying to communicate that Smith's travel habits likely reveal something about Smith's relationship status, namely, that Smith may have a girlfriend in New York after all.

As we can see, despite the fact that the CP is phrased as a prescription for how speakers ought to behave, it is generally put to use as a presumption enabling a hearers to interpret speakers' utterances. It should be clear that this is a highly productive tool: if hearers are standardly justified in presuming that their interlocutors are observing the CP, this can play a role in enabling speakers to engage in creative uses of language without sacrificing the ability to effectively communicate. However, the presumption that conversational participants are following the CP must be a relatively strong presumption. It must be strong enough at least that hearers will, ordinarily, preference cooperative interpretations over uncooperative interpretations even when the speaker consistently produces utterances that appear to violate the conversational maxims, and even when the contribution is consistent with the uncooperativity of the speaker. Although this is what enables the derivation of implicature, we will see that it may also lead to problems.

3.3 The Challenge of Uncooperative Conversations

In this section, I develop an objection to the conception of conversation as a cooperative shared activity by giving two cases of apparently uncooperative conversations. I will start by offering several examples of uncooperative conversations and spelling out the way in which I take them to be uncooperative. I'll then spell out another objection to Grice's account, offered by Asher and Lascarides. Although Asher and Lascarides are responding to a worry that resembles my own, their

concern does not center on my worry about shared goals and as a result, it is not obviously a fruitful way forward for my discussion. Finally, I will clarify what kind of objection I take uncooperative conversations to present for the CP. After all, it is obvious that some conversations are uncooperative, in some sense. It's obvious enough, in fact, that even Grice acknowledges that it is not necessarily a universal feature of conversations that they are cooperative. In order to present uncooperativity as an objection, then, I need to clarify how Grice deals with such cases and why uncooperative conversations present a problem for his view.

3.3.1 Uncooperative Conversations

It is not at all clear that conversations are, in general, cooperative. In particular, it is not clear that participants always, or even ordinarily, share goals or understand themselves as constituting a plural subject. Indeed, Pinker (2007) has pointed to social- and evolutionary-psychological considerations to suggest that something like the CP is, at best, a good starting point, but overly simplified to a degree that it cannot capture the variety of human conversation. Asher and Lascarides (2013) argue that strategic conversations in which participants have different or antagonistic goals cannot be understood on models of conversation that relies on a Gricean notion of cooperativity. Camp (2018) highlights in her discussion of insinuation that, "Many, even most conversations involve only partial alignment in interlocutors' interests" (41). These considerations and others have led Beaver and Stanley (2019) to treat the assumption that participants in a conversation cooperate in sharing content in a pursuit of shared interests to be one of ten "idealizations in the theory of meaning," that are not necessarily true or theoretically useful.

If the CP/shared action view is right, then why is it that we frequently see cases in which conversations do not seem to be cooperative, where participants do not appear to understand themselves as us*, and it does not appear that there is any jointly accepted goal between them? If it is in the nature of conversation that it is a shared action of members of a plural subject with a shared goal, what is going on in these cases? What happens, for instance, in a courtroom, in which a prosecutor attempts to invalidate the defense's witness's testimony during questioning? These participants do not appear to be cooperative in any significant way: they have fundamentally different goals—the witness to share what they witnessed, perhaps to exonerate the defendant, and the prosecutor to invalidate the witness's testimony and to convict the defendant. The witness should and often will cooperate in the strict courtroom sense: they should answer the prosecutor's questions appropriately, for instance. But they may also try to *strategically* answer the prosecutor's question in an effort to foil the prosecutors goals in questioning. This is a paradigmatic case of Asher and Lascarides' (2013) understanding of the phenomenon of *strategic conversation*. In such cases, there is no evidence that participants think of themselves as us*; their goals are at odds. Each is acting only in pursuit of their own goals. Even the witness's courtroom cooperation does not necessarily indicate that they share a goal. After all, a witness may answer a prosecutor's questions only in order to avoid being held in contempt, not because they, say, wish to ensure that the jury comes to the right verdict. And the prosecutor may ask questions with the goal of proving the defendant guilty, not to, say, shed light on the case, or to ensure that the jury comes to the right verdict.

Other conversational exchanges appear uncooperative in an even more basic way. Consider instances of sexual harassment or cases in which a woman is ignored in a conversational exchange:

Sexual Harassment

Ann: Hi Tom, could you be sure to get me the agenda for our meeting this afternoon before lunch?

Tom: Why don't you just join me for lunch? I'll tell you all about my agenda for the two of us over a bottle of wine.

Ann: No thank you, I just want to see the agenda.

Tom (coldly): I'll see if I can get it to you, but I really think lunch would be the best time.

In *Sexual Harassment*, Tom is clearly engaging in the conversation with a particular goal—to get Ann to go out with him—and does not share Ann's clearly stated goal of getting the agenda circulated before lunch. Moreover, Tom's response to Ann after she declined his invitation to lunch suggests that he is likely to respond uncooperatively unless Ann adopts *his* goal. He is not open to finding a shared goal for their exchange besides the one that Ann rejected. This is itself an uncooperative move: he is not attempting to engage cooperatively in the exchange, he is instead attempting to realize his own goals, regardless of whether they are shared. Thus, it is hard to say that Tom is engaging cooperatively if he is indifferent to the fact that his goal goes unshared.

