

Neutrality

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1 A neutral space for reasons?

Let’s say that discussion is neutral if perspectives and social location are irrelevant to the understanding and evaluation of each move in the discussion. If perspectives and social location are irrelevant to the discussion, the discussion is neutral.

Here is a natural way of thinking of how propaganda impairs democracy. Democracy is a space of neutral deliberative reason. In such a space, participants in a discussion solely focus on exchanging reasons. Since the space of deliberation is neutral, it is devoid of biased perspective. Since it is devoid of biased perspective, the best argument wins. Why, according to this picture, do we not live in a democracy? Because propaganda prevents the neutral exchange of reason. Propaganda wields perspective as a weapon, sometimes explicitly, other times covertly, masking perspective behind a facade of apparent neutrality. Propaganda excites emotion, and fosters in-group bonding, impeding rationality. Propaganda is thus a mortal threat to the realization of the democratic ideal. Propaganda and ideological discourse are barriers to the neutral space of reasons that is the liberal ideal.

In a more sophisticated vein, one could allow that some propaganda - some appeal to emotion, to force not backed by reasons - could be necessary to achieve democratic ends. When some of the population is in the grips of ideology, reasons will not work to free them. Ideology blocks considerations of reason. On this picture, even for democratic ends, propaganda is necessary, to shock people out of ideological barriers, but *only* as a way-station to the democratic ideal of neutral deliberative reason. Speech that resonates emotionally with people, bonding them via emotions such as empathy, can perhaps play a role as a means to realizing democratic ideals. But ultimately, a true democratic space of reasons does not involve speech whose function is to resonate with an audience via means other than the provision of reasons. Democracy is incompatible, too, with perspectival content.¹

¹ There are clear central models of democratic deliberation that reject its putatively aperspectival nature. In “On the Ruling of Men”, W.E.B. Du Bois argues that one must include multiple perspectives for democratic deliberation to result in the best outcomes (in W.E.B. Du Bois, Darkwater: Voices from within the Veil (Dover, 1999): 78-94.)

In Alice Crary's 2018 paper, "The Methodological is Political": What's the Matter with 'Analytic Feminism'" Crary critiques this picture of the anti-democratic nature of emotional or anti-rational appeals in public discourse. In particular, she criticizes it for presupposing a picture of idealized public discourse as a neutral space of reasons. Using as an example the account of propaganda in Stanley (2015), since it is for her a paradigm case of how not to proceed, Crary questions whether it is reasonable for feminists to view radically anti-establishment methods that undercut enlightenment-style rationalism as a short term tactic en route to a new and better "neutral conception of reason". She views such an approach as deeply flawed, and says of its advocates:

They recognise the practical need for ethically non-neutral methods. At the same time, they claim that these methods are as such non-rational and should therefore only be used – as crucial but also intrinsically problematic and therefore merely temporary instruments – for clearing away obstacles to the creation of a space for debate that is maximally neutral and, as the thinkers in question see it, hence rationally and politically sound. This is the stance that Jason Stanley, for instance, defends in his recent, widely discussed book on propaganda. Despite regarding all propaganda as non-neutral and hence as non-rational and politically problematic, Stanley allows for indispensable or, in his terms, 'non-demagogic' types of propaganda that are at times 'necessary' for dismantling ideological formations that distort what he sees as the neutral space for democratic discourse.

Crary is correct. We would go perhaps further to argue that any model of speech that legitimates even the possibility of "a neutral space of reasons" for discourse is incoherent, and epistemologically problematic. It is incoherent, because utterances of words are moves in speech practices that have various resonances beyond the contents of those words. Such speech practices locate speakers in histories and social roles. It is epistemologically problematic, because abstracting from the communicative effects of these speech practices threatens to impede awareness of the advantages, as well as the biases, they potentially bring with them. In the terms of the special issue to which this paper is a contribution, the recognition of non-neutrality plays a crucial role in explaining how speakers and their perspectives gain social visibility.

In this paper, we try to meet Crary's challenge. We do so by sketching how a correct theory of meaning could avoid commitment even to the coherence of a neutral space of discourse for exchanging reasons. A critique of propaganda cannot take the form of "clearing out" the obstacles for a "neutral space of discourse for exchanging reasons", since that is to misunderstand how speech works. We will use the issue of neutrality to introduce some of the central aspects of our theory - the relationship between words and speech practices.

What would ground the idea of a "neutral space for democratic discourse"? One would need to think of linguistic meaning as having a certain kind of neutrality, that language has a non-ideological core that is the subject of semantic and pragmatic theory. According to this model, the "core" of meaning is neutral information, denotations independent of the speaker. In this paper, we argue that it's not clear how any such thought can be sustained. Even if the notion of neutral information is coherent, it is not the "core" of understanding speech.

"Core," like "neutral space," is something of a metaphor. We can also think of the issue as what use of language constitutes *the central case*. On one model, the central case of language is its informational use. Political, aesthetic, romantic, and familiar ways of speaking are special cases. We propose, instead, to consider socio-political uses of language as the central case.

On our ultimate view, we adopt a theoretical position from which this point will be less controversial than it seems. We will argue, for example, that *joint attunement* is a primary function of communication, and joint attunement to something like an objective denotation (e.g. joint attunement to the reference of a description) is just a *species* of that, and in no sense its *core*. We argue that joint attunement to aspects other than denotation is at least as important to understanding communication as joint attunement to denotation. So, joint attunement to denotation is just one kind of attunement, and not the “core” kind. From our theoretical perspective, what is most important are the speech practices exemplified by uses of words. That these speech practices often involve attuning speakers to the same *information* does not privilege the informational function of the use of words. The words “dog” and “cur” are used to attune the speaker and the audience to the same kind of animal. But from our perspective, the fact that utterances of these terms are moves in quite distinct speech practices gives use of these words different functions in speech practices. In our theory, it is the different speech practices enacted by using different words that are central, and potential overlap in objective denotation is just one among several features that a theory of meaning should study. Neutrality is just obviously a non-starter from such a perspective. We will use the critical discussion of the ideal of neutrality as a way into this perspective.

