Belief & Linguistic Agency

by

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Abstract

This dissertation consists in a defence of the claim that belief is a state on which its bearer can reflect only deliberatively. That partial characterization of the concept is intended to throw light on the status of belief as a rational phenomenon. I defend it by appeal to features of our actual and imagined practices of ascribing belief linguistically, both to others and ourselves.

Having set out the characterization in the first of four chapters, in the second chapter I survey the ways of learning from words: evidentially, by report, and by belief-expression. I go on to propose that where a person’s words afford belief of his belief, they do so through the belief-expressive character of assertoric speech. In the third chapter, I defend that claim as it applies to the case of ascribing belief to another. I argue that my characterization best explains the fact that we do not ordinarily report our beliefs or invite others to do so. I explain our ordinarily ascribing belief from the expressive character of assertoric speech by appeal to the relation between assertion and belief. In the fourth chapter, I turn to the prospect of ascribing oneself belief based on one’s own words. I argue that self-ascribing belief through the expressive character of words is alone consistent with the self-ascriptor’s basic psychological and linguistic integrity. I recommend my characterization of belief for its capacity to explain the disintegrating effects of self-ascribing belief by one’s own report. I again appeal to the relation
between assertoric speech and belief to explain the feasibility of self-ascribing belief through the expressive character of one’s words.
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Introduction

A person can be astonished at what she herself thinks. Imagine someone whose thinking changes over a period of years, such that she finds herself, on occasion, saying to herself “My sister is selfish.” Suppose she’s always thought of her sister as thoughtful and generous. She’s astonished, now, to be changing her mind, not only because the change is startling and significant, but because it isn’t clean. She still thinks of her sister as thoughtful and generous, and she’s astonished at herself—as she would be at someone else—for thinking otherwise. More years go by and the once-dismaying thought passes into a commonplace of our subject’s self-understanding. Now, though, she’s astonished to find herself, on occasion, backsliding. She behaves as though her sister were selfless—predicting certain things, being surprised when they don’t happen, expressing agreement with others’ spontaneous praise of her sister’s thoughtfulness... When she puts any thought into the matter, she finds that her sister is selfish. And yet it seems to her she might also think otherwise...

Our epistemic lives are rich, multi-layered, and sometimes conflicted. Our subject might think otherwise than she thinks, and she might realize it. In this dissertation, I make a plea for a conceptual cut through these phenomena. The cut distinguishes between our subject’s subterranean, renegade thinking about her sister and her active, lucid thinking. It isolates her ultimate belief that her sister is selfish from whatever epistemic activity it is that results in her occasional inconsistent behaviour. One way to make this distinction is by appeal to the possibilities of reflection. Only when it comes to her ultimate belief that her sister is selfish does our subject’s reflection on her own thinking exert seamless control over that thinking itself. Only that world-representing state is invariably open to revision or confirmation by her active thought. When it strikes her, as it does, that she seems also to continue thinking of her sister as considerate, she therein confronts a strain of her own mental life as conspicuously inert. This form of reflection or second-order epistemic activity for which the first-order state is inert belongs, I claim, on one side of the conceptual distinction I propose. On the other side belongs the kind of thought that is fully vulnerable to reflection.

My plea for this distinction is tacit; it motivates the explicit business of the dissertation: the defence of a partial characterization of belief. A philosophical treatment of belief might focus on one or more of its features, themselves varying in significance. I bring our attention to
the nature of reflective activity vis-à-vis belief. It is partly constitutive of belief, I maintain, to be vulnerable to reflection; or, as I go on to put it, belief is open to only deliberative reflection. According to this characterization, then, at the end of the narrative, our subject qualifies as believing only that her sister is selfish. By way of illustrative contrast, a state such as regret seems to be free of this condition on possibilities of reflection. Suppose a person regrets a past action; and, although on reflection she finds the regret unreasonable, it persists. The state’s inertia in the face of reflection does not disqualify it as a regret. When our constative thinking is similarly indifferent to reflection, on the other hand, I argue that it is disqualified as belief.

That said, why make a conceptual distinction here? After all, there do seem to be other, comfortably weaker ways of articulating the difference between the two strains of our subject’s thought. We might say that she has two conflicting beliefs, one of which is psychologically healthier or epistemically more credit-worthy. Why say that one of her two states fails to count as a belief? The reason to distinguish between state kinds is to keep faith with the status of belief as a rational phenomenon. As I argue in the first chapter, the feature of belief on which I focus is essential to its having that status. In brief, a rational phenomenon is an action. If belief is to be an action—if it is to be something we do, and not something that happens to us—it must, I argue, be incompatible with the kind of arm’s length reflection described above. The matter of the sort of reflection allowed by a world-representing state is salient specifically with respect to the sense in which its bearer may be said to be responsible for it. A rational phenomenon is one for which someone is responsible in a specific sense—in the sense in which an agent is responsible for what she does. A state that is open to arm’s length reflection, rather than being anyone’s action, is one its bearer can, at best, act upon. She may be said to be responsible for such a state, but not in the sense applicable to rational phenomena. So, if I am right, it is a mistake to say simply that a given belief’s vulnerability to reflection makes it a better belief. If a state is open to reflection and yet invulnerable to it, it is disqualified as a rational phenomenon, and so disqualified as belief.¹

¹ Someone on whose recent work I draw is Richard Moran (especially his 2000). One place we differ is over the nature of belief. As I read him, Moran would say that our subject has two beliefs, one better than the other.
Having set out my characterization of belief in the first chapter, I go on to defend it in the remaining three. That defence consists in an appeal to how we in fact do, and imaginably might, ascribe belief to a person from her words. In the second chapter, I consider the background idea of speech serving as an epistemic resource. Given an assertion that the moon is full, a hearer can learn facts as disparate as that the speaker has vocal cords and that the moon is full. But the ways she draws these conclusions differ. In short, following Richard Moran, I make a first distinction between learning from words as evidence and learning from them as assertoric speech. I then make a three-way distinction among ways of learning from assertoric speech: by the speaker’s testimony, by her report, and by the belief-expressive character of her utterance.

In the third and fourth chapters, I turn to the matter of learning a specific sort of fact from speech: the speaker’s belief. How might a person’s words afford the opportunity to ascribe her belief? I ask this question of two very different but coordinate phenomena: ascribing belief to someone else and to oneself. In both cases, I defend a variation of the thought that, where a person’s words allow belief to be ascribed to her, it is through their belief-expressive character. The substance of the claim, in both cases, is to rule out the other ways of learning from words. That said, the two cases differ on several related points: the sense of the question how a person might be ascribed belief from her words, the sense of the claim I defend in answer to that question, and the sense in which that answer “rules out” other forms of learning from words.

In the third chapter, I consider the case of attributing belief to someone else. We often and typically do find out what others think from what they say. I intend the question of how we might ascribe belief to another person from her words to come down to this: is each of the ways we learn from words a normal or abnormal way of proceeding? I argue that we normally ascribe belief to speakers based on the belief-expressive character of speech. We do not, for instance, ordinarily report our beliefs to one another, or invite others to do so. As we will see in the final chapter, things are different when it comes to self-ascription. A case might be made that certain phenomena count as ascribing belief to oneself from one’s own words; but there is no

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2 I use “learn” non-factively. Throughout, in any context in which I speak of drawing conclusions from words, including especially the conclusion that the speaker has a certain belief, I use “learn”, “know” and their cognates non-factively. In general, as will become clear, I am interested simply in the intelligibility of these epistemic procedures and not their merit as paths to knowledge, properly so called.
uncontroversially recognizable practice of linguistic belief self-ascription. So, here, in asking how we might ascribe belief to a person from her words, I am not asking how we normally proceed. Rather, for each of the ways we learn from words, I ask us to imagine whether self-ascribing belief in that way would be consistent with basic psychological integrity and linguistic agency. As it turns out, only learning from the belief-expressive character of one’s own assertoric speech passes that test.

What does all this have to do with my characterization of belief? My general strategy is to recommend that characterization for its capacity to explain features of how we do, and imaginably might, ascribe belief to a person from her words. Chapters three and four each involve the two same tasks. The first I have already described: I answer the question of how we might ascribe belief to a person—whether another or oneself—from her words; thus, I make the points about linguistic belief-ascription just summarized. The second task is to propose an explanation for those points. Why is it normal to communicate one’s belief to another by expressing it? Why does it compromise a person’s psychological integrity to report her belief to herself? The idea that belief is—as I put it—fully vulnerable to reflection nicely explains certain features of what is normal or psychologically feasible by way of ascribing a person belief from what she says.

Let me elaborate briefly. I claim that ascribing belief from the expressive character of a person’s words is the only normal or feasible way of proceeding. The substance of that claim is, as I noted, to rule out other ways of learning from words. And, indeed, the two specific points my characterization nicely explains are negative ones. If I am right about belief, we should (1) expect it to be abnormal to report our beliefs to others and to invite them to report theirs to us. And we should (2) expect that a person who reports her belief to herself deeply compromises herself as a subject of belief.

Why? In brief, I argue that making one’s belief known by reporting it would involve attending to it in a way analogous to the sort of arm’s length reflection our subject brings to her own renegade thinking. If that claim is sound, and I am right that belief is incompatible with such reflection, then—to touch on only one of the previous paragraph’s two explananda—it ought to be at least abnormal to report one’s belief to another. My characterization, that is, ought to rule out reporting one’s own belief and inviting others to do so. An important supplementary
point about the relation between assertion and belief fills out my explanatory efforts. In the second and third chapters, I build towards the proposal that a sincere assertion, rather than being a speaker’s operation on her belief, is simply continuous with it—is just one way the belief may be manifested. This relation between belief and assertoric speech amounts to an overlap between linguistic and epistemic agencies: where what we do with words is to speak assertorically, what we do just is to form, revise or re-entrench belief. In this way, epistemic agency is constitutive of a strain of our linguistic activity. If this is right, then linguistic agency itself provides a way of communicating one’s belief—just speaking assertorically does the trick. In the third and fourth chapters, I appeal to that fact to explain the two positive claims I make about linguistic belief ascription. If it is normal to ascribe belief to another from the belief-expressive character of her speech, and it is psychologically feasible to self-ascribe belief in the same way, that is because speaking assertorically essentially manifests one’s belief. Between them, then, my characterization of belief and this point about the relation between assertion and belief explain how we do, and feasibly might, ascribe a person belief from what she says.
1 A Characterization of Belief

This chapter consists in the presentation, discussion, and initial defence of a characterization of belief. The characterization is partial: it aims to contribute to our understanding of one aspect of the phenomenon of belief, what might be called its agential profile. To put it in a way that is intuitive and philosophically familiar, I am asking whether belief is something that happens to us, like the beating of our hearts, or something we in some sense do. Turning our attention to the full-blown life of belief—of forming and revising beliefs, of holding them—it seems both that, first, we are passive and active in different respects and, second, activeness or activity might be essential to the phenomenon. A phenomenon’s agential profile, as I am using that phrase here, tells us whether and in what sense it is essentially active or passive. The characterization of belief I offer affirms the essential activity of the phenomenon. I aim to capture part of the content of that activity in the claim—to anticipate—that a belief is a state to which its bearer stands in a deliberative relation.

In contributing to our understanding of the agential profile of belief, the characterization I offer also contributes to answering a wider philosophical question: In what sense, if any, is belief a rational phenomenon? Whatever else it entails, a rational phenomenon entails an action, one or more agents, and the possibility of critical appraisal of the agent(s). Now, as I noted, the notion of an agential profile tells us whether a phenomenon is the sort of happening in which people are at best passive elements, or one in which they are active. It differentiates between someone’s tripping and falling, on one hand, and her throwing herself to the ground. It tells us whether we have an action on our hands. In contributing to our understanding of its agential profile, then, my characterization of belief presupposes an answer to the question of whether it is an action, broadly speaking, and so whether it is a rational phenomenon. An action, finally, is something for which someone is in some sense responsible. In the final section, I raise the question of the sense in which we are responsible for our beliefs, given that these are rational phenomena. In specifying part of the content of the claim that belief is an action, my characterization can also be seen to specify part of the content of the claim that we are

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3 The characterization is partial, then, not in relation to the task of picking out all and only beliefs, but in relation to the task of being fully informative about the phenomenon. I touch on the first question in the following note.
responsible for our beliefs in the relevant sense. Where belief is concerned, that is, our responsibility for the phenomenon will turn out to consist partly in our standing in a deliberative relation to the state.

In the first section, I simply set out the characterization, explaining what I mean by the claim that a belief is a state to which its bearer is deliberatively related. I also set out a thesis, implied by the characterization, about ascription of belief. In the second and final sections, I clarify and give context to the characterization, focusing largely on two tasks. The first is to raise and set aside an objection to the terms—deliberative and theoretical inquiry—in which I couch my characterization. The second is to reveal a requirement faced by any account that treats belief as a rational phenomenon: as I began to suggest above, such an account must treat belief as the exercise of the believer’s agency—as an action. I consider a treatment of belief that fails on this point. I argue that, just insofar as it breaks with the requirement, the account also fails to treat belief as a rational phenomenon. This constitutes a kind of initial defence of the characterization. But I largely leave the task of defence to the chapters to come.

1.1 The Characterization

Belief is a state to which its bearer stands in a deliberative relation. What do I mean? Arguably, a belief itself consists in a relation, namely, a person’s holding a content true. Any relation to a belief, then, will be a relation to a relation. The range of possible attitudes a person can adopt to her own belief is wide; she can be intrigued by it, proud or ashamed of it. These are all second-order relations. Let me begin by distinguishing from the rest those attitudes that are broadly epistemic—those forms of attention whose purpose is to identify or otherwise judge their object. I will reserve “reflection” and its cognates for such epistemic second-order attitudes. In asking whether one is ashamed of one’s belief, one reflects on the belief; in being ashamed of one’s belief, one does not reflect on it.

What I am calling the deliberative relation of a believer to her state specifies how she may reflect on it. To bring the relation into view, consider a distinction developed by Richard Moran between two kinds of reflective question a person can ask herself about her mental states: theoretical and deliberative. To inquire theoretically into one’s state is to seek to identify it as an antecedent fact. If I ask myself theoretically whether I regret having missed a dinner party, I simply inquire into whether there is, in me, such a regret. To inquire deliberatively into one’s
own mental state is, by contrast, to set about determining or reconsidering it. If I ask deliberatively whether I regret missing the dinner party, I consider whether to regret it. Whereas *theoretical* inquiry issues in a *judgment* as to whether in fact I have the regret, deliberative inquiry issues in *actual* regret or its absence.

To be deliberatively related to one’s state is to stand in a relation such that, when one reflects on the state, one does so in a deliberative spirit. The substance of the characterization is a denial that a believer can reflect theoretically on her state. Attending to one’s belief in a deliberative spirit need not mean either weighing the evidence in its favour or meeting any epistemic standard in relation to it. To be clear on this point, consider how my characterization applies to a person’s forming a new belief on the basis of a prior one. By hypothesis, she calls the prior belief to mind. I am not suggesting that she therein *re-opens* the question whether to hold the belief. Rather, all that the deliberative nature of her attention requires is that, in bringing the belief to mind, she brings to mind—with whatever level of epistemic care—its *content*. Indeed, if she is to reason from the prior belief to a new one, she must reason from—that is, endorse—its content.