Of course, Grice never said that *every* goal a participant has in conversation must be a shared goal. Moreover, as we saw above, goals can vary in their specificity. Perhaps Tom and Ann are not cooperating with respect to their immediate, specific goals, but in terms of a more general goal: perhaps Ann and Tom share the goal to "identify [themselves] with the transitory goals of the other." But this does not seem right. Tom seems to be refusing to identify himself with Ann's

transitory goal of getting the agenda, despite that as her colleague he should identify himself with this goal. And Ann is justifiably uninterested in merely identifying herself with Tom's goal.

But perhaps Ann and Tom share a goal at the most general, schematic level: perhaps they share the goal of sharing information and influencing and being influenced by one another. Evaluating this sort of claim is actually somewhat tricky. On the one hand, Ann seems to have a goal of influencing Tom to circulate the agenda, and Tom has the goal of influencing Ann to go out with him. They may even recognize that conversation is a means of mutual influence. But it is not clear to me that the goal of influencing one another is really a *shared* goal. After all, each wants to influence the other without being influenced by the other. Moreover, the mere fact that both have a goal of influencing one another is not enough to count as a jointly accepted goal, or an "accepted purpose or direction" of the conversation. Each of them could adopt the goal to influence the other in part in an effort to foil the goal of the other to influence them.

These points will be reinforced with an example adapted from one we saw in Chapter 2:

Ignored Associate

Ann and Tom are now in their meeting. During the meeting, Ann asserts *p,* believing that she is making a significant contribution to the discussion. She is disappointed that the comment doesn't have greater influence on the conversation, but she has no reason to believe she has been ignored until Tom asserts *p*. After Tom makes his contribution, the trajectory of the meeting changes significantly as several participants respond to and build upon *p*.

In the sort of case I'm imagining, and as I discussed in Chapter 2, this is not a case in which Tom is fully aware that he is rearticulating what Ann just said. Instead, it is a case in which Tom and many of their colleagues simply failed to update based on Ann's utterance. Tom does not take himself to be rearticulating *p* because according to his context, *p* hasn't been introduced.

This again is a case in which it is difficult to seriously claim that Ann, Tom, and their colleagues are acting cooperatively. Notably, in this case they may well share a goal—there must be explicit goals of the meeting and the organization for which they work. But they are not participating in a way that is cooperative. To put it in Gilbert's terms, even if, as colleagues in a meeting, there is a sense in which they all think of themselves as constituting an us*, it is clear that most participants are not treating Ann as part of us* and not treating her utterance as contributing to a conversation in pursuit of a shared goal. Thus, even though they *should* count as sharing a goal in this case, in ignoring Ann, the other participants effectively exclude her from the exchange, thereby failing to cooperatively converse with Ann.

3.3.2 A Possible Way Forward: Rhetorical Cooperativity

One approach that has been proposed to save the presumption of cooperativity is to distinguish between minimal notions of cooperativity and those that are more robust. In their discussion of strategic conversations, or conversations in which "agents' motives don't align" (Asher and Lascarides 2013, 1), Asher and Lascarides highlight a challenge to Grice's CP that mirrors my own. They focus on conversations, such as courtroom questioning, in which conversational participants engage in the conversation *strategically*: their goals do not align, but they must maintain their participation in the conversation. Despite that Asher and Lascarides offer this as an objection

to Gricean cooperativity, they want to maintain that strategic conversations involve *some kind* of cooperativity. To do this, they distinguish between *Gricean cooperativity*, which they take to be too strong to describe strategic conversations, *rhetorical cooperativity*, which is a weaker notion of cooperativity according to which participants behave in a way that appears cooperative, despite that they might in fact be violating the conversational maxims, and *basic cooperativity,* which is the weakest notion and applies at the level of compositional meaning—a participant may count as observing basic cooperativity even if they are engaging pedantically with their interlocutor by giving literal answers to questions where the questioner was clearly asking for more. Asher and Lascarides claim that it is better to understand cases of strategic conversation as rhetorically cooperative, but not Gricean cooperative. Someone will count as rhetorically cooperative when they lie to their interlocutor or when they say something that is strictly true but misleading, despite that according to the CP and the Maxim of Quality, it is uncooperative to say things that one knows to be false. The reason lying is effective is precisely because we can maintain rhetorical cooperativity, appearing cooperative to our interlocutors. By contrasting rhetorical and Gricean cooperativity, Asher and Lascarides are able to expand their explanatory resources by taking on board much of the Gricean machinery without being committed to the idea that all conversational participants are always observing the CP and the maxims.