But first - what is “neutral objective information”? Our discussion here is necessarily speculative, as we are not committed to the coherence of the notion. We begin with its source in the analytic tradition - the work of Gottlob Frege. Frege’s preferred notion of meaning, which he called sense, was a kind of neutral informational content. Frege recognized that there were aspects of meaning that were not neutral in his preferred sense. But he rejected these as relevant to his “official” notion of meaning. We will argue that these aspects are conventional, and we can understand them as such.

2 Frege on Sense vs. Tone

In Frege’s mature philosophy of language, from 1892 on, there are two levels of meaning: sense, and reference. The reference of proper names are objects, so “Mark Twain” and “Samuel Clemens” have the same reference. But, famously, Frege argues that in such cases the two names may have different meanings, as it is possible to believe that Mark Twain is not Samuel Clemens, without irrationality (or, to return to the classic example that Frege used, that Hesperus is not Phosphorous). These different meanings, the different meanings associated with “Mark Twain” and “Samuel Clemens”, Frege calls *senses*. Here are five doctrines Frege holds about senses:

- (1) The sense of an expression is the way the expression presents its referent (see the first paragraph of "On Sense and Reference [Bedeutung]"). 'The Evening star' and 'The Morning star' present the same referent, Venus, in different ways.
- (2) The sense of an expression is what one must grasp in order to understand the expression ("The sense of a proper name is grasped by everyone who is sufficiently familiar with the language...", "On Sinn and Bedeutung").
- (3) The sense of an expression is its reference in opaque, or indirect, contexts, such as in the '...' of "John believes ..." (see "On Sinn and Bedeutung").
- (4) Sense *determines* reference, at least in the *minimal* sense that a difference in reference entails a difference in sense.
- (5) Some senses, the *thoughts*, are the ultimate objects of truth and falsity.

On this picture of meaning, a sentence is composed of words. Each word has a meaning, the way it presents its referent. The thought expressed by the sentence is composed of the meanings (senses) of the words the sentence contains. The thought is what is believed, and it is what is true or false.

In “Logic” and elsewhere, Frege draws a distinction between sense and what he calls *tone*. From the distinctions he draws between sense and tone, we can draw a conclusion about Frege’s views of senses. It is that senses are neutral and aperspectival:

If we compare the sentences 'This dog howled the whole night' and 'This cur howled the whole night', we find that the thought is the same. The first sentence tells us neither more nor less than does the second. But whilst the word 'dog' is neutral as between having pleasant or unpleasant associations, the word 'cur' certainly has unpleasant rather than pleasant associations and puts us rather in mind of a dog with a somewhat unkempt appearance.²

There is a thought Frege here articulates, that is natural and widespread. It is that the “normal” words, like “dog”, are “neutral as between having pleasant or unpleasant associations”. The second thought Frege here articulates, also embedded in the ideology of much theorizing about meaning, is that the elements of thought, which for Frege are meanings, are neutral and aperspectival. It is because he is assuming this about senses that he concludes that “cur” and “dog” have the same sense, because they have the same neutral “core”.

Frege has an argument in the case of “dog” and “cur”. Consider someone who objects to his view that the two sentences ‘This dog howled the whole night’ and ‘This cur howled the whole night’ express the same thing, holding that the second sentence also expresses the information that the speaker holds a negative view towards the dog. Frege writes:

We assume that the first sentence is true and the second sentence is spoken by someone who does not actually feel the contempt which the word 'cur' seems to imply. If the objection were correct, the second sentence would now contain two thoughts, one of which was false; so it would assert something false as a whole, whilst the first sentence would be true. We shall hardly go along with this; rather the use of the word 'cur' does not prevent us from holding that the second sentence is true.³

Frege then concludes that the pejorative association of “cur” is not a part of the thought expressed by “This cur howled the whole night”. The pejorative association is tone and not sense.

The following picture emerges from Frege’s discussions of the distinction between sense and tone. Senses, meanings, the constituents of thoughts, are “neutral”, though in what sense is not clear. They are objective and shared. The sense of a word does not change from context to context.

What is left to tone is a motley assortment. The feelings we associate with words are tone, the positive and negative ones, as well as the images it elicits. The elements that are not relevant for the truth and falsity of what is asserted is tone. Tone is fleeting, unstable, unsystematic, and subjective. Frege does not exhibit much interest in its study.

Do we need a theory of meaning that allows us to recognize that the communicative significance of resonance with images, emotions, and shared social practices is no less important than sameness of

² Gottlob Frege, *Logic*, in *Hands Hermes*, Friedrich Kambartel and Friedrich Kaulbach (eds.), Gottlob Frege: Posthumous Writings, University of Chicago Press, 1979, p. 140

³ *Ibid*, p. 140.

neutral informational denotation? In short, do we need somehow to incorporate Frege's *tone*, and not as a secondary element? One objection to such a theory is that tone is not vital to the function of speech. A second objection is that any theory of tone would conflate *mere associations* with linguistic conventions. We will argue against both of these objections. First, something like tone is often crucial to communication. Secondly, we will argue that where Frege and those convinced by his arguments see *no* linguistic conventions, we see *many*.

In the theory we develop, words are associated with social practices, and resonate with different attachments, even if they have the same informational denotation. Most words are constituents of multiple speech practices, and the different tonal effects in different contexts are due to their relationship to the speech practice that the use of the form exemplifies at that time. The fleeting nature of tone is often due to the fact that a single word is being used in different speech practices in different contexts. Once we see that uttering a word is a move in a speech practice, we can recognize why communicative effects are much broader than Frege allowed.

For now, it's worth investigating in detail a specific case, the case of "dog" and "cur", which Frege took as a paradigm example of two words with the same sense but different tone.