The characterization applies to the concept of belief *per se*: the concept of belief is the concept of a mental state such that its bearer is in that state only if she is deliberatively related to it. It would be one thing simply to observe that we do not in fact inquire theoretically into our beliefs. Such an observation is open to more than one explanation. Perhaps a deliberative relation to one’s belief is in some sense desirable, and the observation records the fact that we consistently do the desirable thing. Alternatively, a deliberative relation to one’s state may be constitutive of it, such that we *could* not inquire into it theoretically. My claim is of this second

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4 In the case of belief, deliberation is guided by the question “Should I believe that p?” It is a further question what norm or norms govern how one answers this question—govern doxastic deliberation. In the next chapter, I commit myself to the claim that the only applicable norm is truth. Having done that, it is worth noting, my partial characterization of belief picks out all and only beliefs. Belief is the only propositional attitude to be regulated exclusively for truth (Shah and Velleman 2005). Thus, if a state is such that its bearer can reflect on it only deliberatively *and* that deliberation is governed by truth, it must be a belief (and not, for instance, a desire).

5 The claim that a believer is deliberatively related to her state is also neutral with regard to what might be called the empirical character of belief formation and governance. My claim, then, has no bearing on the discussion in empirical psychology about whether belief-formation is a form of automatic or controlled, rule-governed cognition.

6 This last point is elaborated by Sebastian Rödl (69ff).
kind; it’s a conceptual characterization of belief. In giving it, I aim to describe a concept that I think finds application in our mental lives. How wide is that application? It does not cover everything for which we use the word “belief”. For one, the concept applies only to states of creatures capable of reflection, like us, since the characterization is given in terms of kinds of reflective activity. So, I am not talking about the dog’s belief that his toy is under the couch. Nor does the concept pertain to every world-representing state of human beings capable of reflection. That said, I do mean it to apply to the very familiar phenomenon of a person’s committing to things being thus and so; “belief”, here, does not designate an elite sub-category of such committings. Otherwise put, I am making a claim about how the work of representing the world proceeds for reflective creatures like us. For us, representing the world involves a distinctive kind of state, belief, and part of what makes states of this kind distinctive is their bearers’ deliberative relation to them.

In pointing out the deliberative relation between believer and state, then, I am not making an observation about the first-person standpoint on—what would have to be already intelligible as—belief. Rather, it is partly constitutive of belief that its bearer is deliberatively related to it. In section 1.2.3, I return to this point, arguing that it is essential to my characterization’s treating belief as a rational phenomenon. What will be clear is that I am effectively denying that the notion of belief can be characterized in such a way that it is a further question how the state “looks” from the first-person perspective.

Finally, this partial characterization of belief has an interesting implication for the nature of belief-ascription. If I am right, part of what one knows in grasping the concept of belief is that the bearer of any belief is deliberatively related to it. As competent users of the concept, each of us knows that it’s true of each of us that she is deliberatively related to her beliefs. To apply the concept of belief, then, is to think of the person to whose state one applies it in a certain way. It’s to think of her as a deliberative agent with respect to that state. Assuming, indeed, that ascribing a belief to someone consists in applying the relevant concept to her state, then, just in ascribing belief to someone, one takes her to be deliberatively related to the state in question.

7 It excludes, for instance, fixations and unconscious beliefs.
This means that one cannot be said to be ascribing belief if one treats it as a further question whether the state-bearer does or can reflect theoretically on the state in question.\textsuperscript{8}

Now, my appeal to the idea of a deliberative relation is, as I noted at the start, intended to specify some of the content of the claim that, insofar as belief is a rational phenomenon, a person is responsible for her beliefs. When it comes to belief, as I put it earlier, responsibility consists partly in standing in a deliberative relation to one’s states. I have yet to explain the connection to responsibility, but note that, if it is correct, it yields a richer picture of the nature of belief ascription, too. If, just in ascribing belief, one takes the state-bearer to be deliberatively related to the state ascribed, then one also takes her to be responsible for it, in the sense relevant to rational phenomena.

1.2 Clarifications

Having set out my partial characterization of belief, I devote the rest of this chapter to three points of clarification and contextualization, the first one minor.

1.2.1

The substance of the characterization is a constraint on the range of possible second-order relations a person may take up vis-à-vis her belief. The constraint applies not to such relations tout court, but to what I have been calling reflective relations or forms of epistemic inquiry. Among these, I am saying, only deliberative reflection on one’s own belief is possible.\textsuperscript{9} Belief, then, is incompatible with the believer’s inquiring into it theoretically. To round out the picture, consider the epistemic attitude a person may have toward another’s belief. Obviously enough, one cannot inquire deliberatively into another’s belief. As such, we have a tidy asymmetry: with

\textsuperscript{8} In addition to this implication for the nature of belief-ascription, there is a related implication for the nature of knowledge of belief: if I am right about the concept of belief, then just in knowing a state to be a belief, one also knows its bearer to be deliberatively related to it.

\textsuperscript{9} One might wonder whether Moran’s notion of deliberative inquiry counts as reflective. If it does not issue in a judgment about the state, but in an instantiation of it, why think of it as a form of attention that seeks, as I put it, to identify or otherwise judge its object? I will raise a more acute version of this objection below. For now, note this first-pass reply: deliberative inquiry, in bringing about or adding to the career of some state, arguably yields for the agent awareness of that state.
regard to another’s belief, only theoretical inquiry is possible; with regard to one’s own, only deliberative inquiry.

1.2.2

I turn now to an important difference between theoretical and deliberative inquiry, one that could trigger an objection to their forming a legitimate distinction.

Theoretical and deliberative inquiry are structurally disanalogous. Consider your own case. Asking theoretically about your regret over missing a dinner party, what is the object of your attention? Judging whether you have such a regret or determining its intensity, say, your epistemic attention is directed at the state *per se*. In deliberative inquiry, by contrast, you attend not to the regret, but to the facts relevant to the question *whether* to regret. In inquiring deliberatively into one’s belief, likewise, one attends not to the state *per se*, but to the fact that is its content. Reflecting deliberatively on one’s belief whether the stars are out, one thinks “through” the belief to the world, as it were—to the night sky.

Stepping back one pace—and registering the obvious—I have presented a distinction between theoretical and deliberative inquiry. The standpoint from which one presents such a distinction is distinct in kind from the standpoint of the inquirer to which one refers in making the distinction; call these the outsider’s and insider’s standpoints. Now, note that the structural difference between our two kinds of inquiry can be brought into view from each of these standpoints. As an insider, one can—as I invited you to do—note it directly. Looking out *from* your inquiry, as it were, and noting what you see, you can conclude that theoretical inquiry bears on your belief, while deliberative inquiry doesn’t. As an outsider, one registers the disanalogy not in speaking *from*, but by referring *to*, the insider’s standpoint—the outsider says: *for the inquirer*, deliberative and theoretical inquiry do not both bear on her belief.

The outsider’s remark implies that, ultimately, and as is evident from her more comprehensive vantage point, deliberative and theoretical inquiry *are* fundamentally analogous. For the outsider, that is, it is only from the insider’s standpoint that a structural difference appears. Now, *are* they analogous? The distinction is legitimate if it picks out two genuine and coordinate forms of inquiry. And the forms of inquiry *are* coordinate if indeed deliberative inquiry is also directed at the state. *Is* the distinction legitimate? Is there reason to pick out as
coordinate with theoretical reflection a form of reflection on belief that, for the inquirer, involves attending not to her state but to the world?

A case can be made that there isn’t. To see how, imagine a person’s attempting to bring her reflective attention to her belief. As we have seen, that attempt issues in a form of deliberation that is the same as first-order deliberation: considering whether I believe the moon is out, I consider the first-order question whether the moon is out. On one interpretation of that process, the agent simply fails to bring her epistemic attention to bear on her belief. That attention as it were slips off the target, back onto the world. On this interpretation, the outsider is mistaken to discern, in this process, a form of inquiry coordinate with theoretical inquiry into one’s state. The insider’s standpoint reveals the truth: so-called deliberative inquiry into belief is no more than first-order deliberative inquiry into the facts.

If this is right, my claim that a person is capable of only deliberative reflective attention to her belief collapses into the merely negative point that a person is incapable of attending epistemically to her own belief. After all, I have narrowed the range of possible reflective second-order attitudes down to deliberative inquiry. If such inquiry turns out to be simply first-order deliberation, then, instead of picking out the sort of second-order epistemic activity that is appropriate for belief, I have effectively said that we cannot reflect on our own beliefs. And recall the asymmetry of epistemic attention I observed (1.2.1) between the self-self and self-other cases: a person can inquire only theoretically into another’s belief and only deliberatively into her own. On the current conjecture, the situation is more bluntly asymmetrical: vis-à-vis her own belief, a person can hold, form, and revise it, but cannot apprehend it; only another’s belief is open to apprehension as such.

There is, however, an alternative interpretation of the believer’s move from entertaining a question about her belief whether p to deliberating as to whether p. Rather than to construe the move as the result of a failure to get a fix on the belief, we might see it as a particular way of

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10 This observation registers a phenomenon called in contemporary philosophical literature the transparency of belief. As Dorit Bar-On points out, this use of the term “transparency” is to be distinguished from its more longstanding use to indicate the clarity with which a person knows her own mental states (105). For some, the observation will bring to mind particularly Gareth Evans’ statement of the transparency of belief. I will consider that statement in detail in the fourth chapter.
getting such a fix. According to the criticism I set out, the fact that one’s attempt to pay attention to one’s own belief leads to first-order deliberation indicates the failure of the attempt. But that interpretation presupposes that attention to a thing consists in looking on at it. I earlier described the deliberative inquirer into belief as thinking “through” her belief to the fact. And attending “through” a thing is a way of attending to it, as when one judges the cleanliness of a window by seeing how clearly one can make out the scene beyond. On this alternative interpretation, the deliberative activity triggered by questions about one’s belief is, after all, a form of second-order epistemic attention to one’s belief. Admittedly, as an insider, one notes that deliberative inquiry into one’s belief bears, not on the belief, but on the world. Nonetheless, belief is the channel for that world-directed, second-order inquiry. As the channel, it is seen-through and not seen. It takes an outside standpoint to see the channel through which the insider looks—it takes an outside standpoint to register the sense in which deliberative inquiry is indeed inquiry “into” belief, and is, as such, coordinate with theoretical inquiry. My characterization of belief, then, allows that believers can become aware of their beliefs, but limits that awareness to a specific kind.

1.2.3

In order to give content and depth to my characterization, let me examine a picture of belief offered by Victoria McGeer and Philip Pettit. The contrast between their work and mine will also allow a pointed conclusion. McGeer and Pettit claim that their picture is consistent with a vision of belief as a normative or rational phenomenon. I argue that they are mistaken. I trace their failure to achieve such consistency to the fact that, for them, the concept of belief is intelligible independently of the concept of agency. To do justice to the sense in which we are responsible for our beliefs, and so the rationality of the phenomenon, I argue, an account must portray belief as a form of action. My own characterization, in making the believer’s reflective relation to her state internal to the concept of belief, attempts to do just that. The fact that my characterization meets this requirement on accounts of belief is a first point in its favour.

Seeking theoretical resources to capture what is distinctive about human mentality, McGeer and Pettit distinguish between minds according to whether they are self-regulating. They begin by adopting what they call a general, “constraint-conforming approach to mind”: 
To be an intentional system, and therefore qualify as ‘minded’ in some minimal sense, is...to be a system that is well-behaved in representational and related respects. The well-behaved system represents things as they appear within the constraints of its perceptual and cognitive organization (282).

Part of what is attractive about this approach for the authors is that it allows for “the possibility of systems whose conformity to some of the required constraints is supported not just by brute routine, but also by activities of intentional self-regulation” (283).

Marking the difference between human and other ways of being minded, the notion of self-regulation is nicely illustrated in the case of belief. To begin, McGeer and Pettit define belief as a state in which a system represents things as they appear; and they take a system’s so representing things to be functionally defined: “beliefs can be said to represent how things are for any intentional system so far as they play [the] dual role” of (1) guiding action and (2) varying with the evidence (284). Significantly, this notion of belief allows for a distinction in how beliefs are formed and revised. A system’s beliefs might “update in the light of perceptual input, according to [a] routine or a suitably preset design” (283). Alternatively, a system might have a sort of control over the process—it might regulate its own belief-formation and revision.

McGeer and Pettit have a specific vision for such regulation: a self-regulating system is able to form beliefs about the constraints on belief—call these “constraint beliefs”—and to regulate itself according to its recognition of these beliefs as identifying constraints on its activity. How does such self-regulation work? They offer a helpful developmental account. Able to express belief using language, they first point out, we are also able to use sentences as “exemplar[s] of...representational item[s]”. Exemplar use of assertoric utterances allows us to identify contents of belief as possible objects of attention. In principle, we can then ascribe properties to contents, including truth or falsity and evidential well-supportedness. What guides such ascription of properties? Attention to one’s dispositions: “I can learn to say and believe that a perception or belief with such and such a content gives support of degree X to the truth of content ‘p’, so far as I find myself disposed to that degree, in the presence of the perceptual or belief representation, to say that p” (287). Guided by attention to our dispositions, then, we identify constraints on belief-formation. Having identified those constraints, we can guide our
epistemic lives by them. Believing, for instance, that a perception with such-and-such a content gives ample support to the truth of content ‘p’, and recognizing this belief to identify a constraint on one’s belief-formation, one can, given the relevant perception, adopt the belief that p. The point, to be clear, is that the belief that p is the result of self-regulation: one’s belief that p can issue from one’s own recognition of one’s further belief as constraining one to adopt it.

The self-regulating system intervenes in the life of its beliefs by making them conform to the constraints it has identified. Now, McGeer and Pettit imagine the possibility that the effect of constraint beliefs on a system could itself be routinised. They imagine minds or systems that form beliefs about constraints but fail to recognize them as identifying rules for their behaviour. The beliefs nonetheless influence the systems’ further belief-forming behaviour, in a way strictly analogous to the way features of the environment affect their belief formation. “Whatever holds with the unselfconscious creatures imagined,” they remark, “it is clear that human beings are not of their ilk” (288). That we human beings have the potential for genuine self-regulation is clear, for McGeer and Pettit, from the fact that we ascribe beliefs and desires to ourselves. Human beings “recognise the propositions they believe and desire—and in doing this see themselves as intentional systems” (288). Seeing themselves as such systems, they can recognize constraints on what is, after all, their performance.

Now, one of McGeer and Pettit’s objectives is to accommodate what they take to be the strengths of two divergent approaches to mind. They seek, in particular, to “give countenance to a theme that is much emphasized in the heterodox tradition that rejects the constraint-conforming theory of mind. The theme is that holding by a belief is not a matter of having a disposition but rather something closer to adopting a normative commitment” (294). For philosophers such as Davidson, Brandom and McDowell, the authors point out, a believer’s adopting a normative stance “will not be guaranteed just by the fact that [he] meets certain naturalistic constraints” (294). Taking the point, McGeer and Pettit proceed to argue that, on their view, “believing something will amount to a sort of normative commitment when the believer is a self-regulating mind of the characteristically human kind” (294). They arrive at this point by arguing for two complementary claims about responsibility. As I read them, the fact that self-regulators can shape their beliefs means that—and this is the first claim—they are vulnerable to being held responsible for them by their peers. Because it is only a matter of effort for a believer to attend to any of her (expressible) beliefs, her peers can praise or blame her for any given one of them,
whether or not she has in fact put in the effort. McGeer and Pettit go on to note that the fact that human beings are open to praise or blame for their beliefs is an object of common knowledge; as such, we each expect to be held responsible for our beliefs. Together, the fact that we are vulnerable to being held responsible for our beliefs and the status of that thought as common knowledge yield the conclusion that we assume responsibility for our beliefs:

Suppose that a self-regulating believer is given a chance to consider whether or not to maintain a certain belief, and does then maintain it. Given that this is done in full knowledge, shared in common with others, that they will be held responsible for the belief, the person can be said to assume responsibility for what they believe. They assume responsibility for the belief in the sense that they must take themselves to be ready and able to meet whatever critiques or challenges are made against it (295).