In characterizing strategic contributions to conversations as *rhetorically* cooperative, Asher and Lascarides characterize them as formally and linguistically indistinguishable from Gricean cooperative contributions (Asher and Lascarides 2013, 3); they mimic Gricean cooperative contributions, and as such, we can assume that the very same inferential processes that go into the interpretation of Gricean cooperative contributions will also go into the interpretation of rhetorically

cooperative contributions. This is supposed to explain why in courtrooms or in negotiations or (moderately civil) arguments, speakers' meanings can still be adequately interpreted, and implicatures can still be derived—participants make contributions as though they are observing the CP, so the processes Grice describes can still go through.

This distinguishing of various kinds of cooperativity is Asher and Lascarides's attempt to address a problem that resembles that which I have identified, though it can be distinguished from my worry. Asher and Lascarides are concerned that the CP as Grice puts it requires "Strong Cooperativity," but that Strong Cooperativity is too strong to describe most cases of strategic conversation. A presumption of Strong Cooperativity is the presumption "that interlocutors normally adopt each other's conversational goals and that speakers tell the truth" (Asher and Lascarides 2013, 5). However, Asher and Lascarides worry that this commits participants to adopting far too many goals. Whenever a participant makes an utterance, they do so with some purpose, normally a goal to get their interlocutor to realize some communicative intention and adopt that intention (Grice 1959). Once a hearer realizes what the communicative goal of their interlocutor is, they are then supposed to adopt that goal themselves, or perhaps object to the adoption of the goal (Asher and Lascarides 2013, 6). However, as Asher and Lascarides point out, in strategic conversation, participants often do not aim for their interlocutors to realize all their communicative intentions, and they are often not inclined to adopt the conversational goals of those with whom they are in conversation. The witness in a trial who comes to realize that an attorney is trying to get them to contradict themself is not likely to adopt that goal. And likewise, if the attorney realizes that the witness is attempting to present their testimony in a way that is strictly accurate but misleading, the attorney is not likely to adopt the goal to realize the speaker's goas. Crucially, participants often

make use of conversational implicatures to engage in conversationally uncooperative behavior—such as misleading or obscuring certain facts. But if the derivation of implicature requires Strong Cooperativity, then the Gricean framework cannot explain such communicative exchanges. Asher and Lascarides conclude that there must be significant reworking of the theoretical resources we take to be involved in inferring a speaker's intended meaning in order to account for rhetorical cooperativity.

Despite the resemblance between my concern with the Gricean framework and Asher and Lascardies's concern, there are two problems with their approach. First, it is not universally accepted by Griceans and neo-Griceans that "Strong Cooperativity" is necessary on the Gricean picture. Particularly because the CP is often put to use as a presumption that enables implicature derivation, as much as it is an articulation of strong mutual intentions to produce cooperative utterances, the distinction between Gricean cooperativity and rhetorical coopertivity may be narrower than Asher and Lascarides make it out to be.[54]

My second divergence from Asher and Lascarides' approach is that they claim that rhetorical cooperativity can account for strategic conversations, and I am inclined to do away entirely with the necessity of cooperativity in accounting for communication. My motivation, as I have highlighted in the cases of uncooperative conversations above, is that it is not clear to me why we should assume that sharing goals is necessary for communication. Asher and Lascarides have offered no new evidence that goals must be shared. As long as Asher and Lascarides's notion of rhetorical cooperativity requires some kind of shared goal, it is not a proposal that will address my concerns.

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[54] This is roughly the approach Davies (2007) takes in her consideration of the role that Grice's notion of 'cooperation' plays in his larger theory.

3.4 What Kind of Challenge?

Before I move on give my positive proposal, it is important that I clarify what kind of a challenge I take myself to be offering to the Gricean picture. After all, Grice did not argue that *every* conversation is cooperative; he claimed that conversations are "characteristically" cooperative. Theorists like Asher and Lascarides and Camp (2018) present concerns that are similar to mine without framing their discussions as straightforward *objections* to the notion of Gricean cooperation. Instead, these theorists identify certain categories of conversation—strategic conversation and insinuation, respectively—that aren't fully captured in certain conceptions of Grice's picture. One way to understand these discussions is as an acknowledgement that the conversational landscape is a complicated one, and filling out the landscape requires discussing cases that are not adequately captured by Grice's picture. In adopting this approach, one might think that it is perfectly fine to consider (Gricean) cooperative exchanges to be a good theoretical starting point from which we can expand our discussions to less cooperative exchanges.

In offering a set of uncooperative conversations as an *objection* to Gricean cooperativity, I have, clearly, adopted a different approach. When we treat cooperativity as the standard, and give explanations of communicative phenomena in terms of cooperativity, this means that non-cooperative or uncooperative exchanges are not analyzable within this framework. If, as I have shown, the CP *presupposes* that there are shared goals between participants, then cases in which participants don't share goals are cases in which there is a presupposition failure in our analytical tools. Whatever communicative phenomena may be at play, there is no clear reason for appealing to cooperativity to explain them. If the Gricean picture was designed to account for cooperative

exchanges, then it is not clear why we should still use the Gricean picture as our theoretical starting point for conversations that lack this central feature.