3 "Dog" vs "Cur"

The example of cur is suggestive, but misleadingly so. "Cur" is not merely rare, but essentially never used in contemporary English with the sense of dog + <negative affect>, except by philosophers of language. If it is so hard to come up with an example of a word conveying tone that the standard examples are themselves vanishingly rare, then how important can tone be? Contrary to the impression that the example "cur" gives, we suggest that tone is ubiquitous.

Let us start with the supposedly neutral counterpart "dog", which we choose precisely because of its apparent innocuousness. An unpretentious word, certainly. Old English. And clearly the least marked noun to describe a dog. But neutral? What would it even mean for it to be "neutral"?⁴

Consider first the fact that the etymological history of English words correlates to the register in which they are used. Thus, those old English words, like child and chip and chin still in common use, tend to be understood as ordinary colloquial, plain English words. Anglo-Norman vocabulary is more varied in its register, with beef, blue and (in the UK) bucket being broadly distributed across registers, but citizen, commodity, and conspiracy carrying a decided edge of specialization, education and privilege. And more obviously Latinate or Greek vocabulary presumably provides many of the \$5 words in Mark Twain's aphorism "Don't use a five-dollar word when a fifty-cent word will do." Such language tends to sound cultured or learned – from amorousness and abdominal to phobias and philosophy. The point here is not that these etymologies provide any hard and fast rules as to the extra-semantic significance of words. Rather, etymology provides a way of sorting words into heaps, and once the words are in those heaps, broad differences in usage and connotation become obvious. Simply categorizing words by length, or by frequency, would achieve almost the same as sorting by etymology.

⁴ Jennifer Foster, in "Busting the Ghost of Neutral Counterparts" (ms.), argues tout court against slurs having neutral counterparts, on multiple distinct grounds – she argues that the extensions of slurs and "neutral terms" are not the same, and that so-called neutral terms are not in fact neutral.

Let us now propose that “dog” is inherently toned, introduce natural objections, and then at least partially rebut them. It is obvious first that “dog” is often used in phrases that have negative connotations. Although there are certainly expressions in which “dog” is used positively, the negative resonances in English are mirrored by the fact that the “recurring themes in common idioms in languages such as French, German, Italian, and Spanish, are those of: low status/worthlessness, futility, unhappiness, competition/ aggression.”⁵ Such associations surely creep into many uses of “dog.” And “dog” being, as noted, an unpretentious Old English word, will also carry its unpretentiousness with it wherever it goes. One might, of course, use or mention the word “dog” in a pretentious utterance, as perhaps exemplified by this very statement, which is doing its utmost to wear its authors’ intellectuality on its sleeve while at the same time maintaining an effortless insouciance, but even in this rather extended and unnecessarily self-referential sentence, the two mentions of the word dog are not in themselves pretentious.

A number of objections surface at this point. One might accept that when one uses the word “dog” various connotations connected with the attitudes and social positioning of the speaker are available, but deny that those have to do with the meaning of the word. One might, perhaps, say that some of the connotations reflect nothing about the meaning of “dog” but rather its usage. And one might say that yet other connotations have nothing to do with the word “dog”, but rather are associations we have with the concept represented by “dog”, associations we could in principle have even if we didn’t know the word “dog.” And one might note that “dog” is often used without any conscious intention to display unpretentiousness, or, for that matter, a negative attitude towards “dog.” Doesn’t this suggest that if there is any such coloration, it is not part of the conventional meaning of the word?

Let us tackle the last of these first. Does not the potential lack of conscious intention imply a lack of convention? Although as we will see, the possibility of unconscious invocation of tonal meaning is significant, we do not take that possibility to directly bear on the issue of whether or not a given tonal coloring is a conventional aspect of a word’s meaning. At risk of an argument from authority, let us borrow a line of thought with such philosophical pedigree that it is part of the canon of undergraduate philosophy of language: Putnam’s externalism. A use of “beech” conveys the meaning of “beech” rather than “elm” even if the speaker does not have a sufficiently advanced conceptualization of either beeches or elms to distinguish between the two, for example being unaware of the fact that the base of beech leaves is more symmetric than that of elm leaves. If the speaker lacks conceptual distinctions, then clearly the communicative intention cannot involve conscious access to those distinctions. Therefore, the argument would go, one can utter something with a certain meaning without necessarily having conscious access to all aspects of that meaning. And a fortiori, one can utter something that conventionally carries a certain tonality without conscious awareness of that tonality. Just as one can, as the schoolyard rhyme suggests, be a poet and not know it, so can the tone of one’s words reveal piety or pride, and cause offence or delight, all despite any lack of conscious intention. Even the words of a tone-deaf speaker may carry tone.

What of the idea that what we have identified as the potential tonal components of “dog”, unpretentiousness and a somewhat demeaning attitude towards dog-like things, are not part of the meaning of “dog”? It is intuitive to analyze the claimed negativity as being an attitude towards dog-like

⁵ Livia Miller, “Writing doggedly: dog idioms from around Europe,” Oxford Dictionaries Blog, July 11, 2013.

things, rather than part of the meaning of the word. And it seems plausible to say that the unpretentiousness of “dog” is no more and no less than a fact about usage, associated with our knowledge of register rather than with our knowledge of the meaning of the word. We have two replies, one somewhat defensive, and the other accepting.