For McGeer and Pettit, finally, it is insofar as human beings are ready to meet challenges to their beliefs that these count as normative commitments.

The sense in which believers are responsible for their beliefs, in this picture, deserves some scrutiny. It appears to me to be analogous to the sense in which a person is responsible for her credit rating. In both cases, the phenomenon for which someone is said to be responsible is intelligible apart from that ascription of responsibility. This sense of responsibility, that is, presupposes a metaphysical arm’s length between the subject and whatever she is responsible for. One has one’s credit rating no matter whether one undertakes to influence it. Likewise, on McGeer and Pettit’s picture, a system has its beliefs no matter whether it does or even can exercise any influence on them. The independent intelligibility of the item for which one is said to be responsible, along with the relevant sense of responsibility, is also, I think, implied in talk of a person’s being legitimately said to assume responsibility for something. Where a phenomenon that in some sense belongs to someone—such as a belief, a credit rating, a vote—is treated as intelligible apart from its bearer’s being responsible for it, and yet we want to have reason to conclude that the bearer is responsible, we seem to have to make that case in terms of the basis on which a person may legitimately be said to have assumed responsibility for the thing. This, I think, explains the shape of McGeer and Pettit’s efforts to draw the conclusion that
human beings are responsible for their beliefs. Speaking of background beliefs a person has never had the occasion to bring to light and question, they ask, “[a]re we to take it that the believer assumes responsibility for such beliefs also?” (295). Their answer confirms the analogy between the sense of responsibility they have in mind and sense applicable to credit ratings: “it is certainly plausible that the conventions of responsibility work along lines of strict liability, so that even for beliefs that a person has not actively examined, it is perfectly proper for others to apply praise or blame” (295).

The sense in which McGeer and Pettit think we are responsible for our beliefs will not, I think, underwrite the claim that belief is a normative commitment. With this claim, recall, they aim to recognize and accommodate a thought central to what they describe as a heterodox philosophical tradition. What do the philosophers of this tradition have in mind in saying that belief is a normative commitment? Borrowing terms from Wilfrid Sellars, McDowell familiarly puts the point by saying that belief belongs in the space of reasons. As a move—someone’s move—in the space of reasons, belief is an action, as opposed to a mere event in the space of causes. Will McGeer and Pettit’s understanding of the sense in which we are responsible for our beliefs allow that conclusion? To see why not, consider what I think is the immediate appeal of the following corrective thought: the rational phenomenon in McGeer and Pettit’s scenario is not the belief, but the regulative activity of the believer. When a creature with a self-regulating mind succeeds or fails in its epistemic endeavours, on this picture, it does not do so as a believer, exactly, but as a regulator. No one does better or worse as a believer, on this view; rather, the quality of a self-regulating mind’s beliefs is a fact for which it can be held responsible. And it can be held responsible because the quality of its beliefs can be influenced by what such a mind does do better or worse, i.e., regulation.

I am suggesting that, in order to make sense of McGeer and Pettit’s proposal, we must distinguish two senses of responsibility. As far as I am concerned, what the authors call a self-regulating mind is responsible (and merits praise or blame) in one sense for its regulatory activity and in a distinct sense for the beliefs it regulates. The sense in which it is responsible for its activity is the sense of being responsible for something that is akin to being the thing’s author. The other sense of responsibility presupposes, as we saw, that the thing for which one is responsible is at an arm’s length, metaphysically, like one’s credit rating. McGeer and Pettit envision responsibility for belief in this second way. But it is the first sense of the term that
underwrites ascriptions of rationality. A rational phenomenon is an event for which someone is responsible—as I put it at the start of this chapter—insofar as it is someone’s action. It is not an event or object for whose quality someone can be said to assume responsibility.

McGeer and Pettit aim to treat belief as something more than the upshot of a mind’s meeting certain naturalistic constraints, as they put it (294). I think they are right to do that by reaching for the idea of the believer’s responsibility for belief. The problem is that they reach for the wrong sense of responsibility. That sense, interestingly, is more sophisticated than, and presupposes, the correct sense. Normative stance-taking, rational move-making involves a much more basic notion of accountability—one arguably exhibited in the activity through which one takes responsibility for other things. It is with their notion of a self-regulating mind’s regulatory activity, as such, and not with their notion of belief, that McGeer and Pettit credit us with epistemic rationality.

There is a reason McGeer and Pettit understand responsibility for belief as they do. As I have hinted, belief is, on their view, intelligible apart from the believer’s agency. For them, belief is simply a world-representing state governed by norms. A belief must have a bearer, presumably, but the state type is common to systems who do and do not self-regulate. The believer’s agency, for McGeer and Pettit, consists in her regulatory activity. Since the state-type of belief, along with its norms, is common to minds that do and do not self-regulate, agency is reduced to being part of the explanatory background for the success of some beliefs. Agency, in this picture, is merely a means whereby beliefs become better. Because belief is, at best, an item on which the believer acts, and not the substance of her action, she cannot be said to be responsible for it in the sense in which she is responsible for her action. Rather, she can be responsible for it only in the broad sense in which she is responsible for her credit rating.

I have been operating on the following thought: if belief is a rational phenomenon, in the sense of being a move in the space of reasons, then any right account must make it out to be an action. How does my characterization fare with regard to this requirement? The claim that belief is a state to which the believer is deliberatively related is meant to be both consistent with, and somewhat revelatory of, the active agential profile of belief. It is meant to do this by
specifying a condition imposed by that profile when it comes to second-order activity. To qualify as an action, belief must be incompatible with theoretical reflection. To see why, consider the nature of such reflection. In theoretical inquiry, a person treats a current state of hers—a current regret, say—as a fact independent of her deliberation. A state into which she inquires theoretically is one of which she becomes aware, but before which she may be passive. In the case of belief, that possibility of passivity takes the form of contingency of assent to the content of the belief. A world-representing state on which its bearer reflects theoretically is one she can bring to mind without her endorsing it. More aptly, it is a state she can bring to mind while remaining neutral vis-à-vis its content. By its nature, then, theoretical reflection on a world-representing state must hive it off from the subject’s own epistemic activity. Instead of belonging to the very exercise of her epistemic agency—instead of being her action—it becomes an object at best acted upon, like a credit rating—one to which, in McGeer and Pettit’s terms, one can bring regulation.

Returning to the matter of doxastic responsibility, treating belief as something on which self-regulators may act, McGeer and Pettit misconstrue the sense in which we are responsible for our beliefs. If my characterization succeeds in treating belief as an action, then it is consistent with the claim that we are responsible for our beliefs in the applicable sense. Moreover, in getting at part of what is involved in belief’s being an action, the characterization can be said to give some of the content of the claim that we are responsible for our beliefs.

Having set out and begun to motivate my characterization of belief, I turn, in the remaining three chapters, to its defence. In the interest of preparedness: the turn is a sharp one. In most of what follows, the notions of belief and epistemic agency take a close backseat to the notion of linguistic agency. That said, as we will see, the success of my defence depends on the partly constitutive relation between these two forms of agency.

\[11\] It is at least intelligible, I think, to ask, of any given kind of second-order activity, whether it is consistent with the first-order state’s being an action. Suppose I am right that a world-representing state into which its bearer can inquire theoretically is thereby disqualified from being an action. Then, in order to do justice to its status as a rational phenomenon, an account of belief must specify, as a constitutive condition of belief, the believer’s reflective possibilities vis-à-vis the state.
2 Learning from Words

2.1 Opening Thoughts

Suppose we are listening to Canadian Broadcasting Corporation radio host, Eleanor Wachtel, interview John Updike. “Do you think the American dream is still alive?” she asks. “Yes, it is,” he begins, and proceeds to expand on the subject. A few minutes later, she inquires, “What year were you born?” Updike reports, “I was born in 1932.” In each case, Wachtel and we learn something about Updike, and because this is a personal interview, that’s actually the point. But, intuitively, the two exchanges seem to be importantly different. On Wachtel’s side, the sense in which she asks him what he thinks doesn’t seem quite the same as the sense in which she asks him when he was born, or his height, or shoe size. As for Updike, he doesn’t seem to share what he thinks about the American dream in quite the same sense as he shares the year of his birth. He doesn’t seem to fish out the information as to his own thinking the way he does other information about himself...

We can begin to grasp these differences by appealing to a basic doctrine in philosophy of language: in making an assertion, a speaker can be said to report something and to express or show something. What the speaker reports usually corresponds to the content of the uttered sentence; and what he expresses is his corresponding belief. In saying “I was born in 1932”, for instance, Updike reports the year of his birth, and expresses his belief as to the year of his birth. With his “Yes, it is”, he reports that the American dream is still alive and expresses his belief that the American dream is still alive. The two exchanges between Wachtel and Updike,

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12 In chapter four, I argue that utterances that self-ascribe belief, such as “I believe the American dream is still alive”, require a non-standard analysis as to what they express and report. These, I say, express the belief to which the speaker apparently refers, and report whatever fact is the content of the belief.

13 Provided the assertion is sincere, and allowing for elliptical assertion.
we can now see, differ in how the fact sought by one party and communicated by the other is transmitted. Updike reports the year of his birth, whereas he expresses his belief.\textsuperscript{14}

Obviously enough, Updike has to attend to any fact he communicates. Where the fact is a mental state of his own, that attention will be reflective. Communicating belief by expression is interesting in this respect: expressing his belief, a speaker reflects on it deliberatively. In the next chapter, I will provide an argument for that claim, but the point is also intuitive. Consider: Wachtel wants to learn what Updike thinks about the American dream. In answering her as he does, Updike doesn’t strictly \textit{convey} the fact in question—his belief—the way he does the fact of his year of birth. Rather, he seems to bring it about or, at least, to re-entrench it.

It looks, then, as though one way—perhaps the typical way—a person’s words can serve as a basis for ascribing him belief involves his paying deliberative attention to that belief. So far as it goes, this remark is at least consistent with the first chapter’s characterization of belief. Recall that I proposed that belief is a state to which its bearer is deliberatively related; it is a state, that is to say, on which its bearer can reflect only deliberatively. What is consistent with that characterization are the following two facts: a possible, and perhaps typical, way of communicating belief is by expressing it; and an inquirer seeking to learn a speaker’s belief might well expect him—and even invite him—to express it. But might we have more than consistency, here? Perhaps Updike’s \textit{expressing} his belief reflects the very nature of belief. And perhaps Wachtel’s inviting him to express it—supposing she can be said to do that—reflects the nature of belief ascription.

\section*{2.2 What’s to Come}

In the final two chapters of the dissertation, I mount an extended, two-part defence of the characterization of belief set out in the first chapter. In the remainder of this chapter, I do two things: In the current section, I discuss in outline the defence to come and address certain

\textsuperscript{14} To be clear, the utterances are fundamentally symmetrical: each reports something and expresses something. The difference we intuit concerns how we and Wachtel learn the fact we learn in each case: in learning Updike’s belief, we attend to the expressive dimension of the relevant utterance; in learning the year of his birth, we attend to what he reports. Which fact I have said we learn in each case is given by the conversation’s being a garden-variety personal interview. Thus, Wachtel’s question what Updike thinks primes us to learn his belief from his reply. And her question as to the year of his birth primes us to learn when he was born (and not—as one might imagine, under special circumstances—what he \textit{thinks} about what year he was born).
methodological questions to which it gives rise. Then, in section 2.3, I put into place some essential background for the argument of the subsequent chapters.

In the broadest strokes, I defend my characterization of belief by looking to our everyday life with the concept. I contend that some central ways in which we operate with the concept reveal facts about it. And part of what is revealed is that the states to which the concept of belief applies are ones to which their bearers are deliberatively related.

The realm of our use of the concept in which I am interested is the ascription of belief, both to oneself and others. My interest is further narrowed to a particular basis for ascription: the believer’s words. It happens that when belief is attributed to a person from his words, a second realm of our life with the concept is also at work. Besides the ascription of belief, there is also what we might call its communication or its being let-known; there is the way the concept figures in what Wachtel does, that is, but also in what Updike does. In order to understand the ascription of belief to a person from his words, it will, as we will see, be equally important to understand the role of the concept in the believer’s speech.

In effect, I focus on a basic scenario: someone speaks, and belief is ascribed to that person based on his speech.\(^{15}\) Let me make three points about this scenario.

First, as I noted, the two realms of use of the concept I consider bear on either side of the phenomenon. The hearer ascribes belief and the speaker in some sense lets his belief be known in speaking. Certainly, a speaker can communicate his belief without the hearer’s making the ascription. Likewise—as we will see in sections 2.3 and 4.3, with the idea of learning evidentially from words—hearers can ascribe belief based on someone’s words without the speaker’s in any sense letting it be known. Still, letting someone know what one thinks and ascribing belief to someone based on his words are possible moves on opposite sides of the same narrative: someone’s speaking and being heard.

Second, our scenario has two variations, depending on whether one ascribes belief to oneself or another. It often happens that another’s words serve as a basis for attributing belief to

\(^{15}\) Taking my cue from the opening scene, in the remainder of the dissertation, believer and speaker figures are male, while learner and hearer figures are female.
him, as in the Updike interview. It can also happen that one ascribes a belief to oneself from one’s own words—we sometimes discover where we stand on some issue based on what we’re prepared to say about it. These are two sides of the same coin. Given the scant fact, that is, of a person’s words affording belief of his belief, the question arises, for whom? Answers to this question can be sorted according to whether it is the person himself or someone else. Another way to put the difference between our two variations is this: either the believer and the belief-ascriber are the same person or they are not. But, in both cases, belief is ascribed on the basis of the believer’s words. Each of the two chapters to come focuses on one of these variations.

Any actual ascription of belief based on a believer’s words will be a psychologically rich and multi-faceted affair. The third point to make about our basic scenario is that it can vary—for one—according to whether, and to what extent, the person(s) involved pursue intentions concerning belief. For the belief-ascriber, this is the question whether she acts with the intention to find out what the speaker believes, as Wachtel does in asking Updike what he thinks. For the believer, the question is whether there is, among his intentions, an intention to make it known what he thinks. Let me flag something I will return to in the third chapter: I take there to be a difference between what I’ve been calling communicating one’s belief (or letting it be known), on one hand, and pursuing an intention to inform someone of one’s belief. So, we should say, for instance, that the concept of belief figures in what Updike does in two ways. First, it figures somehow in whatever it is about his words that makes them an action informative of his belief—a role for the concept of belief common to any ordinary assertion. But because Updike is participating in a personal interview, he can be said, in making his assertion, to have the further intention to inform Wachtel of his belief. Note that this variable also affects the version of our scenario in which a person self-ascribes belief based on his own words: qua ascriber, he might just discover what he thinks without having meant to, or he might put himself the question, “Do I believe that p?” Qua speaker, he might just speak, or he might speak with the extra intention of informing himself, qua hearer, of what he thinks.