Of course, rejecting the Gricean framework as the starting point for theorizing about language will be unattractive to those who are convinced by portions of the framework. After all, the framework offers resources to theorize effectively about implicatures, which is certainly important for an adequate account of linguistic communication. If it turns out that we lose the ability to give an account of implicature without the CP, then this will lead to theoretical difficulties. Fortunately, I do not think we need to reject Grice's approach wholesale. It is, by and large, a useful approach that has been developed and adapted in productive ways over the years. The single element in Grice's system that makes it unable to deal with uncooperative exchanges is the presumption of shared goals. If we can present a broadly Gricean account without presupposing shared goals, we will be able to give a unified explanatory account of the derivation of implicatures in a wider variety of cases. Moreover, if we can offer an account of implicature derivation that makes no mention of shared goals, but is otherwise equally satisfactory as an account of the linguistic phenomena, then this may give the account an advantage over the view of conversation as a cooperative shared activity *even if* it turns out that I am wrong about whether or not there are shared goals in the conversations I claimed are uncooperative. Even if it is incredibly rare that conversations lack a shared goal, if it is even a conceptual possibility, then, all else equal, an account that can include such cases should be preferred over another account that cannot.

3.5 Conversation as a Coordinative Action

3.5.1 Coordinative Actions

The understanding of conversations that we have seen so far, in which conversations are shared activities in which participants share goals, does not have much to say about the cases of uncooperative conversations I have discussed above. This is because uncooperative conversational exchanges are exchanges in which the presuppositions of the CP—that conversations are joint actions in which participants pursue shared goals, is false. In many uncooperative conversations, the CP is not straightforwardly violated; it is not the recommendation that the CP makes (to make your conversational contribution "such as is required") that participants fail to observe, it is the presupposition that there is an "accepted purpose or direction" in the first place. In *Sexual Harassment*, Tom has not said anything that differs from what is required, given the accepted goal between Ann and Tom; there *is no* accepted goal between Ann and Tom so there is nothing that would be appropriate or inappropriate given *that* goal. Similarly, in *Ignored Associate*, Tom does not take Ann to be included in the set that comprises us*, the set that he takes to share the goals of the meeting. Thus, there is no accepted goal between Ann and Tom in that case either.

We can see that it is not necessarily the case that participants in a conversational exchange are members of a plural subject that shares one or more goals. Thus, if there is some kind of principle of cooperation like the CP, it cannot presuppose that there is an accepted purpose or direction of the exchange that participants share, as long as we are understanding "accepted purpose or direction" to denote shared goals. Nevertheless, there is something importantly right about the shared goal thesis: conversation is, by its nature, a social goal-oriented activity, in which participants in the conversation are reliant on one another to realize their (individual) goals. This is the

understanding of conversation I defended in Chapter 2. In what remains of this chapter, I will argue that this understanding of conversation can provide us with the resources to replace the CP with another principle that resembles the CP in two important respects: it can retain many of the recommendations the CP makes for how conversational participants should produce utterances, and it can play the explanatory role that the CP plays in the derivation of implicature.

To do this, I argue that the understanding of conversation I have offered is a variety of what I call *coordinative action*. Talk of action as "coordinative" might reasonably call to mind David Lewis's (1969) discussion of coordination problems. Although I will appeal to Lewis's discussion in attempting to pick out the phenomenon I have in mind, I do not assume that my notion of coordination is identical to Lewis's. One reason for this is that Lewis talks of coordination *problems*, not coordinative actions. That is, he is concerned with the payoff structure of a decision procedure, and defines a subset of those payoff structures as constituting coordination problems. In identifying the phenomenon of coordinative *actions*, I treat certain actions as coordinative by looking at the features of a situation that an agent takes into consideration in acting. In particular, these will be social features of a social action: in coordinative action, agents must act in a way that is properly responsive to other agents' goals.

The second reason my notion of coordination is not likely to be identical to Lewis's is because the specific payoff structure of the coordination problems Lewis identifies is such that there are multiple equilibria—that is, there are multiple decisions such that, for each participant, no change in their decision alone would make them better off. They are coordination problems in part because there are multiple outcomes which, for each party, are the best possible outcome, given that the other party has taken a particular action. Moreover, in general, in Lewis's examples, these

equilibria result in mutually beneficial outcomes. Thus, they are considered coordination problems because participants must coordinate in order to reach the mutually benefical outcomes. The coordinative actions that I am considering, on the other hand, do not require that there are mutually beneficial outcomes. In many cases, participants may be required to act coordinatively, where doing so is consistent with attempting to make their interlocutor worse off.

To give Lewis's definition more exactly, coordination problems are, "situations of interdependent decision by two or more agents in which coincidence of interest predominates and in which there are two or more proper coordination equilibria" (Lewis 1969, 24). That is, coordination problems are situations in which agents interests roughly align (though the payoff for each need not be identical) and there are two or more outcomes in which, for each agent, they are no worse than they would be if only one agent made a different decision. Lewis (1969) gives the example of two people who want to meet, and in order to meet, they each need to go to the same place. For each, it is not particularly important *where* they go, provided that when they get there, they will meet the other. Suppose A and B's preference to meet one another trumps their preference for going to any particular place. Suppose further that they are restricted to meeting in one of two places: The Bar or The Café. For each, it is preferable to go to The Bar if the other will go to The Bar, and it is preferable to go to the Café if the other will go to The Café. For each participant, regardless of how much they independently like The Bar or The Café, going to the place where the other will be is not worse (indeed, it is better) than going to the other location and missing the other person.