Our more defensive reply is that we cannot see a clear empirical basis for discriminating tone as part of expression meaning from tone as either associated with an underlying non-linguistic conceptual category, or from tone as a matter of usage. We can, on the contrary, see at least one argument for considering at least some of the tonality of “dog” a part of its meaning. We can think of this using Grice’s notion of detachability. Detachability is a diagnostic criterion for whether an aspect of meaning is conventional or conversational, although as we will discuss later, it is by no means clear that the criterion is a coherent one. Grice describes an inference associated with an expression as “nondetachable insofar as it is not possible to find another way of saying the same thing (or approximately the same thing) which simply lacks the [inference].”⁶ So let us ask: is the unpretentiousness of “dog” detachable? The word “canine” used as a noun (or indeed the Latin *Canis familiaris*) would have the same extension as “dog”, but contrast strongly in pretentiousness. So it is possible to find another way of saying “the same thing (or approximately the same thing)” that lacks the inference in question, namely the inference that the speaker intends to represent him- or herself as ordinary, humble, or unpretentious. It is less clear whether the words canine or hound carry similar negative connotations as dog, though certainly they are not found in the same negative idioms. It is not a hound eat hound world. It anyway seems that, by Grice’s criterion, at least the inference of unpretentiousness is detachable from the concept represented by “dog”, and therefore this inference should be considered to be conventionally associated with the word “dog.”

Here is a fact: use of one and the same word on different occasions can exemplify different speech practices. This simple fact has ramifications for a test like detachability. There is a regular speech practice, exemplified by the use of “dog”, that has negative connotations. There is another speech practice, which uses of “dog” also can exemplify, that lacks these negative connotations. The word “dog” is associated with both of these speech practices. Which speech practice a particular use of “dog” exemplifies is communicatively relevant. We have here two conventional associations, rather than none.

Linguistic practices are communicatively relevant. We can recognize the significance of this point by thinking of specific utterances as actions that fit into a pattern of practices. The word “dog” is typically used as part of a practice of unpretentious speech; it fits into a way of speaking. Whether a particular use of “dog” exemplifies a practice of this kind is a context-dependent matter. In the book from which this paper is drawn,⁷ we fit the context-dependence of practices into our model, much like the context dependence of indexicals. A word will be used relative to a context in which various practices are salient; which practices are salient will determine the communicative effect of uttering it. On the model we will describe, this will emerge as no more perplexing than indexicality. Fitting practices into the theory, much of what is covered by discussion of tone will be accounted for by practices.

⁶ Paul Grice, “Further Notes on Logic and Conversation,” in *Studies in the Way of Words*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991). Grice is here not discussing inferences in general, but rather what he terms “conversational implicatures”.

⁷ David Beaver and Jason Stanley, *The Politics of Language*, Princeton University Press, to appear.

The examples we have discussed lead us away from a model of communication that privileges a notion of objective denotation as central to meaning. That two expressions attune conversational participants to the same informational denotation is consistent with these expressions having all sorts of other communicative effects. And here we might distinguish between a weak position, that all expressions are associated with effects other than the effect of providing a Fregean sense and reference, and a strong position, namely that there is no such thing as an informational denotation devoid of emotional or social tone, and no such thing as a purely informational communicative effect. While the weaker position suffices for current purposes, we would like to suggest a middle ground: we can think of the separation of conventional meaning into categories such as provision of information and expression of affect and social perspective as a methodological choice. That is, we leave open whether it is possible to even state the sense of words independently of emotional valence or other aspects of what Elisabeth Camp refers to as the perspective of the speaker. While it may or may not be feasible for the theorist to adopt a divide-and-conquer-style reductionist strategy in analyzing different aspects of meaning, we see no evidence that any such division is inherent to the phenomenon of language. There is no data clearly showing that meanings consist of constellations of isolated meaning components, and no data clearly showing that meanings are cognized as if distinctly separated in this way. Leaving aside these methodological questions, and focusing simply on the idea that language has equally important communicative effects other than providing an informational denotation, what other sorts of linguistic phenomena suggest a similar moral?

4 Speech Practices

In *The Language of the Third Reich*, Klemperer describes the propaganda of the Third Reich under which he lived. The speech practices that were pervasive under National Socialism, the subject matter of the book, were sufficiently distinctive as to give them a name, *Lingua Tertii Imperii*, or LTI:

The LTI only serves the cause of invocation. ... The sole purpose of the LTI is to strip everyone of their individuality, to paralyze them as personalities, to make them into unthinking and docile cattle in a herd driven and hounded in a particular direction, to turn them into atoms in a huge rolling block of stone.⁸

Klemperer's book is a focused description of LTI, of characteristic Nazi speech practices.

The first chapter of Klemperer's book, "Heroism: Instead of an Introduction," is devoted to describing the symbols associated with the term "heroism," what he describes as the "uniform," in fact the "three different uniforms," of the word. The first uniform was that of the "blood soaked conqueror of the mighty enemy," the image of the original Storm Troopers of the 1920s. The second uniform was that of "the masked figure of the racing driver," representing German success at the beloved sport of auto racing. The third uniform was that of the wartime tank driver. These are the "symbols which assemble emotions" that the term "heroism" evoked. In all three cases, the symbols were "closely tied up with the exaltation of the Teutons as a chosen race: all heroism was the sole prerogative of the Teutonic race."

Klemperer writes:

What a huge number of concepts and feelings [the Nazi cast of mind, the typical Nazi way of thinking] has corrupted and poisoned!...I have observed again and again how the young people in

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21

all innocence, and despite a sincere effort to fill the gaps and eliminate the errors in their neglected education, cling to the Nazi thought processes. They don't realize they are doing it; the remnants of linguistic usage from the preceding epoch confuse and seduce them. We spoke about the meaning of culture, or humanitarianism, of democracy and I had the impression that they were beginning to see the light, and that certain things were being straightened out in their willing minds - and then, it was always just round the corner, someone spoke of some heroic behavior or other, or of some heroic resistance or simply of heroism per se. As soon as this concept was even touched upon, everything became blurred, and we were adrift once again in the fog of Nazism...it was impossible to have a proper grasp of the true nature of humanitarianism, culture, and democracy if one endorses this kind of conception, or to be more precise misconception, of heroism.