The defence to come involves two moves: I identify a fact about how ascription of belief does or can proceed in our scenario, and I argue that the truth of my characterization of belief best explains that fact. The fact I undertake to explain—and which I call, for convenience, the “target
fact”, is this: where a person’s words afford belief of his belief they do so through their 
*expressive* character.  

The idea that words can afford information in different ways—such as 
through expression—will be the subject of the second half of this chapter. For now, let me 
clarify the target fact. First, it does not record the *epistemic value* of the expressive character of 
a person’s words as a basis for ascribing him belief. I am not saying, in a factive voice, that 
where a person’s words afford knowledge of his belief, they do so through their expressive 
character. If I *were* saying that, to be clear, one might think I was saying that hearers intelligibly 
can, and normally do, ascribe belief to speakers from their words in *other* ways, but that these 
fail to produce knowledge. If not its epistemic value, what positive feature of the phenomenon 
of ascribing a person belief from his words does the target fact record? The answer is different 
in each of the next two chapters. In the third chapter, where I consider ascribing another person 
belief, the target fact states a condition of normal practice. In the fourth, where I discuss the 
prospects for self-ascribing belief from one’s own words, the target fact states a condition of 
what I call bare feasibility. Let me explain.

Consider the case of ascribing belief to another from his words. Since talking is 
overwhelmingly something we do in interacting with *others*, and since it usually affects our 
epistemic fortunes, and in a number of ways, the question how another’s words afford 
knowledge of his belief fits naturally with questions about how his words afford knowledge of 
anything at all. I begin, in the third chapter, with the relatively modest observation I made at the 
start of this chapter: one—perhaps typical—way we communicate our beliefs, and learn those of 
others, is through the *expressive* character of speech. I then defend the stronger claim—
equivalent to the target fact—that, in any normal case, a person’s words serve as a basis for 
ascribing him belief through their expressive character. In context, that amounts to the claim 
that, of the multiple ways a person’s words can inform us of anything, the way they inform us of 
his belief is through expression.

In the case of learning one’s own belief, it would be odd to ask the question, of the ways 
a person can let facts be known to himself using words, in what way does he let his belief be

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16 I mean in particular the *belief*-expressive dimension of assertoric speech, and not the general expressiveness of 
linguistic phenomena.
known? A person’s own words, after all, are not an obvious epistemic resource for him, and only exceptionally, if at all, can he be said to ascribe himself belief on their basis. Although I think there probably are phenomena correctly described as self-ascribing belief from one’s own words—indeed, I describe what seems the best candidate—I remain officially neutral as to whether such a practice exists. Instead, I imagine what such practices would consist in for each of the ways of learning from words described in the second half of the current chapter. I argue that, among these, only learning from the expressive character of one’s words is feasible, in the sense of maintaining basic integrity as an exercise of the self-ascriber’s agency. This allows me to conclude that, if one’s own words allow one to self-ascribe belief—also if one may seek to self-ascribe belief from one’s own words—it is through the expressive character of speech.

Note, finally, that the target fact concerns both the ascription and communication of belief. Where one ascribes belief to someone based on his words, I am saying, one normally does (or feasibly might do) so based on their expressive dimension. Likewise, where a person’s words reveal his belief, they normally (or feasibly might) do so through their expression dimension.

The second move of the defence consists in an argument to the effect that the target fact is best explained by the characterization of belief set out in the first chapter: that it is through their expressive character that a person’s words normally do, or feasibly might, serve as a basis for ascribing him belief is to be explained by the nature of the concept of belief. We can already discern the rough shape of the connection I am promising to clarify between the ideas that, on one hand, the expressive aspect of a person’s words serves as a basis for ascribing him belief, and, on the other, the characterization of belief I offered. Expressing a belief involves, as I noted and will elaborate, paying deliberative attention to it. It is not contingent that, of the ways words can inform us, the way a speaker’s words inform us of his belief involves his paying deliberative attention to it. That a person, in expressing his belief, pays deliberative attention to it is to be explained by the fact that it is his belief he is communicating. Likewise, that a person who learns the state expressed in an assertion takes the speaker to reflect deliberatively on that state is explained by the fact that it is his belief he is communicating. And Wachtel’s taking Updike to so reflect manifests her conceiving of the person to whom she ascribes belief as deliberatively related to his state.
Having outlined the defence to come, let me step back and address certain questions concerning the strategy of the argument considered more abstractly. How is it that—as I affirmed—certain ways in which we operate with the concept of belief reveal facts about it? And what is the significance for my characterization of observations about how we ascribe belief in a specific context?  

At the most general level, there is the question whether and how facts about any uses of the concept of belief can provide support for, or undermine, a characterization of that concept. Ultimately, such facts matter in virtue of the nature of conceptual analysis itself. Presumably, a characterization aims to be true of a concept as we know and use it. So, sound observations about how things go in our use of a concept may bear on whether to accept a characterization. We use the concept of belief in several ways; for instance, we talk and think about belief per se in proverbs, politics, psychoanalysis.... In what follows, I focus, as I say, on certain phenomena of ascription of belief. Observations about our concrete ascribings of belief bear on the soundness of a characterization of the concept insofar as ascribing belief is applying the concept.  

Because of this accountability to the facts, given a characterization of belief, we can ask: Do our ascriptions of belief indicate a grasp of a concept with that content? Do the states to which we apply the concept have those features? Now, it turns out that answers to such questions are asymmetrical in their philosophical significance. Observations that are inconsistent with a characterization matter without qualification. Suppose there were a cultural practice of instructing children how to improve their theoretical grasp of their beliefs. Children are told: “Don’t reconsider whether the roses are in bloom, just see whether you believe it. What makes you think you believe it?” Pursuing such instruction, we would use the concept of belief in a

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17 The remainder of this section applies to the strategy of argument used in the third chapter only. As I noted, there is no widespread practice of self-ascription of belief from one’s own words about which to make observations, and so no opportunity to check for consistency between such observations and my characterization of belief.

18 The idea that an analysis of a concept is accountable to our life with that concept is implicit in the way I treated belief in the first chapter. The legitimacy of deriving a thesis about ascription of belief from the characterization I offered (as I did on p. 9) assumes that the characterization aims to get right the very concept on which we operate in the realm of use of the concept that is ascribing belief. The first chapter’s characterization, that is, aims to describe a concept that finds application in our mental lives, not only as believers, but also as ascribers of belief.
way that violates the characterization offered in the last chapter: among those people, belief is such as to be inquired into theoretically. Observations along these lines, in being inconsistent with my characterization, would call it straightforwardly into question.

Observations that are consistent with a characterization, on the other hand, only may matter: whether they provide any support depends on the reasons for the consistency. It’s one thing, that is, to note that Wachtel and Updike behave in a way consistent with my characterization of belief, or, indeed, that everyone pretty much always does. It’s another thing to appeal to that consistency in support of my view. Part of the burden I shoulder in the third chapter is to get beyond the observation of bare consistency. I do this by defending a certain explanation for the consistent facts. That a person’s words normally afford knowledge of his belief through their expressive character—a fact consistent with my characterization—is, I argue, best explained by the nature of belief.

2.3 Learning from Words and Asking Questions

The basic fact for which I provide explanation concerns the ascription of belief on the basis of the believer’s words. It identifies the specific way in which a person’s words normally do or feasibly might—to capture the difference between the two- and one-person cases—afford a basis for ascribing him belief. In order to fully understand this claim, we will need a sense of the range of ways words serve to inform us. That is what I provide below. Now, in our opening scene, the difference between how Wachtel learns each of the two facts Updike conveys depends on the nature of those facts. Something about learning a speaker’s belief makes that a different kind of project from learning his year of birth... Although I will end up claiming that, indeed,

19 It is worth noting the wrinkle introduced by characterizations of belief that, like mine, include in the content of the concept a certain relation between bearer and state. In such cases, the general question of consistency between our belief-ascribing, on one hand, and a characterization of the concept of belief, on the other, takes the following form: are the states we have in mind in ascribing belief such that their bearer is related to them in the relevant way? Now, as I have been saying, a positive answer to that question, along with the right explanation, would support the characterization. But the formulation of the question might make it sound as though applying the concept of belief were a matter of focusing on a candidate state and ascertaining its properties. In reality, though, the question about consistency for a characterization of the kind in question—i.e., one that specifies a relation between state and state-bearer—concerns how we, the ascribers and concept-appliers, conceive of the bearers of the states we ascribe under the banner of belief, as it were. Do we think of those to whom we ascribe such states as related to them in the relevant way? Invariably so? As a condition of the applicability of the concept?
certain facts do have an impact on how they may be learned or communicated through words, the project of the current section abstracts from what is learned. I develop basic taxonomies of two phenomena: learning from words and seeking words from which to learn. I present the taxonomies in that order because they are nested. In order to identify the possibilities for seeking words from which to learn, we must first understand the few central ways in which words afford belief. For, in so seeking words, a person seeks to learn in some such way.

As we will see, the ways words afford belief vary with the possibilities for construing what comes out of a person’s mouth, from motive-less noise to articulate communication. So, the terrain I explore goes from a person’s learning what she can from another’s noise-making to learning what she can thanks to a fellow epistemic agent’s speaking to her. That a hearer can fall short of doing justice to a speaker in construing what comes out of his mouth provides a clue as to what is most interesting about the range of ways words afford belief: the relation, for any such way, between the participants’ linguistic and epistemic agencies. Linguistic activity, after all, is governed by norms. So, for any given case of learning from a person’s words, the following questions apply: does the learner’s pursuit of her epistemic intention—her attempt to acquire knowledge—compromise or enhance the integrity of her linguistic activity? And does the speaker’s intention to make some fact known compromise or enhance the integrity of his linguistic activity? We will see that it is possible for a person to meet her epistemic intentions at the expense of meeting linguistic norms or in virtue of doing so.

2.3.1 Linguistic Agency

Before setting out the taxonomies, then, let me say something about the idea of linguistic agency. From asking someone about her day to lip-synching to a pop song, plenty of actions involve words; but is there such a thing as specifically linguistic agency? A good place to begin theorizing the notion is to identify the norms and responsibilities that apply widely across, and prominently in, cases of action involving words. Many of the particular responsibilities of linguistic activity appear to coalesce around two themes: intelligibility and recognition. Much of what we do, in speaking and hearing, requires that we make ourselves intelligible to, and find intelligibility in, others. A speaker is, for instance, responsible to speak in such a way as to be
correctly understood by his hearer. A corresponding responsibility at the level of the speech act is to act in such a way as to be understood to be doing what one is doing; so, recognizably to ask a question, to assert, to take a vow, etc. Now, the exercise of linguistic agency involves not only what we do, broadly, in producing words (such as sharing a secret and coordinating plans), but also what we do in receiving them (such as accepting a promise and listening to a pop song). These receptive components of linguistic agency impose corresponding intelligibility-themed obligations. A person must interpret a speaker according to what she means to say, for instance, and be alert to the sort of speech act she is undertaking.

Moving to the second theme, what do I have in mind in saying that many basic responsibilities of linguistic action concern recognition? Here are two similar phenomena: grasping what is said and done by another person and grasping that the phenomena before one are someone’s articulate, purposive speech. The word “recognize” can be applied in the first case—one can recognize someone’s ambiguous utterance as a question, for instance. Here, however, I want to reserve “recognition” for the second mentioned phenomenon of apprehension. Logically prior to the questions of what a person means by her words and intends to accomplish with them are the questions whether she is saying anything at all and whether she is a creature capable of saying something. Whatever form it takes—whether a guess, a judgment or something closer to a decision—a (sound) affirmative answer to these logically prior questions is what I will call, I think aptly, recognition. So, the responsibilities of linguistic activity that concern recognition are responsibilities to handle these questions deftly. What makes an answer sound? What kind of accomplishment is recognition? Ethical? Theoretical? I hope I can leave these fascinating questions to one side and nonetheless suggest some particular responsibilities of linguistic activity as responsibilities of recognition. For one, speech is usually addressed and is often (over)heard; a person may be said to be responsible for recognizing others as potential addressees and (over)hearers of his speech. And, as a hearer, a person is responsible

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20 To discharge this responsibility is, according to a dominant view, to speak in conformity with a language shared by the hearer; this is the responsibility Humpty Dumpty eschews in using “glory” to mean “there’s a nice knock-down argument for you” before letting Alice in on his idiosyncrasy (Carroll 186).

21 To be clear, this is not an observation about how we actually apprehend and interact with one another. We hardly ever stumble at the points picked out by the logically first question; and our understanding of what others say is usually immediate.
for recognizing meaningful, communicative speech when she runs across it, making out to whom it is addressed and, if herself, acknowledging that.

The responsibilities of recognition are not only other-regarding. In the case of others, recognition takes the form of entering into a relation with them; whereas in one’s own case, “recognition” takes the form of action. That is, the responsibility to recognize a person as a linguistic agent is—when that person is oneself—a responsibility to act. Linguistic agency itself may be said to have both self- and other-involving dimensions. Others and I figure in my speaking and hearing, but not symmetrically. To say that linguistic agency has a self-involving “dimension” is to pick out the fact that the self in question is active. I “figure” in my speaking and hearing as the source of those actions. The relevant contrast is to say that the self-involving element of linguistic agency consists in the agent’s relating to himself in some way—such as, perhaps, intending or encouraging himself to act.\textsuperscript{22} The other-involving dimension of linguistic agency, on the other hand, is a form of relation the agent enters into. It is his recognition of others as fellow speakers and hearers with the same responsibilities, whom he can address, and by whom he can be addressed.\textsuperscript{23} When I raised and set aside the question of the nature of recognition—of the sort of accomplishment it might be—I was asking about the nature of this relation into which an agent enters with another.\textsuperscript{24}

As applied to linguistic action, the term “integrity” captures in an image what it is for such action to be compromised by a person’s failure to recognize himself or another as a

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\textsuperscript{22} The contrast I note in the text is between an agent’s acting and his entering into some relation with himself. There is an important difference between the fact of an agent’s entering into a relation and the fact of his simply standing in some relation with himself, such as identity. To point out the self-involving element of linguistic agency requires carefully contrasting the activity of the self with, in particular, an agent’s entering into some relation with himself. Is there any way of understanding the activity of the self in terms of a relation? Yes, if only in an image: Rather than enter into a stable, two-place relation in which he is, for himself, an object of some kind, the person himself collapses the distance holding the poles apart. I think this collapse is what Kierkegaard had in mind in preferring “choose thyself” to “know thyself” as the imperative of the ethical individual (549).

\textsuperscript{23} The recognition of others subtends both the productive and receptive components of linguistic activity. There is no province of what we do with words from which the other-involving dimension can be disentangled. The responsibilities of recognition equally permeate, in particular, the productive element of linguistic agency. As we will see below, for example, the speech act of telling involves recognizing one’s hearer as herself, in turn, able to recognize what one is doing in speaking.