By now it should be clear why this notion of coordination might be in some tension with the notion of coordination I am presenting as a weaker alternative to the notion of cooperation: although coordination, in Lewis's sense, does not necessarily require the sharing of *goals*, it does

require significant overlap of preferred *outcomes*. Yet the cases that I am concerned with—particularly cases like *Sexual Harassment*, are not necessarily cases in which agents have overlapping preferences. In fact, it is important that whatever principle replaces the CP, it includes cases in which participants' interests are distinctly at odds. So what is the feature of Lewis's coordination problems that is shared by my category of coordinative action? The feature I aim to identify here is that of being responsive to other agents *as agents* in the exchange. For instance, in coordination problems, agents must be responsive to the other agents in the exchange *as agents*, and not merely as objects to help serve their interests. That is, each agent must acknowledge that the other has goals and preferences of their own, and is engaging in a roughly parallel reasoning pattern, insofar as they are taking into account their interlocutor's goals, preferences, and reasoning in determining the decision they should make.

Appropriate engagement in a coordinative action requires reasoning about other participants *as agents*, and not merely as tools or obstacles to one's achievement of one's own goals. We saw in Chapter 2 that an important feature of conversation, and part of what makes it the case that there are distinctive and identifiable *norms* of conversation is that conversation is an exercise of agency. To treat one's own conversational goals as taking priority over the goals of others is to treat one's own communicative agency as though it takes priority over the agency of others. But as agents engaged in a coordinative activity, one is not justified in thinking of one's own goals and agency taking priority in the exercise of the activity. One certainly might have reasons for aiming to treat their own goals as primary or taking precedence, but it does not make sense for a participant to treat their own interests as being more central to the exercise of a coordinative activity than any other participants. This is true for some of the same reasons we saw in Chapter 2: it is not rational, since conversation

is meant to augment participants' agency, but prioritizing one's own agency over the agency of others is unlikely to aid one in realizing one's conversational goals. Moreover, it undermines the agency of one's interlocutor, thereby violating social and possibly moral norms.

Think again of the example above: suppose participants A and B both have strong preferences for going somewhere where they will meet the other. Any situation in which they end up in different places is strongly dispreferred to any situation in which they end up in the same place. However, they do still each have weak individual preferences about where to meet. A prefers going to The Bar, while B prefers going to The Café. A would be failing to coordinate effectively if they treat the mere fact that they prefer going to The Bar as sufficient reason to go to The Bar to meet B. A should understand the situation as one in which both A and B have preferences of various sorts; not just to meet one another, but also to do so in a particular way. Instrumental rationality requires that A and B should reason in such a way as to maximize the chances that their goals will be realized. This is not a case in which one party should be acting against their own self-interest. Yet acting in accordance with one's own self-interest in a coordinative action requires treating the other party's goals and agency as equally important for determining the course of action the they undertake.

Similarly, in conversation, pursuing one's own conversational goals coordinatively requires that one take into account the conversational goals of one's interlocutor. Moreover, one must not just take one's interlocutor's goals into account as static considerations that must be navigated in the realization of one's own goals. They should be understood as influencing the exchange just as much as one's own goals; they count equally *as conversational goals*. Of course, some conversational goals may be illegitimate for a variety of non-conversational reasons. One might adopt a conversational

goal that is morally prohibited, for instance. In such a case, their interlocutor might be justified in treating their goal as illegitimate and thus discounting the goal *as a conversational goal* by trying to get them to see the illegitimacy and adjust their goal accordingly. But in any situation in which it is a conversational goal, it should be considered in reasoning as a goal with equal standing to all other conversational goals. Consider, for instance, Tom's advance toward Ann in *Sexual Harassment*. There is reason to think that there is something illegitimate about Tom's conversational goals to get Ann to come to lunch with him—it is unprofessional, and very apparently unwelcome. But it is nevertheless a conversational goal in the exchange, and as such Ann must take it into account in her reasoning about which conversational moves to make in order to maximize her chances of realizing her goals. There certainly is something conversationally defective about how Tom pursues his goal, but what makes this case defective *as a coordinative activity* is not the goals Tom adopts, but the fact that he fails to treat Ann's goals and contributions as equally legitimate to his own.

3.5.2 The Coordinative Principle

With this understanding of conversation as a coordinative action in mind, I propose the following principle to replace the CP:

> Coordinative Principle (CP*): Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, in order to most effectively realize your conversational goals, while acknowledging that your interlocutor's goals have equal standing *as conversational goals* in the exchange.