Victor Klemperer is here saying that there is a distinctive National Socialist speech practice. In this speech practice, only Aryans are described as "heroic." Use of the word "heroic" attunes an audience raised under National Socialism to a practice of treating Aryans as better than non-Aryans. Indeed, the function of the speech practice of heroism myths in Nazi ideology is to attune audiences to such a practice. Use of the term "heroic" also attunes the audience to emotions, to resonate positively with images of Storm Troopers and race car drivers, and (presumably) negatively to images of cosmopolitan decadence, to homosexuality, and to swarthy Slavic or Semitic faces. What Klemperer is saying those raised under National Socialism react to the use of the term "heroic", and similar vocabulary, inadvertently - the use of the term leads the audience to resonate with certain images positively, and to others negatively. A Nazi propaganda poster from 1940, set in a characteristic gothic font and with emphatic capitalization, attributed the following quote to Hitler: "HEROISMUS ist nicht nur auf dem Schlachtfelde notwendig, sondern auch auf dem Boden der Heimat." ("Heroism isn't only needed on the battlefield, but also on the soil of the homeland.") In Nazi ideology, "heroism" was part of an Aryan supremacist speech practice. It became a conventionalized property of "heroism", or at least of the German "Heroismus", to be a constituent of such a speech practice.

If we think of using words as exemplifying speech practices, we can understand how they can have conventional significance over and above the contents they are used to present. A use of the word "heroism" in Germany in the early 1940s conveyed a wealth of associations, in virtue of the Nazi speech practices such a use exemplified. A noun like "stormtrooper" was used to present a content - an ordinary denotation, if you will, the property of being a stormtrooper. But when the word was used, it conventionally signified much more than what it presented, in virtue of the speech practices its use exemplified. And as we have seen in the previous section, we do not need to move to extreme cases, such as National Socialist speech practices, to see that words can conventionally signify much more than the contents they are used to present. This is a fact about conventional significance that is far more general. When speakers use words like "dog" and "cur", they also exemplify certain speech practices, in virtue of which these words are used to convey different information, despite presenting the same contents.

The term "ideology" is used in a bewildering variety of senses, as befitting the fact that the study of ideology is central to most philosophical theorizing dating back at least to Plato. Raymond Guess defines the broadest sense of ideology, "ideology in the descriptive sense", as including "the beliefs the members of a group hold, the concepts they use, the attitudes and psychological dispositions they exhibit, their motives, values, predilections, works of art, religious rituals, gestures, etc."⁹ In this sense, ideology is not pejorative - every group has an ideology - it is something like a worldview, in the broadest possible sense (including practices).

⁹ Raymond Guess, The Idea of a Critical Theory: Habermas & the Frankfurt School (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 5.

Pierre Bourdieu, one of the most insightful theorists of ideology, writes, “[e]very established order tends to produce (to very different degrees and with very different means) the naturalness of its own arbitrariness.”¹⁰ This is a central function of an ideology. An ideology creates a set of presuppositions - what Bourdieu calls “doxa”, “the class of what is taken for granted... the sum total of the theses tacitly posited on the hither side of all inquiry...” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 178). There are many mechanisms that play a role in forming an ideology. With Jack Balkin in his theory of “cultural software”, we focus on *symbolic forms*, which, in his words, “carry units of cultural transmission.”¹¹ Nazi ideology embodies a way of thinking of Aryans and a way of thinking about Jews, and these ways are carried in the speech practices that constitute it.

Nazi ideology is an extreme example of an oppressive ideology. It brings out in vivid ways how ideologies can unjustly create hierarchies of worth. But any way of talking about other beings brings with it attunement to emotions, images, and suggested practices. If one is asked to “go out with the guys”, one can make a free choice about one’s decision - but the language in which the invitation is offered will elicit emotions that will influence one’s choice. The emotions will be different if one asked to “meet with mutual acquaintances”, even if the shared references are the same. Ignoring the force of such emotions, the result of the framing of an invitation, is missing a vital function of language. It is a function of language that is missed if one only focuses on neutral shared denotations of words.

In the descriptive sense of “ideology”, not all ideologies are oppressive. An ideology helps to guide us through a complex world, by giving us shortcuts and strategies in the face of an overwhelming mass of information. An oppressive ideology involves shortcuts that impose or reinforce hierarchies of ethnicity, gender, or other dimensions that should not be set into hierarchies of value. A liberatory ideology involves practices that undercut or disrupt such hierarchies. And some ideologies are just habits, practices, and concepts that help an agent maneuver the world in mundane practical ways - to find food, for example.

The function of an ideology is to create a set of presupposed shared meanings - not just common beliefs, but attunements to more than just the beliefs that we associate with the entities, events, actions, and properties under discussion. A full theory of language should allow us to model these presuppositions. That is, a theory of language should allow us to model not just the commonly shared beliefs that our words presuppose, but simultaneously shared attunement to emotions and practices associated with ways of referring to objects, actions, and events. We should not assume that these attunements are in any sense separable. A full theory should allow us to model the degree of attunement that reflects differential attachments to these ideologies. Oppressive ideologies clearly frame the social world with charged emotions - but even casual conversation persuades along dimensions that cannot simply be captured by considering “neutral” shared meanings.

5 Perspective

In sketching the neutral picture of content, we began with the work of Gottlob Frege, and his distinction between sense (neutral content) and tone. The picture Frege sketches in 1897 neglects indexicality, words like “I”, “here”, “now”, “this”, and “that”, whose reference shifts with context. A central moral of the last half century of discussion of indexicality is that it seriously compromises any putative commit to neutral content. Any defense of neutral content against our skepticism must reckon with this moral, which is, as it were, internal to the ideology of analytic philosophy of language and mind.

¹⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 164.

¹¹ Jack Balkin, *Cultural Software: A Theory of Ideology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 102.

John Perry famously argued in “Frege on Demonstratives” that the moral of indexicality is that nothing could play all of Frege’s five roles of senses.¹² The linguistic meaning of the first person pronoun “I” is always the same. Given that sense is supposed to be linguistic meaning, this means that “I” has the same sense in every context. If President Obama were to utter in 2015 “I am the President of the United States”, he would express the same thought as the one David Beaver would express by using that sentence at the same time. But then the thoughts would have the same truth value. However, the thought President Obama would have expressed would be true, and the thought David Beaver would have expressed would be false. Therefore, the thoughts are different after all. Frege must abandon one or more of the roles of sense.