\textsuperscript{24} Entering into a relation with another, it is worth noting, is not forming a judgment about her. In the former case, one relates oneself to the other; in the latter, one relates the other to a property.
linguistic agent: there being a distance, for an agent, between himself and his words, or another and her words, or both. We are now in a position to see why the integrity of linguistic agency is a variable in the taxonomies I present below. Many interestingly compromised linguistic interactions arise from a conflict between responsible speaking and hearing, on one hand, and good things like happiness, sanity, and knowledge, on the other. Below, I explore forms of acquiring belief from words and seeking words from which to learn. These acquirings and solicitings are, after all, linguistic interactions. They are linguistic interactions shaped by the pressure of interlocutors’ desire to know or to let know. Our resourcefulness, as seekers after knowledge, is not bound by the responsibilities of linguistic agency; a person can compromise that agency in finding something out, or in letting another know something. We are free to take another’s words as it suits us for epistemic purposes—to derive belief in different ways from them. In exercising that freedom, as we will see, we sometimes take the phenomena as other than they are—as, say, motive-less noise. We introduce a distance, that is, between another person and her words. In distinguishing the various forms of learning from words and seeking words for epistemic purposes, then, I will be setting out some forms of compromised linguistic agency—those that result from the strain sometimes put on the responsibilities of such agency by the impetus to know (or to let know). In principle, epistemic and linguistic activity can find themselves at odds over any particular responsibility of linguistic agency, down to the obligation to speak loudly enough to be heard. (Imagine a person who wants to make known, by demonstration, how quietly he can whisper.) But I will focus on the responsibilities of recognition. As we will see, the major forms of epistemic significance had by words are to be understood in terms of whether and how those who trade in such words fall short of integrity in their linguistic agency.

2.3.2 Learning from Words

What phenomena count as learning from words? That depends on what counts as “words.” Here, it will be useful to take “words” broadly, to include everything from mere noise or marks to fully articulate speech or writing. That way, including under “learning from words” a wide range of phenomena, we can see what distinguishes learning from words in the fullest sense of “words”. An obvious phenomenon to be classified as learning from words is learning by testimony. One way of putting what I am up to in developing a taxonomy of learning from words is to say that I am mapping a territory whose border is two “rings” away from testimony.
In the taxonomy I propose, testimony is a specific way of learning from assertoric speech, so the first ring around it encompasses all the ways of learning from such speech. And the second ring reaches out to include learning from words where the words fall short—in a sense to be explained—of being assertoric speech. For reasons that will become clear, and following Moran (2005), I call such cases learning evidentially from words. Here, in anticipation, is the full structure:

**taxonomy of ways of learning from words**

- learning from words
  - evidential
    - testimonial
  - non-evidential
    - conversational
    - expressive

Let’s get started. The difference between learning evidentially and non-evidentially from words depends on whether the words in question have the value of evidence in the hearer’s belief-formation. And whether they have the value of evidence, we will see, correlates with whether and how the speaker participates in the belief-acquisition. If the words have the value of evidence, then the speaker’s participation is optional; and where it occurs, moreover, that participation is limited to the presentation and interpretation of evidence. Where the epistemic value of words is of the kind distinctive of linguistic action, as we will see, the speaker necessarily participates in the hearer’s learning, and in a way excluded in the case of learning evidentially.

Where a person learns evidentially from words, the epistemic significance of those words is that of evidence. Something’s being evidence is its being a reason for belief for anyone in a position to appreciate it, and without regard to anyone’s presentation or appraisal of it. So, a belief formed on the basis of evidence does not rest on anyone’s intervention into the believer’s
deliberation. Another way to put this is to say that, in forming a belief based on evidence, the believer remains wholly responsible for the truth of his belief, for the judgment as to where the evidence leads is, in the end, wholly his own. Another person may urge an interpretation of the evidence on him, and he may accept it. But in doing so, he independently endorses the other’s reasoning, and does not defer to it. 25

We can recognize someone’s words’ functioning as evidence in the following two cases: Suppose Updike tells Wachtel that he was born in 1932. If she were to conclude, on the basis of his utterance, that he has vocal cords, the utterance would serve as evidence in the formation of her belief. Or consider Faulkner’s character, Benjy Compton, in The Sound and the Fury. Benjy’s saying “Caddy, Caddy, Caddy...” gives those who know him some reason to believe he is near a golf course. Benjy is developmentally stalled; he misses his beloved sister, Caddy; hearing golfers yell, “caddie! caddie!” sets him to repeating his sister’s name in a hazy, yearning sort of way. The connection between Benjy’s words and his location is only symptomatic, but it is that—it does provide the evidence a symptom provides.

Whether words have the value of evidence in a hearer’s acquisition of belief correlates with whether and how the speaker participates in that acquisition. To participate in a hearer’s acquisition of belief, first of all, is to figure in that acquisition in a certain way. Moran imagines looking out the window at the bundled-up people passing in the street and concluding that it is cold out. Here, belief is acquired through observing private behaviour; the people in the street, unaware of even being observed, figure in, but do not participate in, the learner’s drawing the conclusion about the weather. In the case of learning evidentially from words, because the hearer’s belief acquisition depends on no one else, the speaker certainly need not participate. Also internal to words’ serving as evidence is a limit on the way the speaker can participate, if he does: all he can do is present and perhaps interpret his own words as evidence.

This kind of participatory activity will be clearer where the evidence consists in something other than words. Suppose you and I are trying to decide what to make of the pool of

25 Of course, the other might succeed in persuading him in an importantly different sense, such that he gives up considering the evidence, relying instead on the other’s estimation of it. But then his belief is not genuinely formed on the basis of evidence.
liquid on the kitchen floor. I might point out a feature of the scene, such as the pool’s dried edges, as relevant to understanding how it got there. Or, supposing I have already formed an opinion as to what happened, I can point to something as evidence for my hypothesis: I think our sloppy houseguest is responsible, and I point out that it looks like soda, something neither of us drinks... Yet the most I do by way of intervening in your deliberation is to try to align your estimation of the evidence with mine (or, if I want to deceive you, some other estimation).

Likewise, the person who utters words serving as evidence in a hearer’s formation of belief can, at best, serve as a fellow judge of their independent epistemic significance. To undertake this kind of participation, then, a speaker must regard his own words as evidence. How does this work? Moran offers the following example: Imagine a person seeking to have his hearer arrive at the conclusion that he is “being scrupulously candid or self-revealing”, and reaching his goal by confessing a minor fault (19). In speaking, as Moran observes, this person does something he hopes will be taken as evidence. He seeks to accomplish his goal by producing linguistic behaviour, guided by his understanding of the evidential value of that behaviour. So, the participation of the speaker in a hearer’s learning evidentially from words extends only as far as the role of the co-inquirers in the kitchen. That is, the speaker accepts and works within the constraints of the hearer’s consideration of the evidence. The difference is that he can (openly or secretly) shape the hearer’s belief-formation by controlling what evidence gets produced. The point is that the kind of reason for belief provided by the speaker’s words is, as a reason, valid without regard to his presentation or estimation of it. As a reason for belief, his

26 In Moran (2005) this difference appears as one between attitudes with which a person can show another a photograph: she can do it as part of a joint effort to figure out what the image shows, or she can flourish a compromising photograph, detective-novel-style.

27 The cases from which it is clear that it is possible for a speaker to regard his own words as evidence are cases in which he intends to lead the hearer to a particular belief. It is harder to think of an analogue for the first of the two spilled-liquid cases, in which the speaker simply points something out as relevant to drawing conclusions on some matter, without also encouraging a particular conclusion. One example might be a psychotherapeutic patient who does not know what to make of what he says, but speaks to his psychoanalyst with a manifest awareness that his speech is evidence from which his expert listener can draw conclusions about him. He can be said to “present” his words as evidence.
words are an object in common for—and have the same epistemic significance for—both himself and the hearer, like the pool of liquid.\textsuperscript{28}

Now, the epistemic significance of speech certainly extends beyond that of evidence. Confronted with Updike’s utterance that he was born in 1932, the most obvious fact Wachtel might learn is not that he has vocal cords but that he was born in 1932. And this, I think, is a fact she learns non-evidentially. That the string of words leaving Updike’s mouth should to some extent warrant a hearer’s belief that he was born in 1932 is a fact in some sense dependent on \textit{him}. Where Wachtel learns that fact from his words, that is, he must have participated in some sense. In what sense? As we will see, learning evidentially and non-evidentially from words are mutually exclusive: where the form of speaker’s participation possible but contingent in the case of evidential acquisition of belief leaves off, the form of participation necessary to the non-evidential acquisition of belief begins.

A speaker can be said to participate in a hearer’s learning non-evidentially from his assertoric speech just insofar as that speech is his linguistic action. The fact that the words leaving Updike’s mouth afford Wachtel belief about the year of his birth, that is, depend on Updike just insofar as those words are his linguistic action. For a person’s words to count as his action is, in turn, for him to constitute them as such. There is an instructive way of explaining what it is to constitute one’s words as action, but first note that we can think of that accomplishment as meeting what I called one’s responsibility to “recognize” oneself as a linguistic agent. Failure in the self-directed form of this basic responsibility of linguistic activity is, I suggested, failure to act—failure, that is, to constitute one’s words as action.

A way to visualize such failure is to imagine a radical break between a person and his words—a break preventing the minimal integrity essential to being a linguistic agent. Instead of minimally occupying his words, as it were, a person looks on at them. To get beyond the kind of understanding provided by these images—and yet to stay in their orbit—think of the phenomenon of constituting one’s words as action as such as to impose a limit on how

\textsuperscript{28} Moreover, it is internal to the speaker’s regarding his speech as evidence that he takes its epistemic status to be independent of his so regarding it: “To present something as evidence is to be in a position to report that it is a reason for belief, and to be in this position, one must be presenting that claim of belief-worthiness as having a basis in fact that is independent of one’s reporting itself” (Moran 20).
completely a person can regard his words as evidence. The integrity required by minimal linguistic agency, that is, turns out to impose a limit on the respects in which a speaker may regard his own words as evidence.

Recall the case of the speaker leading his hearer to the conclusion that he is being candid by confessing a minor fault. There, the speaker regards his own words as evidence, but note that the belief he intends the hearer to acquire differs from the content of his utterance. Can a speaker regard his speech as evidence for the truth of what he in fact says? That is, can he treat the fact of his saying that \( p \) as evidence on which a hearer may believe that \( p \)? This oversteps the limit. Such a speaker’s words are not his own. His stance, in effect, interferes with the freedom exercised in simply producing the responsible linguistic behaviour that, in the previous case, figures in the speaker’s higher-order intention as evidence.

How so? The speaker we are imagining regards the relation of his words to the truth as an objective regularity. But grammatically indicative utterances for whose truth or falsity their emitter fails to take immediate responsibility are not assertoric speech. To count as assertoric speech, the words a person produces must purport to be his stabs at the truth. To make an assertion, that is, is to purport to speak truly. This is to be explained by the fact that assertion, when sincere, expresses belief. The explanation has two components. First, assertoric speech itself purports to express belief, which is to say that the norm of sincerity constitutively governs assertion. Bernard Williams offers the following basic characterization of assertion, leaving room for insincere cases: “the standard conditions of A’s asserting that P are that A utters a sentence, ‘S,’ where ‘S’ means that P, in doing which either he expresses his belief that P, or he intends the person addressed to take it that he believes that P” (74). Second, truth constitutively governs belief. To make an assertion, then, is to purport to express one’s belief, and therein to purport to speak the truth. That in virtue of which a person regards his words as related to the truth, then, must be himself. He cannot consider the relation of his own words to the truth to be an objective regularity.

I suggested that we think of constituting one’s words as action as a phenomenon limited by the extent to which a person can regard his words as evidence. If this is right, then we can understand such constitution—such achievement of basic linguistic agency—as centrally including taking direct responsibility for the truth or falsity of one’s grammatically indicative
speech. And if the form of speaker’s participation essential to a hearer’s learning non-evidentially from his words amounts to his words’ being his action, then that participation includes his taking responsibility for the truth of what he says.

We should now be able to see why it is that whether the words from which someone learns have the value of evidence correlates with whether and how the speaker participates in the learning. When speech serves as evidence, the kind of reason for belief it provides is valid without regard to anyone’s presentation or estimation of it—that’s the hallmark of evidence. What an utterance reveals about the speaker’s vocal cords, for instance, is no more up to him than it is up to others. To have an epistemic value other than that of evidence is, by contrast, to be an epistemic resource somehow irreducibly dependent on another person. So, learning non-evidentially from something just does involve relying on someone else in some sense. If words are to be a non-evidential epistemic resource, they must be constituted as such by their speaker. And it is in doing that that he participates in the hearer’s learning; so he both must participate and participate in the relevant sense. Only then is it possible for others to learn from the words that leave his mouth in ways other than evidentially.

I turn now to ways of learning non-evidentially from words or, as is now clear, learning from assertoric speech. There are, I will suggest, three such ways: testimonial, conversational, and expressive. These can be sorted according to the dimension of assertion to which the hearer attends: whereas the third obviously involves the expressive dimension of assertion, the first two concern what we might call its reportive aspect.

Let us begin with those. First, the sense in which learning conversationally and testimonially both concern the reportive dimension of assertion is this: the belief the hearer may acquire as a result of learning from the speaker’s words corresponds to the fact he reports. Whether she learns conversationally or testimonially, what Wachtel takes from Updike’s assertion is that he was born in 1932. In both cases, also, Wachtel depends in her learning on Updike’s purporting to speak truly. But testimony—to begin there—involves further conditions. In order to offer testimony, a speaker must not only sincerely assert the fact in question, but must attach to his assertion the force of *telling*. Moran—whose account I follow here—offers a nicely intuitive characterization: “*Telling* someone something is not simply giving expression to what’s on your mind, but is making a statement with the understanding that here it is your word that is
to be relied on” (2005, 8). In telling someone that \( p \), a speaker invites her to rely on him that \( p \); her reliance on “his word” is her reliance on him, for he constitutes his utterance as a reason for his addressee’s belief.\(^{29}\) This, I think, is why Moran, Elizabeth Anscombe and J. L. Austin all think of learning by testimony as believing the speaker, and as believing what he says only on that basis.\(^ {30}\) The reason the speaker offers the hearer for belief that \( p \) consists in the fact that he tells her so. He can offer his words as a reason for belief insofar as they carry his guarantee that \( p \).\(^ {31}\) In so constituting his words, he does something akin to addressing his hearer with “Take it from me that...”. And so, according to Moran, in offering the hearer a reason to believe that \( p \), the speaker also grants her a right of complaint should it turn out that not-\( p \). “But you told me so!” she might say.

It will help to characterize the act of telling in terms of the intentions of the speaker. In telling someone that \( p \), the speaker first of all presents \( p \) as worthy of his belief. He also intends that the hearer believe that \( p \). And he intends that she believe it in virtue of his presenting it as worthy of belief. That is, part of what he intends is the hearer’s own action of believing that \( p \) for the reason he offers in telling her. For the act of telling to be completed by the hearer, otherwise put, the latter must believe what the speaker asserts for the reason that the speaker offers and represents himself as offering. In order for the hearer to believe that \( p \) in virtue of the speaker’s telling her so, she must, of course, first recognize the kind of reason he is offering; so, part of his intention is that she recognize what he is doing in telling her something: “[t]he speaker’s intent...is that for the audience, the very fact that this speaker is freely and explicitly presenting P as worthy of belief constitutes his speech as a reason to believe that P” (16). The hearer must also recognize the speaker’s authority to determine the kind of reason afforded by his words. In recognizing and responding to—by accepting or declining—the sort of reason for

\(^{29}\) That is, the sense in which the speaker is the “source” of the reason to believe is not that he produces something that is a reason. Rather, he offers, by way of reason, reliance on himself. As Moran puts it, he does not invite the hearer to rely on something he has “freely done”, but on him (11-12).

\(^{30}\) See the whole of Anscombe (1979), and p. 83 of Austin (1961).