The CP* maintains from the CP the requirement that we consider the goals of our interlocutors, but unlike the CP, it does not require that the goals in question are *shared* goals; rather, the goals in question are all the conversational goals in play, or at least, all the goals that the agent can identify. Yet as soon as we do away with the presumption that participants share conversational goals, we must determine which goals *are* in play in communication, and how those goals relate. After all, when participants share a conversational goal, it is clear that what is required is that they both aim for the realization of that goal. But if participants do not share a conversational goal, then it is less clear how participants are supposed to engage with the conversational goals of others. There is not necessarily any one particular outcome of the conversation that is ideal for everyone, or even one particular mode of engagement with the conversation that is ideal for all participants. Instead, participants must find a course of action that is most likely to accomplish their goals, given that their interlocutors are agents with their own goals and aims in the exchange.

Moreover, like the CP, the CP* is an articulation of a kind of instrumental rationality:

> Simplified CP*: Speak in such a way as to realize your goals, given your interlocutor's goals (at each stage of the conversation).

In other words, if one is to successfully realize their own goals through conversation, which requires significant coordination with others, then one will need, rationally, to strategically take the goals of one's interlocutors into consideration in order to ensure that the interlocutors will play the relevant role in helping one realize one's goals. But strategically taking one's interlocutor into consideration

as a tool to help one realize one's conversational goals isn't enough to count as coordination. When I am out for a run, I take into consideration the likely goals of drivers as I cross the street in order to avoid being hit by a car, but I do not take that to be a case in which I am coordinating with drivers. I anticipate drivers' goals in order to realize my own goals by attempting to predict their future actions. This predictive reasoning no more counts as coordination than my predictive reasoning about how the weather will impact my run. In order for our interaction to count as coordinative, there must be some recognition on the part of both parties that we are engaging in a coordinative action in which each of us has goals central to the action itself. The drivers and I are not engaged in any action or activity together, we just happen to be in close proximity to one another and sometimes run the risk of getting in one another's way.[55] On the other hand, if we are engaged in a conversation, we are each a part of a single conversational exchange, requiring us to do some kind of coordination.

This is easy to see when conversational participants have overlapping or partially overlapping goals. We often enter into a conversation because of or as a result of goals we have in common with others—we generally share at least some work-related goals with our colleagues, we often build friendships around shared interests, allowing us to expect that our friends share certain goals with us, and even in transactional interactions we often have some shared goal: a barista and I share the goal of getting me coffee, since I go to the barista because I want coffee, and her job relies on her providing customers with coffee. The CP* can deal with these cases without trouble: when my goals and my interlocutor's goals overlap, it is often easy to identify what the Coordinative Principle

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[55] Of course, we might become engaged in a coordinative action if we made eye contact and the driver gestured at me to cross the street before they continued on).

requires of me: if we have the very same goals, then making contributions that are productive in realizing my goals, given your goals is easy because your goals and mine are the same.

But the CP* can also deal with strategic conversations in which participants attempt to realize their goals despite the conflicting goals of their interlocutors, and even overtly uncooperative conversations. Strategic conversations are strategic precisely because participants recognize that their goals differ from those of their interlocutors. Part of the strategy is to anticipate those goals and take them into consideration when producing and interpreting utterances. Unlike in conversations that are, to a significant degree, cooperative, in strategic conversations we need to anticipate the goals of others in part to ensure that our contributions promote our own goals *even when* (and in some cases especially when) doing so will be counterproductive for an interlocutor's goals. In more antagonistic cases of strategic conversation, each party's goal might involve identifying and foiling the other participant's goal first. But note that this does not present a problem for the view of conversations as coordinative, in my sense. An antagonistic exchange that involves participants aiming to foil one another's plans is still a case in which participants recognize their interlocutor as an agent whose goals have equally standing as conversational goals. The fact that participants aim to foil one another's goals *requires* understanding those goals as counting equally as conversational goals. It is because they count as conversational goals that they constitute a threat for other participants. Adequately identifying and foiling an interlocutor's goal requires treating them as a conversational agent in their own right.

Overtly uncooperative conversations, such as the example of Ann and Tom, differ from strategic conversations in that they cannot be explained *using* the CP*. Rather, we should understand such cases as *violations of* the CP*. One advantage of appealing to the CP* over the CP is that it is

easier to make sense of violations of the CP* stemming from a lack of overlapping goals. Because the shared goals discussed in the CP are *shared*, to violate the principle would be to act against one's own rational interests. The purpose of engaging in the conversation just is to realize one's own (shared) goals, so acting in a way that does not move forward the (shared) goals makes little sense. To violate the CP would be to violate a kind of instrumental rationality in which you pursue actions that do not further your own goals. On the other hand, it is evident what it takes to violate the CP*: one can violate the CP* either by failing to speak in such a way as to realize one's own goals, or by ignoring or failing to properly take into consideration their interlocutors' expected goals in determining what utterance to make. Because the CP* can be understood as a principle of instrumental rationality, either way of violating the CP* is a rational failure, of a kind. But failing to properly take into consideration one's interlocutor's expected goals is a rational violation that we can make sense of because it stems from the tension that exist between one's own goals and one's interlocutors' goals. An agent is not failing in acting as they should, given their own goals; they're failing to act as they should, given both their own goals and what they know about the goals of others. This does not mean that it is not irrational, but it is an irrationality that could reasonably stem from the difficulty of reasoning through how to behave conversationally, given the goals of others.