In the end, Frege comes around to recognizing the failure of the picture of sense he had earlier addressed. When he addresses the topic of indexicals in his paper “The Thought”, he decides that the word “I” has different senses in different contexts (his discussion shows clear commitment to role 4, that a difference in reference entails a difference in sense).¹³ He abandons the *publicity* of sense, on the grounds that each person’s first personal way of thinking of themselves is accessible only from that person’s perspective. The sense of an occurrence of “I” is only accessible from one perspective. It is not a sense that is aperspectival, and so, as John Perry and others have long pointed out, Frege’s own discussion violates the thesis of the neutrality of meaning. On Frege’s preferred view, our first-personal thoughts cannot be grasped by others.

Frege’s initial discussion of first-person thought, the *de se*, has had a tremendous impact on the theory of meaning. It could rightly be said that the problem of perspective is one of the perennial issues of the last century in the theory of meaning in the analytic tradition. There is a lengthy tradition of defending Frege’s view that first personal thoughts are not shareable. As Gareth Evans argued, Frege’s view that first person perspective is not sharable is consistent with Frege’s commitment to the objectivity of thoughts - in the sense that a first person perspective is an objectively existing perspective, albeit only capable of being grasped by one person.¹⁴ Evans embeds his defense of Frege’s position in Frege’s theory of meaning, employing senses rather than modal semantics. But Frege’s view of irreducibly unshareable first person thoughts is not bound to this theory of meaning. David Lewis took the notion of an irreducibly first person perspective so seriously, that he altered his basic conception of content, moving from propositions as sets of possible worlds to propositions as centered worlds, worlds centered upon a first person perspective.¹⁵ Building on Lewis’s work, Robert Stalnaker has argued for the coherence and importance of “a notion of informational content that is not detachable from the situation of a subject, or from a context in which the content is ascribed.”¹⁶ In short, the thought that informational content is irreducibly perspectival is deeply embedded inside the analytic tradition in the theory of meaning.

It has been widely recognized that irreducibly perspectival content poses challenges to idealizations about rationality and communication, how to retain and build on a core of information over time, and how to share that information with others. In short, the modifications in the theory of meaning required to incorporate the ubiquity of irreducible and shareable perspectives pose challenges to the notion of a neutral deliberative space of reasons for shared rational inquiry. There are many creative solutions - for example, Sarah Moss has argued that to each perspectival proposition (*de se* proposition), there corresponds a non-perspectival (“*de dicto*”) proposition that can “rationally stand in” for that perspectival

¹² John Perry, “Frege on Demonstratives,” *The Philosophical Review* 86 no. 4 (1977): 474-97.

¹³ Gottlob Frege, “The Thought: A Logical Inquiry,” *Mind* 65 no. 259 (1956): 289-311.

¹⁴ Gareth Evans, “Understanding Demonstratives”

¹⁵ David Lewis, “Attitudes *De Dicto* and *De Se*”

¹⁶ Robert Stalnaker, *Our Knowledge of the Internal World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. Chapter 3.

content in communication and learning.¹⁷ Moss's solution of finding a *de dicto* "stand in" for each *de se* proposition (as well as the solution of Stalnaker (2008)) relies on denying a core motivating intuition of the *de se* literature - that two people (Lewis's "two Gods") can share all their *de dicto* beliefs, while differing on their *de se* attitudes. It seems to be generally conceded, by such solutions, that differences in individual perspectival contents must supervene on differences in ordinary (*de dicto*) contents. If individual perspectival content runs as deep as Lewis and Evans hold, then it does raise significant problems for how to make sense of neutral debate.

Andy Egan's work on the problem of the *de se* is an attempt to alter the framework of the theory of meaning in more substantial ways than Moss, not by finding a *de dicto* ("neutral") counterpart of *de se* belief, but by relativizing the fundamental notions of the theory of meaning, such as the common ground of a conversation and (accordingly) presuppositions, both of which can have *de se* content. Different roles towards the same *de se* common ground (speaker, or hearer) result in grasping different propositions (I grasp a proposition about myself when I utter, "I am tired"; you grasp a proposition about the person speaking to you).¹⁸ This is a distinct way to alter the theory of meaning to account for something like shared discourse information - but the *information* that is shared, on this account, is not the same. Only components of that information are shared, as when you and we are thinking of different scenes involving the same color red.

The moral of the extensive literature on individual perspective over the past two decades is that we are already stuck with a difficult problem of objectivity at the very heart of orthodoxy in the theory of meaning. Just the problem of the *de se* alone raises significant conceptual difficulties for the concept of a neutral space of reasons for deliberation.

Andy Egan's theoretical interest in the *de se* was a small part of his large contribution to the large literature on relativism, a major topic of research in philosophy of language in the last two decades. Perhaps the signal work of this era is John MacFarlane's magisterial Assessment Sensitivity.¹⁹ An assessment relative theory of meaning is one that takes norms governing notions like agreement or disagreement to be relative to a context (or standard) of assessment. In neutral debate, we appear to agree or disagree about the same informational content. The central theoretical task facing any assessment relative account is to make sense out of such agreement and disagreement, in other words, to make sense out of the fundamental concepts of rational debate.

Most work on assessment sensitivity is driven by examples in which a robust sense of objectivity is in any case misplaced. For example, one of the central motivating examples for this revision to the theory of meaning is predicates of personal taste, as in "is tasty."²⁰ These are domains in which it is easier to see how one might abandon commitment to a genuine neutral space of reasoned debate. However, we might imagine, as in the case of the *de se*, that the problem of social perspective is more general, and indeed ubiquitous.