\(^{31}\) Moran describes the speaker as offering an assurance; hence his calling this the Assurance View of testimony.
belief he offers her, the hearer defers to the speaker’s authority to determine what kind of reason is on offer. 32

Philosophical work on testimony usually proceeds on the assumption that there is only one way—that way—in which to learn from assertoric speech. Someone says sincerely, “The moon is full tonight” and—we imagine—the hearer finds herself with a kind reason for a belief about the moon interestingly different from what she would have looking up at the night sky. We simply do not imagine that there could be more than one kind of epistemic resource at the hearer’s disposal, here. On my view, there are two ways a speaker’s sincere report can inform a hearer’s belief-formation. As a way of introducing the second way, it will help to pause to discuss the location of Moran’s account of testimony in the literature on that subject.

As Jennifer Lackey (2006) reports, most theorists of testimony take the speaker’s belief to be the locus of epistemic significance. Roughly, a statement is a source of testimonial knowledge provided it expresses a belief with the right epistemic features. The statement is something like the mode of transmission for the epistemically significant belief. Lackey herself rejects this emphasis on beliefs. It is, she argues, the epistemic features of statements that provide hearers with testimonial knowledge; a speaker needn’t believe what he states, as long as his statement has the right epistemic features. As I read him, Moran’s account falls outside this disagreement altogether. Lackey breaks with the tradition over what can and must serve as a source for the justification without which the hearer cannot be said to have acquired testimonial knowledge. She argues that the hearer’s warrant must be said to come from the statement she is offered and not the speaker’s belief. On Moran’s view, the reason for belief acquired in testimony is not transmitted from either the speaker’s belief or his statement. Rather, the sort of reason for belief on offer to a hearer is itself reliance on the speaker. Lackey and her opponents share the thought that the recipient of testimony comes away with a self-standing piece of knowledge, whereas Moran takes the recipient to come away with a belief in part supported by someone else’s reasons.

32 Having recognized the kind of reason on offer, the hearer still, of course, faces the question whether it is a good reason. If she thinks the speaker is insincere or does not know what he is talking about, she is likely to decline it. As we will see in the next section, some of what recommends speakers as sources of testimonial reason-to-believe is given by the norms governing assertion.
More broadly, although Moran focuses on the speech act of telling, and so might be described as interested in the epistemic significance of the statement that passes between speaker and hearer, his view is closer to the traditional view than to Lackey’s. The epistemic significance of statements, for Moran, derives from their being sincere expressions of the speaker’s mind. Now, my notion of learning conversationally from words—the second way of learning from a speaker’s report—is closer to what the traditional view takes to be going on in testimony. The traditional view emphasizes the testifier’s mind: telling someone something is revealing one’s mind on some matter. Now, Moran can be read as insisting that, if we are describing testimony proper, we must add a thought: the speaker does not just reveal his mind but offers reliance on himself for the adoption of a like belief. But—as the traditional view of testimony has it—the bare fact of speaking one’s mind—the bare fact of assertion—is an epistemic resource for hearers. Where one learns from someone’s report, after all, it is not always from his testimony in particular; likewise, only some of our assertions are offers of testimony. I am suggesting that we can subtract from testimony the speaker’s sophisticated offer to shoulder responsibility for someone else’s belief, and be left with the general way in which others’ words affect our epistemic fortunes: by revealing their minds.

If another’s words reveal his mind on some matter, that is of interest to a hearer as making up her own mind on the same matter. Knowing what the other person thinks and his reasons for thinking it allows her to compare her thinking with his. For instance, she might find, based on his example, that she has overlooked something in her reasoning. At a deeper level, she might manage to understand which differences between them are due to differences between their points of view—an awareness that improves her capacity to critically assess her beliefs and his. To learn conversationally from a person’s words, in summary, is to learn from him as a fellow epistemic agent.

Implied in the more sophisticated phenomenon of learning testimonially are, as I noted, a number of speaker intentions: Besides presenting the content of his assertion as worthy of belief, the speaker intends that the hearer believe that \( p \). And he intends that she believe it in virtue of his presenting it as worthy of belief. Learning conversationally is much simpler. The speaker need only present what he says as worthy of belief—and this he does merely in virtue of purporting to speak truly. He need not have any further intentions. Likewise, the hearer who learns conversationally cannot be said to believe the speaker, but rather only what he says.
And yet the contribution of what the speaker says to what the hearer believes is also not that of evidence: her reason for forming the same belief is not the fact that his having said that the moon is full is good evidence that the moon is full. Rather, the speaker’s having said that the moon is full shows what he thinks on the matter, and what he thinks is of epistemic value for others curious about how things stand with the moon.33

I turn, finally, to learning from the expressive dimension of assertoric speech. There are two things to note, here. First, learning this way is indeed learning non-evidentially from words. In order for Wachtel to learn Updike’s belief from his assertion that the American dream is still alive, he has to participate. That participation, as I explained, takes the form of just constituting his words as his action. Only if the words that leave his mouth are his linguistic action can they even purport to express—and thereby reveal—his thinking. We saw that one element of constituting one’s words as action is taking responsibility for their truth or falsity. This feature of assertoric speech is essential to its being a basis for a hearer’s belief of the fact reported in it; Wachtel believes Updike was born in 1932 partly in virtue of his taking responsibility for the truth of the utterance in which that fact is reported. But, as I noted, a speaker takes responsibility for the truth of what he says directly—as nothing but an extension of the fact that he takes responsibility for the truth of what he believes. The same feature of speech in virtue of which a hearer may believe what is said—the speaker’s taking responsibility for the truth of his words—is also that in virtue of which a hearer may learn from its expressive dimension. Just in purporting to speak truly, a speaker purports to express his belief. So, where an assertion is informative in its reportive dimension, it is necessarily also informative in its expressive dimension.

33 Note that evidential and testimonial epistemic significance are similar in being the sort of significance had by an ingredient in cooking (an omelet, say). Suppose one is settling some question of fact. If evidentially significant, another’s words serve as evidence in one’s deliberation; if testimony, they consist in a reason for belief one can accept. In both cases, the words are part of the stuff of one’s knowing, as it were—like the eggs in an omelet. The third sort of epistemic significance another’s words may have—the significance in virtue of which they support conversational learning—is more like the significance of a model, finished omelet. For a hearer who learns conversationally from another’s words, those words are not themselves a reason for belief. Rather, in showing what someone else thinks, they serve as an example for her own activity. In this way, despite the resemblance, learning conversationally differs from what happens in what I called the traditional picture of testimony. What is pictured there is assertion as a mode of transmission of a reason for belief from one person to another—assertion as an ingredient in the hearer’s formation of belief.
The second thing to note is that the expressive character of assertoric speech is informative of only one thing: the speaker’s belief. For it is only the speaker’s belief that can be expressed in assertoric speech *per se*.\(^{34}\) In this, learning expressively from words differs from learning from them in any other way. I haven’t raised the question whether there are limits on the range of facts a person can learn in any of those ways—evidentially, testimonially, conversationally—but it is clear that the range is wide in every case but the expressive. Why the difference? I will be discussing it in depth in the next chapter, but the reason—we can already begin to see—concerns the nature of linguistic agency itself. When one learns from the expressive dimension of words, not only *how* one learns, but also *what* one learns, is determined by the status of those words as linguistic action.

2.3.3 Asking Questions

Consider, finally, an interaction more complex than, and encompassing, the one just considered. Imagine that the last section’s hearer *seeks out* the words from which she goes on to learn. In this extended interaction, each person is both a speaker and hearer. The first asks a question, then hears the answer; the second hears the question, then speaks in reply. I turn now to a brief analysis of the initial question-asking move in this extended interaction. What different ways are there of obtaining words from which to learn? As we will see, asking another to tell one something is much different from getting him to produce evidentially-significant behaviour...

In what follows, I distinguish between word-seeking actions depending on whether the agent intends to learn evidentially or non-evidentially, and between seeking to learn via expression versus testimony or conversation.

I give this complementary taxonomy of word-seeking actions for two reasons. The fact I seek to explain in subsequent chapters is that a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief through their expressive dimension. So, a hearer learns from the believer’s words by attending to that dimension. Recall that, in some cases, the participants in our basic scenario pursue intentions *concerning* belief. I will want to make a further claim about one such kind of case: where a hearer pursues an intention to learn a speaker’s belief from his words—as Wachtel

\(^{34}\) Assertoric speech, in this or that capacity, may express facts as diverse as the speaker’s mood and the typical cadence of a CBC radio host. To learn such facts from a person’s speech is to learn evidentially from it.
does in asking Updike what he thinks—she does so by inviting him to express the belief. To understand and evaluate that claim, we need a sense of the range of actions through which hearers can solicit the words from which they intend to learn. Second, in the fourth chapter, I will be concerned with whether a person’s words can serve as an evidential basis for learning his belief, including whether a would-be learner can intelligibly pursue an intention to learn a speaker’s belief evidentially. For that question, we will need to have seen what it is to pursue an intention to learn evidentially from someone’s words.

Some ways of getting a person to speak do not involve words, such as when one gestures at something interesting, hoping to hear the reaction of a companion. But let us focus on actions pursued by, or in, uttering words, and words taking the grammatical form of a question. What we want to know, then, is this: When it comes to posing someone a question in order to have them talk back, roughly, what differentiates between cases intended to bring about evidence and those intended to bring about words from which to learn non-evidentially? Given what we know about learning non-evidentially, we can say that an action meant to bring about words for such an epistemic purpose must be directed at producing assertoric speech in particular. In what sense directed? We will see that linguistics provides an analysis of the familiar act of asking a question that shows the act to be intended to solicit words from which to learn—in our terms—testimonialsly or conversationally. A less specific kind of question-asking act picks out those intended to bring about words from which to learn non-evidentially in any sense, including the expressive. A given performance belongs in this wider category, as we will see, insofar as it consists in a request for assertoric speech. And we will see that cases of uttering a question in order to bring about words as evidence cannot count as such requests.

Following linguists Jeroen Groenendijk and Martin Stokhof (1997), let me distinguish three uses of the word “question”. The word can, first, designate a particular kind of sentence “characterized (in English) by word order, intonation, question mark, and the occurrence of interrogative pronouns”. Second, it can refer to “the speech act that is typically performed in
uttering interrogative sentences” (1057). Third, the word can pick out the semantic content of interrogative sentences. The sense of interest to me is the second.\(^{35}\)

Linguists standardly think of the act of asking a question as making a request. The request is the illocutionary force of the asker’s utterance of an interrogative sentence (1062, 1070). The nature of the request can vary. Groenendijk and Stokhof draw an intuitive distinction between what might be called informational and non-informational question-asking: “one might say that such an interrogative as ‘Do you promise to come?’ does not request the hearer to provide information, but asks for a promise (Cf., the contrasting ‘Did you promise to come?’)” (1069). To request from an addressee an act that is not informative, such as a promise, is, according to many linguists, including Groenendijk and Stokhof, an exceptional use of an interrogative sentence. In that use, asking a question overlaps with the more intuitively appropriate way of seeking non-informative acts, namely, uttering an imperative, such as “Promise to come”. So, the paradigmatic interrogative act, on this view, is one that seeks information.

The view is, specifically, that asking a question is requesting an act through which the asker will gain information (1070). The idea that information is the indirect object of a speaker’s request in asking a question is reflected in the everyday notion of an answer. We use “answer” to mean whatever a person says in reaction to a question. But we also use it more narrowly to mean the sort of reply that is appropriate given the question, such as when we object to someone’s off-topic reaction by saying that she has not answered the question. In this second

\(^{35}\) To note these three senses of the word “question” is not yet to raise the matter of the appropriate form of analysis, within linguistics, for the phenomenon. Groenendijk and Stokhof report that theorists who work in semantics and pragmatics both claim the phenomenon as their own. The former seek an analysis of interrogative sentences using the resources of truth-functional semantics (1058). The latter argue that interrogative sentences “can be analyzed fruitfully only at the level of interrogative acts” (1059); theorists who take this latter approach deny the existence of questions in the third sense noted in the text. The general conflict between these approaches to natural language analysis is particularly intense in the case of interrogative sentences. The reason, Groenendijk and Stokhof note, is that the distinction “between the contents of a sentence and the act that is performed by uttering it”, widely considered unproblematic in the case of indicative sentences, is contentious in the case of interrogatives (along with other non-indicative constructions) (1059). Both sides of the debate do countenance discussion of the speech act(s) undertaken in uttering interrogative sentences, differing only over the primacy of this analysis. I remain neutral on the question.
use, an answer is something like the fact or piece of information sought in asking the question. So, another way to say of a question that it is a request for an informative act is just to say that, in asking it, a person requests the addressee to provide the answer.

In what sense does the addressee provide the answer? Thinking of the questions Groenendijk and Stokhof take to be paradigmatic, i.e., informational questions, Daniel Vanderveken observes that they “expect assertive answers” (i, 167); for instance, “[a]n answer to a yes-no question whether P is in general an assertion or denial of P” (ii, 157). The addressee is requested to provide the answer in the specific sense of asserting it; so, what the asker seeks to learn will correspond to the content of the addressee’s reply. It makes sense, of course, to take a question to be a request for assertion of the information sought. Intuitively, to request that the addressee provide the answer to one’s question is to request that he share his thinking on the matter of concern. The alternative is to imagine that the asker requests the addressee to say something whose content only happens to be the true answer to the question. More pointedly, it is to imagine that an asker is indifferent to whether the addressee indeed believes what he says and is in a good position to hold such a belief.

The form of question analysed above is meant to solicit words from which to learn testimonially or conversationally. So much is clear from the asker’s expecting the information sought to be the content of the addressee’s reply; she intends to learn from the reportive dimension of assertoric speech. So, this familiar form of question is actually more specific than the form of act suited to bringing about words from which to learn in any non-evidential way. To include cases of seeking words from which to learn expressively, we can simply subtract the

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36 The theoretical notion of an answer is broader. Groenendijk and Stokhof offer the following informal characterization: “an answer is something that...conveys information which is pertinent to the request” (1067). From the standpoint of a theorist, the notion of an answer is to be given sense by the conditions, for a given question, on counting as an answer to it. Pertinence is one such very general condition. As for another, Groenendijk and Stokhof report that theorists differ over whether possible answers extend beyond true answers (1066).

37 A second norm constitutively governing assertion—besides sincerity—is well-foundedness: to make an assertion is to purport to have some basis for thinking what one says is true. A person whose assertion is sincere does take herself to have such a basis, though she may be wrong; a person whose assertion is insincere pretends to have one. Either way, hearers do not register utterances as assertions unless the speaker purports to have some basis for thinking the utterance true. Austin gives voice to this expectation on the part of hearers: “You cannot now state how many people are in the next room; if you say ‘There are fifty people in the next room’, I can only regard you as guessing or conjecturing” (1975, 138).
relevant specifics. A person seeking to learn from the expressive character of her interlocutor’s speech does not request him to report the fact she seeks to know, but she certainly requests an assertion. Words intended to bring about words from which to learn non-evidentially, then, characteristically consist in requests for assertoric speech. As such, the speech act a non-evidential learner requests of the addressee is one in which he shares his thinking, whether on the matter of interest or as the matter of interest.