For instance, we can see that in *Sexual Harassment*, Tom has failed to take seriously Ann's conversational goals, or to treat her as a conversational agent whose goals and intentions influence Tom's ability to realize his own goals. Thus, Tom fails to coordinate with Ann. He has inappropriately prioritized his own goals at the expense of Ann's. It is clear that it is counterproductive for Tom to do so; the less he acknowledges and takes into account her goals and

interests, the less likely he is to achieve his goal of getting Ann to go to lunch with him.[56] We can see, then, that Tom's preferencing of his goals over Ann's counts as a violation of the CP*, and that this constitutes an instrumental irrationality on Tom's part since it endangers his own ability to realize his goals. Similarly, in *Ignored Associate*, all participants who failed to treat Ann's utterance of *p* as a meaningful contribution to the conversation have failed to recognize that, since her goals align with theirs, they ought to take her contributions as seriously as they take anyone else's if they are to effectively realize their goals.

These uncooperative conversations illustrate instances in which the presupposition of the CP is not satisfied, and thus, they cannot be evaluated for whether they meet the requirements of the CP. These exchanges do satisfy the presupposition of the CP*, however, and we can thus make sense of them as violations of the CP* rather than as presupposition failures of the CP*.

3.6 Implicature Derivation and the Coordinative Principle

One might worry that the CP* could not possibly serve the explanatory purposes that the CP does and thus, that the CP* could not be an adequate replacement for the CP. In particular, one might worry that the CP* could not give an adequate explanation for the derivation of implicatures. As I noted above, Grice (1975) introduces the CP in order to explain the derivation of implicatures:

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[56] Of course, it is not clear that a sexual harasser's goal in their harassment is generally the apparent goal. There may be cases, for instance, in which Tom's true goal is not to take Ann to lunch, but perhaps to humiliate Ann, to exercise power over her, etc. In this case, he may not face any rational pressure to consider Ann's goals; he can use his words to try to exercise his power over her, regardless of her goals.

if a hearer assumes a speaker is cooperative, but the speaker's utterance appears to be uncooperative—usually by appearing to violate one of the conversational maxims—then the hearer can re-interpret the utterance to have an alternative interpretation that would count as a cooperative contribution. Thus, when we presume an interlocutor is cooperative, we are in a better position to understand them, even when they produce utterances that are intended to be interpreted non-literally. The CP*, of course, does not require that participants are cooperative. One might worry, then, that doing away with the CP in favor of the CP* would eliminate our ability to explain implicatures. Yet this worry is not well-founded. There is no particular reason why the derivation of implicature requires that participants cooperate. Coordination will explain the phenomenon equally well.

To see this, recall from Section 2 that according to Grice, implicature is derived as an inference to the best explanation, where the hearer presumes that the speaker is observing the CP and the conversational maxims. When the most obvious interpretation of the utterance does not appear to be in observance of the CP and maxims, the hearer looks for the best explanation of what the speaker must have meant to communicate in place of the apparent interpretation. Note that none of this requires that the speaker and hearer share any conversational goals. In the derivation of implicature, the shared goals to which the CP refers are not invoked at all. The only indirect invocation of the shared goals is in the invocation of the CP itself, and the presumption that the speaker is observing the CP. But what is important in invoking the CP here is that the hearer can presume that the speaker is making their utterances "such as is required," given some goal or goals that are identifiable to the hearer, and that the hearer can then identify what the speaker must have intended to communicate given these goals. But a hearer could identify a speaker's goals and what a

speaker must have intended to communicate just as well by presuming that they are observing the CP* as by presuming that they are observing the CP. By presuming that a participant is *coordinating* rather than cooperating, we must still assume that they are following all of the maxims: to fail to make one's utterances true, appropriately informational, relevant, and orderly is as much a violation of the requirement to coordinate by taking into consideration the interlocutor's goals as it is a violation of cooperativity. In other words, the CP is no better suited than the CP* for enabling the derivation of implicatures.

Given that hearers can presume a speaker is coordinating with their interlocutors, and given that coordination requires that participants take their interlocutors' goals seriously, we can infer a great deal. For instance, if we presume that a speaker is engaging coordinatively, we must presume that they believe their utterances to be expressing true propositions (Quality). To lie or intentionally mislead, after all, would be to treat one's own goals as primary. We must also presume that they are presenting roughly the right amount of information, given at least one party's goals (Quantity). To fail to do so would be to fail to speak in a way that is efficient, given the goals that one recognizes as conversational goals. We must, of course, presume that speakers are producing utterances that are relevant, at the stage of the conversation at which they are made, to one or more identifiable goals in a way that it is clear to which goal the utterance is relevant (Relation). To utter non-sequiturs would be criticizable on multiple counts. First, it would be irrational since, as a non-sequitur, it will likely not contribute to the realization of the speaker's goals. Moreover, it is uncollaborative, in that it does contribute to the realization of the hearers' goals. If it moves forward neither the speaker's nor the hearers' goals, then it simply does not make sense as a coordinative contribution to the exchange. And finally, we must presume that a speaker's utterances are presented in a way that is relatively

straightforward and understandable (Manner). To fail to do so would be uncollaborative in that it puts an undue burden on the hearer to determine what the speaker must have meant. Suppose a speaker uses unnecessarily complicated jargon, or uses words in nonstandard or idiosyncratic ways. This is unproductive for the realization of any goals, including both the speaker's and the hearer's, since it does not allow for collaboration. If one's hearer cannot be reasonably expected to decipher the speaker's meaning, then the speaker is not really even communicating with the hearer; they are not treating their interlocutor *as an interlocutor*, much less treating their interlocutor's goals as equally counting as conversational goals.