Oddly, given the centrality of the problem of the *de se*, and the recent exploration of the conceptual foundations of assessment sensitivity, analytic philosophers working in the theory of meaning have been more reluctant to explore the consequences of theorizing about *social* perspective as a node or element in the theory of meaning. The goal of revising the theory of meaning to accommodate an irreducibly first

¹⁷ Sarah Moss, "Updating as Communication", *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 85.2 (225-48).

¹⁸ Andy Egan, "De Se Pragmatics", *Philosophical Perspectives*.

¹⁹ John MacFarlane, Assessment Sensitivity (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

²⁰ Classic papers include Peter Lasnik, "Context-Dependence, Disagreement, and Predicates of Personal Taste", *Linguistics and Philosophy* 28 643-686 (2005), Andy Egan, "Disputing about Taste", *Disagreement*, R. Feldman and T. Warfield (Oxford: OUP).

person perspective has been a central to almost every tradition in the analytic theory of meaning. But there is considerably less discussion of how to alter the theory of meaning to account for social perspective, and less discussion of the sorts of linguistic phenomena that would raise the issue in the first place. As we have seen, there does not seem to be a legitimate objection in principle to such a program.

In fact, the notion of a social perspective need not be theorized, as in the literature on assessment sensitivity, as a parameter of *truth*-assessment. Speech is used to communicate social perspective, and reflect social perspective. Speech attunes us to the identity of the speaker, or a proffered shared identity. But it also attunes us to reality. These functions of speech do not need to be theorized simultaneously, as an interpretation of the same predicate, “is true.”

In a pioneering set of papers, Elisabeth Camp has argued that perspectives are implicated in “political discourse, in intimate interpersonal arguments, in informal commentaries on movies – anywhere that intuitive interpretation is at stake and potentially contested.”²¹ Camp has argued that perspectives are central to understanding essential features of metaphors, in particular their lack of paraphrasability.²² Camp has argued that perspectives are necessary to understanding how slurs derogate - by introducing derogating perspectives.²³ In short, over the years, Camp has given a systemic case, considering a variety of different linguistic constructions and phenomena, for the importance of something like a social perspective as an essential tool in the theory of meaning. Nor is Camp alone in attempting a systematic argument for the importance of social perspective in theory of meaning. In powerful unpublished work, the philosopher Samia Hesni has argued that intuitions about linguistic felicity are responsive to social location, as well as intuitions about generics (the acceptability of “Muslims are terrorists” depends on whether the audience is composed of Muslims or non-Muslims”, and intuitions about inferential patterns associated with slurs.²⁴ Hesni’s argument is that if we wish to capture the evidential basis of the theory of meaning - speaker intuitions - we must theorize about social situatedness.

Across very different paradigms in the theory of meaning, philosophers have held that first-person perspective is something that must be modeled, to account for an essentially dominant view that first-person perspective is ubiquitous and theoretically central.²⁵ We have seen a two decade attempt to make sense more generally of disagreement about less than factual seeming domains. There is thus no obstacle in principle that theorists of meaning in the analytic tradition have had to the centrality and importance of perspective - indeed they have been theorizing it as a parameter of truth. We have argued in this section that once it is already granted that theory of meaning must be adjusted to account for first-person perspectives, there is no obstacle to exploring, as Camp has done over the years, the natural view that social perspectives are a ubiquitous element of linguistic interpretation.

Thus far, we have attempted to motivate via example that attunement to the same facts is only one among many goals of using a word. But one still might be led to thinking of informational denotation as central,

²¹ Elisabeth Camp, “Imaginative Frames for Scientific Inquiry: Metaphors, Telling Facts, and Just-So Stories”, in Peter Godfrey-Smith and Aaron Levy, *The Scientific Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019): 304-36.

²² Elisabeth Camp, “Metaphor and that Certain ‘Je Ne Sais Quoi’”, *Philosophical Studies* (2006) 129:1-25.

²³ Elisabeth Camp, “Slurring Perspectives”, *Analytic Philosophy* (2013) 54.3: 330-349.

²⁴ Samia Hesni, “Philosophical Intuitions about Socially Significant Language.” Unpublished ms.

²⁵ In Chapter 3 of *Know How* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), Jason Stanley argues that first-person perspective does not pose distinctive issues for a broadly Fregean theory of content - it is just one kind of mode of presentation. In *The Inessential Indexical: On the Philosophical Insignificance of Perspective and the First-Person*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014), using similar considerations, Herman Cappelen and Joshua Dever argue that the focus on the specialness of de se thought to the theory of meaning has been misplaced.

if one took neutrality to be some kind of theoretical ideal. If so, informational denotation would be the neutral (“shared”) denotation of the term.

6 Against neutrality as an ideal

The thought behind neutrality is that the core of communicated denotation is non-ideological. On this way of understanding neutrality, the core information conveyed in a communicative action is neutral because it does not in any way convey something about social perspective.

But, as we have argued, ideologies are constituted in part by social practices.²⁶ And speech practices are paradigmatic examples of social practices. In The Language of the Third Reich, Klemperer writes:

Nazism permeated the flesh and blood of the people through single words, idioms and sentence structures which were imposed on them in a million repetitions and taken on board mechanically and unconsciously...language does not simply write and think for me, it also increasingly dictates my feelings and governs my entire spiritual being the more unquestioningly and unconsciously I abandon myself to it.²⁷

Klemperer here forces us to take seriously the thought that National Socialist ideology consists in large part of certain speech practices. It is for this reason that denazification took the form of constraining and minimizing those speech practices.²⁸ The result of denazification was a more open, inclusive, and democratic German society. Denazification is an example of restrictions on speech practices leading to a strengthening of democratic norms.

Social practices include “cultural schemas”, such as “rules of etiquette, or aesthetic norms, or such recipes for group action as the royal progress, grain riot, or democratic vote, or a set of equivalences between wet and dry, female and male, nature and culture, private and public...”²⁹ A speech practice embodies a schema in this sense, a way of speaking of the world, characteristically the social world, in a way that assigns different groups social roles and positions. In so doing, a speech practice reflects a perspective on the world. These speech practices thus help constitute ideologies - social perspectives on the world (according to one reading of Elisabeth Camp’s work, speech practices are the result of such perspectives, which give rise to them).