The sort of act intended to bring about words from which to learn evidentially, by contrast, cannot be a genuine request for an assertion. It seems reasonable to suppose that a person can at least have the intention to learn evidentially from another’s words. But requesting an assertion is not a possible way of seeking to fulfill it. Someone who seeks to learn from words as evidence can move things along by getting the speaker to talk, but any use she makes of interrogative sentences in doing that will be disingenuous. Suppose Wachtel asks Updike what year he was born in order to determine whether he has vocal cords. To see that her act is not a genuine request for an assertion, consider the idea of a speech act’s sincerity conditions. As we began to see in the case of assertion, such sincerity conditions require that the speaker actually have the mental states or attitudes her speech act implies she has (Vanderveken i, 117; Searle 65). A request implies a desire on the speaker’s part. In the case of asking a question, the speaker expresses a desire—minimally—that the addressee act so as to inform her of what she wants to know—a desire absent in Wachtel’s case.

Indeed, what an evidential learner does by way of bringing about words cannot qualify as a request in any sense; all she can be doing in uttering a grammatical question is, as it were, cajoling someone into producing words. The epistemic resource needed by the non-evidential learner is a linguistic action. It makes sense for her to pursue her intention to bring such a resource about by requesting it. Making a request, one seeks the sort of change wrought by (or consisting in) the requestee’s action. The epistemic resource needed by an evidential learner, on the other hand, is something falling short of assertoric speech. Thus, a request is not an appropriate way of bringing it about. Where Wachtel is interested in whether Updike has vocal cords, for instance, she might just as well step on his foot.38

38 On these points, I have benefited from the opening pages of Stephen Darwall (2006).
In the second and larger part of this chapter, I introduced the idea of linguistic agency, focusing on what I called the responsibilities of recognition. I also set out taxonomies of two phenomena: learning from words and seeking words from which to learn. As I indicated in the first part, the next two chapters mount an argument in defence of the characterization of belief presented in the first chapter. That argument appeals (in chapter three) to the givens of, and (in chapter four) feasibility conditions of, ascribing belief to a person from his words. It is in reference to the conceptual landscape surveyed in the preceding pages that I will make these more specific claims about how we do and can learn a person’s belief from his words.
3 Learning Another’s Belief from his Words

This is the first of two chapters in which I set out an argument in favour of the first chapter’s characterization of belief. As indicated in the preceding chapter, I argue that the truth of that characterization can be seen to flow from its being the best explanation of what I called the target fact. Here, that is the claim that where a person’s words afford belief of his belief they normally do so expressively, for I consider the common, two-person case of the scenario in which belief is ascribed to a person from his words.

So, let us call back to mind Eleanor Wachtel’s interview of John Updike. Minimal reflection on such cases shows, as we saw, that when it comes to learning a person’s belief from his words, one—perhaps typical—way of doing so is to learn from the belief-expressive character of assertion. That remark concerns both sides of the interaction: it is possible and natural for Wachtel to ascribe belief to Updike based on the expressive character of his assertion, and likewise Updike may easily communicate his belief that way. My first task is to argue for the stronger claim that, normally, words only ever serve as a basis for ascribing the speaker belief through expression. Having done that, I conclude the first section by setting out my explanation.

To be careful, it is the nature of belief more broadly to which my explanation of the target fact appeals. The specific feature of belief picked out by my characterization—the deliberative relation between believer and belief—nicely explains what might be called the negative component of the target fact: we do not report our beliefs or invite others to do so. As for the positive claim that we, rather, do express our beliefs and invite others to express theirs, I explain it by appeal to a different feature of belief: its relation to assertion. Overall, then, my characterization belongs to a wider explanation of the highlights of our linguistic belief-ascribing and -communicating practices by appeal to multiple features of belief. The characterization’s good fit in that role, and the strength of the explanation as a whole, is what I contend recommends it.

Among the facts explained by appeal to features of belief is that a speaker who expresses his belief attends to it deliberatively. In the second section, I consider and critique the best explanation of that fact not adverting to the nature of belief. The account in question also
operates on the supposition that belief is logically independent of the believer’s reflective relation to it. The alternative explanation’s failure, I argue, gives us reason both to prefer an account appealing to the nature of belief and to conclude that belief is to be understood in terms of the state bearer’s reflective relation to it. We will see that the alternative explanation’s major failing is to presuppose a mistaken understanding of assertoric speech. In the third section, I draw on that mistake in order to put my finger on the feature of belief that explains what I called the positive aspect of the target fact—our normally communicating and ascribing belief specifically through the expressive dimension of words.

3.1 Explanation

We have seen that one way that words serve as a basis for attributing belief to the speaker is through their belief-expressive dimension. Updike says “The American dream is still alive...” and Wachtel is apprised of his belief. Are there other ways a person’s words afford knowledge of his belief? Taking “words” widely enough, this question asks also about learning belief evidentially from a person’s speech. Let me defer to the next chapter the question whether one does or can learn a person’s belief evidentially from his words. Here, then, I narrow my use of “words” to assertoric speech. This leaves the question whether a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing belief in what they report. Do we report our beliefs or invite others to report theirs?

Ahead of that question, note a distinction between two senses in which a speaker might be said to report something. The first sense is simply grammatical. Any assertoric utterance will have indicative grammatical structure and propositional content. Just insofar as it does, the speaker may be said to report something. The second sense of reporting differs in capturing what the speaker typically does in uttering a grammatically indicative sentence. Reporting a fact in this sense amounts simply to asserting it. As we began to see in the last chapter, to assert a fact is to put one’s epistemic credit at stake in uttering a sentence corresponding to it—to stand behind its being so.

The question whether our words serve as a basis for ascribing belief in what they report involves reporting in the second sense. If we do report our beliefs, then, presumably, we do so in utterances of the form “I believe that p”. In the next chapter, I discuss belief self-ascription in some detail. I defend the claim that, under normal circumstances, “I believe that p” serves to express the belief that p and to report simply that p. In saying “I believe the American dream is
still alive”, for example, Updike says something, not about himself, but about the American
dream. Linguistic intuition, I will propose, warrants this break with the standard approach to
analysing assertoric speech described at the start of chapter two. Now, to the extent that the
question whether we report our beliefs is tied to the question how to analyse self-ascriptions of
belief, I defer the case for my answer to the next chapter. That said, let me here argue that we do
not report our beliefs by considering the exceptions to that rule and by defending an
interpretation of what we are usually up to in asking another about his belief.

There are cases in which an utterance of the form “I believe that $p$” functions as a report
or assertion about the speaker and serves as a basis for ascribing him belief. But, tellingly, these
involve exceptional circumstances. To bring to mind what is probably the most common such
situation, imagine an exchange in which one person appears to express a belief so extremely and
manifestly out of character that the other, flummoxed, says “Wait, do you really believe that?”

At this point, arguably, both interlocutors have the sense that the speaker’s reporting his belief is
likely to succeed in conveying what he thinks, where his merely expressing it failed. That is, the
circumstances are such that, in order to fulfill any intention to let his belief be known, the
speaker will have to resort to report. And, if the hearer really wants to know what he thinks, she
will have to get him to assure her of it—as, indeed, she can be understood to be doing with her
question.

Now suppose the speaker replies “Yes, I do believe that,” and the hearer is satisfied that
he does. Let me point out two features of cases, like this one, in which a person is ascribed
belief based on a report about his own belief. For one, their success depends on an appeal to
self-knowledge. Faced with the speaker’s reply, the hearer concedes that he has the relevant
belief insofar as she takes him to know his own mind. That said—and this is the second
feature—the speaker’s utterance does not manifest his self-knowledge of belief in the natural
way. The details of the following claim will have to wait until the fourth chapter, but in a natural
manifestation of self-knowledge of belief—in an ordinary utterance of the form “I believe that
$p$”—a speaker expresses the belief of which he evinces knowledge. In our current case, on the
other hand, the speaker, by hypothesis, does not express the belief of which he evinces

39 Thanks to Paul Franks for bringing this sort of case to my attention.
knowledge. His “I believe that $p$” reports his belief—which is how it evinces his self-knowledge—and, at best, expresses his second-order belief.\footnote{If, in the ordinary case, a self-ascriptiob of belief is not a statement about the speaker, how does it evince his self-knowledge of belief? I answer that question in chapter four.} A way to tell that it is exceptional to resort to reporting one’s own belief or to inviting another to do so is to imagine what it is like to be in such an exchange. Consider the speaker: he aims to communicate his belief to the hearer; he knows that—unusually—it won’t do just to assert its content. So, he knows that he can achieve his aim only by inviting the hearer to rely on his knowledge of his own mind. But there, too, he knows that he cannot evince his self-knowledge by simply avowing the belief. Instead, he must pronounce on his own mental life as he might any subject on which he is expert.

The problem comes more clearly to the fore if we ask how a person stands vis-à-vis a fact in reporting it. Telling Wachtel that the moon is full, for instance, Updike has that fact in mind; if he is to stand behind the fact, he must at least bring his attention to it. Think of this attention as a basic condition for, and less specific than, taking a fact to be true—as, for instance, also implicated in supposing that $p$ and wondering whether $p$. Provided we can categorize this attention as a use of reason, it seems clearly theoretical, as opposed to practical. As we might expect, when such attention is brought to bear on one’s own belief, the resulting sort of reflection is of the theoretical kind I introduced in the first chapter. Reporting the fact of his own belief, a speaker would have the belief in mind as a fact—he would attend to it, and not through it. This is why it would feel odd and artificial to have to resort to reporting one’s own belief in order to communicate it: the means of communication—the report—presupposes a kind of attention to one’s state one doesn’t undertake in earnest.\footnote{Compare the communication of unconscious belief. Suppose Updike’s therapist has persuaded him that he believes his father resents him. Asked what he has learned in therapy, he might say, “It turns out I believe my father resents me.” Updike’s self-ascriptiob functions as a report about himself and involves his attending theoretically to his state. Unlike a believer having to resort to reporting his state, however, Updike has no reason to feel odd reporting his unconscious state. And his hearer has no reason to regret—as the flummoxed hearer might—that she cannot be apprised of the state by his simply expressing it assertorically—by his saying, in his own voice, “My father resents me!” or “I believe my father resents me!” For an unconscious belief, there is no such possibility. I think David Finkelstein is right that “it is a defining characteristic of our unconscious mental states that we lack the ability to express them merely by self-ascribing them” (119). On my account, again, world-representing states such as fixations and unconscious beliefs are anomalous, failing to count as beliefs.}
Consider the learner’s side of the two-person case of our scenario. When we ask others about their beliefs, we don’t enlist them as fellow theoretical inquirers into a logically independent fact. Indeed, what we want to know, in wanting to know whether someone believes the American dream is still alive, is not whether such a state is to be found among his stock of world-representing states, but rather whether he takes it that the American dream is still alive! We want to know what he responsibly thinks on the matter. What a learner is up to in inquiring into another’s belief, then, explains the significant difference we intuit between Wachtel’s seeking to learn from Updike his belief and the year of his birth. In the second case, she does appeal to him as a theoretical inquirer. Asking him what year he was born is not essentially different from asking him about the weather in New Jersey. But when she asks him what he thinks about the American dream, she doesn’t treat him as a fellow—perhaps privileged—inquirer into the fact of his belief. Rather she invites him to simply think out loud about the American dream.

We can put the same points in terms of the linguistic analysis of question-asking. We saw that the learner’s act, in asking someone “Do you believe that $p$?”, is a request for assertoric speech, as opposed to the mere provocation of vocalization. And it is motivated by a desire for information—information as to the addressee’s belief. But the act is not a paradigmatic informational question-asking insofar as the learner does not request the addressee to provide the information by asserting it. To say that Wachtel does not appeal to Updike as a fellow inquirer is to say that she does not request that he report or assert the fact of his own belief. Likewise, the addressee, faced with a question about his belief whether $p$, does not take it as a request to assert whether he believes that $p$. He does not take it as an appeal to him as a fellow knower of the fact in question.  

In summary, it seems that, normally, the way a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief is through their expressive dimension. Now, this observation about our linguistic belief-ascription practices is consistent with my characterization of belief. It is consistent, in particular, with respect to whether and how a speaker attends to the fact his words

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42 An exception would be a conversation between two people about the results of one interlocutor’s psychotherapeutic efforts to recover his unconscious convictions: “So, does it turn out that you believe your father wants you dead?” “Apparently, I do.”
make available. It will help to situate this claim in two wider contexts: ways of learning a person’s belief and expectations generated by my characterization of belief. Among the several ways we may learn a person’s belief, some involve the believer, and, indeed, the believer attending to his own belief. Some don’t, of course, as when Wachtel learns the belief of an absent third party from Updike’s telling her about it. As for the expectations generated by my characterization, they affect any circumstance in which a person attends to his own belief. Now, among those circumstances are some in which we learn a person’s belief, so the question of consistency arises at that intersection. My characterization requires that, where we learn a person’s belief in a way involving his attending to the state, that attention be deliberative. The more specific requirement of interest to us affects cases in which a person’s words serve as the basis for ascribing him belief: where his words serve as such a basis, and he attends to his belief, that attention should, if I am right, be deliberative. That requirement, I am now saying, is met: where a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief, he only ever attends to the state deliberatively. Our practices of learning a person’s belief from his words do not include his paying theoretical attention to the state—we do not ordinarily report our beliefs or invite others to do so. Where a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief and he reflects on the state, that reflection is deliberative. For, as we saw, expressing a fact involves paying deliberative attention to it.

Beyond being consistent with the picture of belief I have offered, at least one feature of our linguistic belief-ascribing practices promises to be nicely explained by it. There are, after all, two conspicuous facts calling for explanation. As is evident in the previous chapter’s taxonomies, the ranges of ways we can learn from words and seek words from which to learn submit to analysis largely in abstraction from the matter of what is learned or sought to be learned. The only exception we ran across concerns learning from the expressive dimension of assertoric speech; there, as we saw, the speaker’s belief is the only thing a hearer can learn. So—a first conspicuous fact—it seems our linguistic belief-ascribing practices turn on what is a peculiarity in the wider context of learning from words. The second conspicuous feature of our linguistic belief-ascribing practices is the restriction on what can be communicated by report. It’s easy to imagine very many facts a speaker may ordinarily report. As we have seen in this chapter, however, a speaker’s own belief is not among them. Why this exception? And—to return to the first fact—why should there be a discernible way of learning from words applicable
only to the speaker’s belief? Arguably, it is the very nature of the phenomenon of belief that, first, imposes the noted restriction on, and, second, grants the corresponding unique possibility for, how belief may be communicated and sought to be learned. Differently put, the nature of belief conditions how a person may, as a linguistic agent, pursue his epistemic intentions to let his own be known and to learn those of others from them.

Specifically, the feature of belief I highlighted in the first chapter—the believer’s deliberative relation to his state—can be seen to explain the restriction just mentioned. The reason a person does not ordinarily report his own belief is that it would require him to reflect theoretically on the state—something prevented by his deliberative relation to it. Of course, that explains why we don’t report our beliefs or invite others to do so. I will argue that a different feature of belief explains the fact that we do express them and invite others to do so. As we will see in the concluding section, that feature is the relation belief bears to assertion. In order to bring that relation out, I will ask why it is that, when it comes to a person’s own belief, there is a linguistic way of letting it be known, and finding it out, unique to it. Note, for now, the headway already made on that matter. In the previous chapter, I in effect asked the same question, but differently inflected: why is it that, when learning from the expressive dimension of a speaker’s assertoric speech, only his belief can be learned? As I noted there, the reason is the nature of assertion: simply, belief is what a sincere assertion expresses. In the concluding section, I’ll supplement that answer and deepen our grasp of it.