Finally, one might worry whether we are in fact warranted in presuming that speakers are observing the CP* or the conversational maxims. After all, one of the reasons I suggested that that the CP* does a better job at explaining the phenomena than the CP is because we can make better sense of what it takes to violate the principle. But if the violation of the CP* is a live option, then in what sense does it make sense to presume that a speaker is observing it? I suggest that we expand the inferential explanation of utterance interpretation: not only do hearers seek an inference to the best explanation with regard to the implicated meaning of utterances, under the presumption that the speaker was observing the CP*, they first seek an inference to the best explanation with regard to whether the speaker was observing the CP* in the first place. Thus, determining a speaker's intended meaning is a multi-step inferential process in which hearers infer, first, whether the speaker is observing the CP* and if so, second, what they must have meant, given that they are observing the CP*.[57]

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[57] Despite my use of 'first' and 'second', this need not be a temporal ordering. These processes may happen in parallel, or in a mutual feedback system where, for instance, the processing at both levels

It should be evident, I think, why such a multi-step process is necessary: given that violations of the CP* are possible, and not particularly uncommon, we need an explanation for why participants don't need to presume that a speaker is observing the CP* when it is evident that they are not. Note that with a strong enough presumption that a speaker is observing the CP*, a hearer could, in principle, perform mental gymnastics to try to interpret and reinterpret the speaker's utterance until some coordinative interpretation can be found. Surely with a little extra effort, Ann could identify a coordinative interpretation of Tom's lunch invitation in *Sexual Harassment*. But this is clearly not ideal. First, it is naïve: Ann would make herself unduly vulnerable to speakers who fail to observe the CP* each time she goes out of her way to give a coordinative interpretation of a speaker's failure to observe the CP*. Second, it is psychologically unrealistic: the amount of cognitive effort involved in interpreting and reinterpreting Tom until she can make sense of utterance as coordinative is far greater than the amount of cognitive energy she would need to use to identify that he simply is not adequately coordinating; he is not treating her conversational goals as having equal standing to his own as conversational goals.

Although it appears that my proposal involves more steps in the inferential process, I do not think we need to think of this as a great cost. First, despite the extra step, it is an explanatorily unified explanation: each inferential process is at the level of an inference to the best explanation, and there is no need to posit new processes or explanatory functions. Second, in fact, this step would be necessary even on a Gricean picture. Grice argues that there are many ways that a

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of inference stops as soon as a sufficiently plausible interpretation is reached by one. I make no claims about how such systems should play out psychologically, though a psychological analysis would, for obvious reasons, offer a more refined picture of the process.

speaker's utterances can fail to (or appear to fail to) align their utterances with the conversational maxims. Not only can a speaker flout a maxim in order to implicate something, they can also opt out of a conversation or part of a conversation by saying something like, "I can't say any more." Clearly in such a case, the speaker should recognize that the speaker is not using that utterance to attempt to do anything more than opt out of the conversation. But this requires that the hearer is able to recognize that they should not presume that the speaker is observing the CP and the maxims in that utterance. In other words, they have already inferred that such an utterance counts as an opting out, rather than that the speaker is trying to implicate something. Thus, we can see that I have not introduced anything particularly new here; any adequate account of implicature must recognize that hearers must infer a great deal, even aside from identifying an implicature, about what kind of utterance a contribution is and what kind of reasoning will appropriately go into the interpretation of utterances.

3.7 Conclusion

As I have shown, there is reason to doubt that conversation is, or must be, a cooperative joint activity in which participants constitute a plural subject pursuing a shared goal. People are often uncooperative and engage in conversation without thought or consideration for their interlocutors. This does not mean that conversation is not social and does not have the sorts of features that social action often involves; conversational communication requires multiple people, and in order for it to function properly, it requires coordination between those people. In fact, it is plausible that in entering into conversation, participants take on various obligations to one another, and by failing to

consider the goals and interests of one's interlocutor, one is actually doing something wrong by violating the obligation.

Whether or not participation in conversations gives rise to obligations, however, there is clear reason to reject the CP and replace it with the CP*, or something like it. Any account on which conversations are presupposed to be cooperative endeavors in which interlocutors participate as a joint agent in the goal-oriented activity of conversation will be unable to account for uncooperative exchanges. At the same time, simply replacing the CP with the CP* enables us to explain all that the CP explains: participants in conversations will still, in general, presume their interlocutors to be following the CP*, since in general we presume our interlocutors to be rational. This allows participants to derive implicatures when their interlocutors, who are apparently coordinating properly make utterances that flout the conversational maxims.

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