If we think of a use of a word as occurring within a speech practice, then we can see that there will standardly be communicative effects of using that word over and above attuning an audience to a common object, property, or relation. By using one word rather than another for the same thing, “dog”

²⁶ We are particularly influenced by the conception of ideology defended in Sally Haslanger, Resisting Reality: Social Construction and Social Critique (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), e.g. the section on ideology in Chapter 15, “But Mom, Crop-Tops Are Cute!”.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14

²⁸ In the work of Elisabeth Camp, perspectives *give rise* to speech practices. One might disagree with the priority claim inherent in Camp’s work, though. Perhaps perspectives are also in part constituted by habits of behavior, including speech behavior. This, we take it, is what Klemperer is urging.

²⁹ William H. Sewell Jr., “A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation”, *The American Journal of Sociology* 98.1 (July, 1992): 1-29, p. 8.

versus “canine”, for example, we locate ourselves within one speech practice rather than another. The speech practices our words exemplify locate us socially, and often politically. Different speech practices can use some of the same tools - that is, can employ some of the same words. One and the same word can exemplify, in one context one speech practice, and in another context, quite a distinct one. So, different uses of one and the same word can communicate quite different things, depending on the speech practice it exemplifies. But this is not the lack of linguistic convention - it is participation in multiple linguistic conventions.

We can now see the difficulty with a model of speech that focuses on neutral debate as an ideal. Words are always embedded in speech practices, which are elements of ideologies. All speech will locate its users in this way. If we ignore this fact, or pretend it is something we can idealize away from, we are liable to overlook the effects of the speech practices words exemplify. The use of a word can cue us to the social location of a speaker, to their identity, their socio-economic class, gender or race. The ideal of neutrality is problematic, insofar as it masks the way that speech essentially presents the world within a situated perspective.

As we have noted, not all ideologies are oppressive. Some standpoints bring with them epistemological advantages, which is the central thesis of standpoint epistemology.³⁰ There are various versions of standpoint epistemology. There are some according to which this is a truism - being in a certain social situation leads you to have more fine grained knowledge about it, for example. There are some according to which it is a weighty metaphysical claim. For example, if certain social situations can be transformative, in the sense of Laurie Paul (2014), they can give you access to information that you cannot have without that experience. This is a weighty standpoint epistemological claim. If standpoint epistemology is true, then certain social perspectives can aid you evidentially. Since speech practices are parts of social perspectives, ways of talking can presuppose ways of thinking about the world that are more epistemologically advantageous.

The thesis of standpoint epistemology is not foreign to liberal democratic philosophy. W.E.B. Du Bois advances standpoint epistemology in “Of the Ruling of Men”, his classic defense of epistemic democracy, the view that democracy is epistemically the best system, to produce good policy. Not all democratic political philosophy privileges the idea of a neutral space of public reason - not even epistemic democracy.

All communication takes place with respect to a context of practices, which licenses the communicative acts constitutive of the communicative exchange. Understanding the interplay between utterances and different background ideologies is essential to understanding what is communicated, and to which audience. On the model we employ, there is no commitment to the possibility of reasoning free of a set of background practices. Such situated background practices affect the rhetorical force of one’s chain of

³⁰ Standpoint epistemology has multiple sources, most recently in feminist philosophy – e.g. Nancy Hartsock (1983), “The Feminist Standpoint: Developing the Ground for a Specifically Feminist Historical Materialism”, in Sandra Harding and Merrill Hintikka (eds.), Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and the Philosophy of Science. Dordrecht: D. Reiden: 283-310, Catharine MacKinnon, Towards a Feminist Theory of the State (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989).

reasoning. If standpoint epistemology is correct, knowing that someone is speaking from a privileged epistemic perspective can even be relevant to deciding whose views carry the most weight. From this more realistic perspective, there is no commitment even to the *coherence* of an ideal of neutrality.

There is, as we have seen, a substantial literature on the topic of rescuing agreement and disagreement in the presence of various kinds of perspectival relativity. One solution, taken in the assessment relativity literature, is to limit the scope of claims of perspectival relativity to cases in which there isn't a sense of shared objective reality - a paradigm example being judgments of taste.³¹ The terrain looks different in the case of social perspective - one cannot focus on a limited set of contexts in which social perspective is irrelevant (as we have urged). One might think this raises a profound problem for this investigation. One might, that is, think that the ubiquity of social perspective means that we must compromise on robust truth claims. Fortunately, this is not so. Though social perspective is ubiquitous, it is not a *parameter of truth assessment*. The relativization we are urging is not a relativization of the sort discussed in the assessment sensitivity literature, where truth can be taken relative to a parameter of taste or a potential future history. We are trying to explain attributions of predicates like "arrogant", or "sad", to an assertion - not to explain how attributions of truth are more complex than they appear to be.

Here is a way of making good on the commitment to speech as pervasively ideological, without sacrificing a kind of robust realism. Let's suppose that language is used to attune us to reality, and also to emotions, social identity, values, and practices - in short, ideologies. Language attunes us to the world, but the words we use in the service of attuning us to the world are elements of speech practices, indeed often elements of multiple speech practices. More generally, speech attunes us to ideologies, which determine narratives, practices, affect, values, principles, goals, and expectations. There is no "simple" attunement to things. Nevertheless, the fact that language generally attunes to reality, and what we say is based upon such attunements, means that realism about reality is not in tension with the ubiquity of social perspective.

³¹ See Peter Lasersohn, *Subjectivity and Perspective in Truth-Theoretic Semantics* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017). major work on Assessment Sensitivity is John MacFarlane *Assessment Sensitivity: Relative Truth and its Applications* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). who considers five applications, to taste, knowledge, statements about the future, and epistemic and deontic modals.