3.2 An Alternative

One thing to which I’ve drawn our attention (see section 2.1) is a feature of the phenomenon of ascribing belief to a person from the expressive dimension of his words, namely, that the speaker pays deliberative attention to the state ascribed to him. Now, the phenomenon in question counts as a use of the concept of belief—actually, as two: one person’s use of the concept in ascription, and another’s “use” in what I called communicating one’s belief or letting it be known. A way to understand my argument, then, is as answering a question of this form: Is feature x of a phenomenon, which is an operation with concept y, to be explained by the nature of the concept, or by something else?

As we have seen, my explanation adverts to the nature of the concept. But another explanation of the speaker’s paying deliberative attention to the state he expresses—if not also of
other features of our linguistic belief-ascribing practices—seems possible. In what follows, I consider the best candidate explanation not adverting to the nature of belief. That account turns out to be both mistaken about the nature of assertoric speech and incomplete. From its failure, I will want to draw a lesson deriving from each of the account’s two main features. The first such feature is that the account is characteristic of one of two strategies of explanation available for the phenomenon: rather than to appeal to the nature of the fact ascribed and communicated, i.e., belief, it appeals, as we will see, to the fact’s being ascribed and communicated. Its failure gives us reason to favour the other strategy, which is mine. Second, the account operates on a background view about belief that is incompatible with mine, the view that belief and the believer’s reflective relation to it are logically independent of one another. It is arguably the best explanation consistent with that supposition. Assuming that the target fact ought to be, and can be, explained, then, the failure of the account encourages us to reject the supposition. This second reductio-style argument grants us the conclusion—weaker than mine, but going a good distance towards it—that conditions on the state-bearer’s reflective relation to his state are internal to belief.

Suppose belief is logically independent of the believer’s reflective relation to the state. So, whatever makes a state a belief is antecedent to the question of whether and how the state-bearer relates to it. That a person’s words sometimes serve as a basis for attributing him belief in a way that involves his attending to it deliberatively is, on this assumption, a fact independent of its being a belief. Likewise, that some belief-ascribings involve thinking of the believer as paying deliberative attention to the state ascribed is a fact independent of its being a belief. So, when Wachtel learns Updike’s belief from his assertion, she learns two logically independent facts: that Updike believes that the American dream is still alive, and that he is reflecting deliberatively on the belief.

In this scenario, something other than the nature of belief determines whether and how a believer can reflect on his state. One possibility is that this “whether and how” question is settled—whatever way it is settled—belief-by-belief. For any given belief, then, it would be a standing fact whether and how the believer could reflect on it. Since we aim to explain a fact recording a correlation between how a believer reflects on his state, on one hand, and certain occasions for ascribing it to him, on the other, let us pursue another possibility. Also compatible with the in-principle independence between belief and reflective relation is the possibility that
whether and how a person reflects on his belief is settled, not belief by belief, but on each occasion that the state is ascribed to, or communicated by, him. Now suppose what settles the question is the nature of the phenomenon serving as a basis of ascription. The idea is that the second fact Wachtel learns—that Updike is reflecting deliberatively on the state she ascribes to him—is learned in virtue of the very means by which he communicates it. So, she takes him to attend to the state deliberatively, not in virtue of its being a belief, but in virtue of the nature of the phenomenon from which she learns it, i.e., assertion.

If this explanation is to be worth entertaining, it should be minimally plausible to construe assertoric speech as equipped to settle the question whether and how a speaker reflects on a belief on a given occasion—on the occasion of his expressing it, that is. Here is how that might go. Assertion is among the speech acts constitutively governed by a sincerity condition. As we have seen, an agent meets a speech act’s sincerity condition if he indeed has the mental state the act purports to show him to have. Now, in some cases, at least, performing a sincere speech act settles the question whether the agent endorses the state he thereby expresses. Consider apology. To meet the sincerity condition for apology is to actually regret whatever one apologizes for. If Updike sincerely apologizes for missing Wachtel’s dinner party, it’s at least clear that he is aware of his regret. But just in sincerely apologizing, he goes further: he endorses the state he expresses. A sincere apology shows the apologizer, not simply to be aware of the regret he expresses, but to take himself to have reason to have it. Although making a sincere apology involves endorsing one’s regret, a person needn’t endorse a regret in order simply to have it. So, in the case of apology, the speech act settles the independent question of how the regret-bearer relates to his regret. The alternative explanation I am currently considering invites us to think of assertion in the same way. It is the fact that a belief comes up for expression that settles the independent question of how the believer attends to it on that occasion.

Given the endorsement of one’s regret involved in sincere apology, learning a person’s regret from his apology includes thinking of him as deliberatively related to the regret in question. A hearer who learns the state in this way takes the apologizer to be deliberatively

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43 Following Moran, I am treating deliberative reflection as an attitude applicable beyond the state kind of belief.
related to his state in virtue, specifically, of the action through which she learns it, i.e., the apology. The belief-ascriptor, we might say, is the same way. Wachtel’s thinking of Updike as attending deliberatively to the state he expresses might be the result of his making an assertion of it. The nature of belief, on this view, imposes no requirements on how the believer attends to his state; but sincere assertion does.

What should we make of this explanation? In the remainder of this chapter, I set out its two major deficits. The first is simply that the explanation is too modest in scope. The second, considerably more interesting and involved than the first, is that the explanation may be said to either misidentify the reflective attention it aims to explain or—and this is the more apt indictment—misconstrue assertoric speech. From these difficulties with the explanation, as noted, I go on to draw two lessons.

If belief were independent of the believer’s reflective relation to it, such that expressing one’s belief settled the question how one attends to it on a given occasion, we would have the following two frustrated expectations. We would expect, for one, that, all other things being equal, a person’s words ought ordinarily to be able to serve as a basis for ascribing him belief testimonially or conversationally. If theoretical attention to one’s belief is not prevented by the nature of belief itself—or anything else, of course—a person ought well to be able to report his belief. Second, we might expect that a person who wants to know another’s belief could and would appeal to him as a theoretical inquirer into his own state. Yet, as we saw, we have no such practices. So, a first reason to reject this alternative account is that it leaves too much in need of further, un-obvious explanation.

In order to grasp the more interesting difficulty with the account, we need to focus on how its proponent—hereafter, my opponent—thinks of the attention a person pays to his belief in expressing it. Consider, first, the difference between our general strategies: If my explanation of the deliberative nature of that attention appeals to features of the state communicated, the alternative explanation appeals instead to a feature of a given way of communicating the state. Implicit in my opponent’s explanation, then, is an idea about the nature of assertion: assertion is one way a person can pursue his intention to inform a hearer of his belief. This is a view of assertion I will clarify and develop below. For now, in order to help pick out the way my opponent thinks of the deliberative attention paid to belief in expressing it, note that this way is
consistent with that idea about assertion. Thinking of assertion *per se* as a means of informing a hearer of a fact—as it happens, the speaker’s own belief—my opponent thinks of the attention paid to belief in assertion as of the same order as the attention paid to a fact in pursuing an epistemic intention to inform someone of it.

The deliberative attention paid to belief in expressing it, on this view, belongs to a person’s pursuit of what I called an intention *concerning* belief. Recall, from chapter two, that one variable of the scenario of linguistic exchange in which belief is ascribed to a speaker from his words is whether one or both interlocutors pursues an epistemic intention concerning belief: the speaker may intend to inform his hearer of his belief, and the ascriber may intend to it find out. Of course, a wider version of this claim was implicit in the second half of the same chapter: sometimes, in conversation, not only do we learn from one another’s words, but speaker and hearer may pursue epistemic intentions. In telling someone something, for instance, a speaker pursues an intention to inform the hearer of the fact in question. As we also saw, a speaker who reports a fact in some sense attends to it: if Updike is to maintain, by assertion, that the moon is full, he must at least have that fact in mind. So, just in pursuing an intention to inform a hearer of the fact, a speaker attends to it. And, as I went on to suggest in the current chapter, that attention is theoretical.

Now, my opponent takes the deliberative attention paid to belief in expressing it to be of the same order as the attention paid to a fact in virtue of pursuing an intention to make it known. As far as she is concerned, expressing one’s belief and reporting it are two coordinate ways one can let a hearer know about it. In both cases, one brings attention to the belief; the only difference is the kind. Reporting one’s belief, one attends to it theoretically; expressing it, one attends to it deliberatively.

The deliberative attention paid to belief in expressing it, however, is not comparable to the attention one pays to a fact in reporting it. A speaker attends to his belief deliberatively, in expressing it, *whether or not* he also pursues an intention to make it known. The linguistic phenomenon I say serves as a basis for ascribing a speaker belief is bare assertoric speech. The matter of whether the speaker pursues an intention concerning his belief is a *variable* of the scenario of interest, that is, and not one of its defining features. The attention-to-belief calling
for explanation, then, is common to all assertoric speech, and so is not attention to a fact specific
to pursuing an epistemic intention to let it be known.

At this point, the alternative account seems to invite two incompatible diagnoses. On one
hand, we could say that its proponent misidentifies the deliberative attention paid to a belief in
expressing it. In thinking of that attention on the model of the attention one pays to a fact in
reporting it, she can be said to both miss the real phenomenon of interest and to restrict the range
of cases she can explain. She cannot explain just any case of assertion’s allowing a hearer to
ascribe belief, on this diagnosis, but only those in which the speaker also intends to inform the
hearer of his belief, as Updike does in the interview with Wachtel. The second and more
interesting way of seeing the situation focuses on the curious thought that expressing belief per
se is a means of pursuing an intention to communicate it. Taking seriously this view of
expressing belief, and retaining the idea that assertoric speech just is (where sincere) expressive
of belief, my opponent can be seen to be making a claim about all assertoric speech. Instead of
seeing her as explaining a too-narrow selection of cases of expressing a belief—those in which
the speaker also pursues an intention to let his belief be known—we can see her as claiming to
explain any case in which a person’s assertion allows a hearer to ascribe him belief. To go this
second diagnostic route is to take my opponent, not to miss the more basic deliberative attention
to belief common to all assertoric speech, but to replace it with the kind of attention paid to a
fact in pursuing an intention to inform someone of it. Whenever a person asserts that $p$, on this
view, he pursues an intention to inform his hearer of his belief that $p$.

What we have here is a construal of assertion, one according to which assertion per se is
a means of communicating facts. A person cannot communicate any fact by assertion, of
course—only his own beliefs. That said, assertion, on this view, is essentially analogous to
report. The idea is that, depending on the fact he seeks to make known, a person can report it or
express it. Just as Updike makes known the year of his birth by reporting it, he makes known his
belief by expressing it. In the first case, he reports or asserts the fact he intends to communicate;
in the second, he makes the assertion corresponding to its expression. In this way, speaking
assertorically is a way of letting a hearer know the fact of one’s belief.

So, what is wrong with understanding assertion as the speaker’s undertaking, in this way,
to make himself known? For one, according to this view, people can speak—if that is the right
word, for I’ll raise a doubt shortly—only about their own states. If an assertion just is a person’s undertaking to make himself known, then speakers talk only about themselves! But how might such speech work? If it is to be the communicative upshot of a person’s attending to a fact—the fact of his own belief—speech must be analogous to describing the fact. An analogy will help. Suppose there is a room into which only Updike can see, and he has the task of telling Wachtel what is in it. He might do this by simply calling out what is there: “a telephone”, “a rug”, “a chifforobe”... Now imagine that Updike takes the same descriptive stance towards his own mental states. So, in saying “The American dream is still alive”, he is, as it were, reading off the content of his own belief. We can see more clearly, now, that this construal of bare speech assimilates it to the much more sophisticated act of reporting. If Updike’s very utterance about the American dream is to be his informing Wachtel as to his belief, then it is akin to his reporting a fact about himself.

Just as, on this false construal, assertion per se resembles report, so learning a person’s belief from his assertion resembles learning from a person’s report. Learning a fact from someone’s report, recall, is mediated by the speaker’s epistemic agency: it’s insofar as the speaker takes responsibility for his words that they serve a hearer as a reason for belief. Likewise, my opponent imagines learning a person’s belief from his assertion to be mediated by the speaker’s epistemic work: it’s insofar as the speaker responsibly describes his state that his words serve as a basis for ascribing it to him.

Let me take stock. As we have seen, the alternative account of a person’s attending deliberatively to his belief in expressing it comes to grief over its conception of assertoric speech. There are, as promised, two reductio-style lessons to be drawn from its failure. One suggests that the right strategy for explaining the target fact is to appeal to the nature of belief. The other suggests that conditions on the state-bearer’s reflective relation to his state are internal to belief. I’ll elaborate each in turn.

Where a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief through their expressive dimension, he attends to the state deliberatively. Confronted with this observation, two broad explanatory possibilities present themselves: either the deliberative attention reflects a peculiarity of the kind of fact learned and communicated or it reflects a feature of the mode of communicating and learning that fact. The alternative account opts for the second possibility:
the deliberative attention is to be explained by the exigencies of assertion, understood as a device for informing the hearer. Where a person “does” to his belief what a speaker does in making an assertion, on this view, he reflects on it deliberatively. The failure of the alternative account should, then, make us suspicious of that initial choice of strategy; it should encourage us to explain the givens of our belief-ascribing and communicating practices by appeal to the nature of belief.

That has been my strategy. Recall that I set out to present my characterization of belief as the best explanation of the target fact—of the observation that, where a person’s words afford belief of his belief, they ordinarily do so expressively. As we have seen, that observation can be broken down into negative and positive correlates: we do not report our beliefs or invite others to do so, and we do express our beliefs and invite others to do so. As we have also seen, my characterization gets traction as an explanation of the negative claim in particular. The reason we don’t report our beliefs is that it would require attending to them theoretically—a kind of attention prohibited by the deliberative relation between state-bearer and state. But consider the corresponding question for the positive content of the target fact: Why do we express our beliefs and invite others to express theirs? That question, it turns out, is not determinate enough to be answered by appeal to my characterization of belief. The bare fact that we are deliberatively related to our beliefs neither predicts nor requires that we should express them linguistically. We can, again, note that the deliberative relation requires that any reflective attention a person brings to his state be deliberative. But that feature of belief sheds no light on why it is that, on the specific occasion of belief’s being ascribed to a person from his words, he in fact does reflect deliberatively on his state.

To make sense of that fact—and it can be done—one must appeal to another feature of the nature of belief: the continuity between constative, belief-oriented thought and assertoric speech. In the concluding section, I will make the case for this continuity, as over against my opponent’s view of the relation between belief and assertion. With that in hand, we will have a more precise answer to the question how assertion is informative of the speaker’s belief. And I will be able to complete my explanation of the target fact by saying why it is we express our beliefs—why it is that, on the occasion of belief’s being ascribed to a person from his words, he in fact attends to the state deliberatively.
Before turning to that, though, let me summarize the second lesson of the failure of the alternative account. That account is the most obvious, and likely the best, of those consistent with the supposition that belief is logically independent of the bearer’s reflective relation to it. That supposition restricts our reasoning in the following way: If, in given aspects of our life with belief, it turns out that we characteristically or exclusively reflect on these states in one way or another, that is to be explained by something other than the nature of the state. As we have seen, in one—perhaps primary—way in which a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief, i.e., through their expressive dimension, the speaker reflects deliberatively on his state. If not to the nature of belief, that attention is most naturally credited to the work of informing people through one’s words. That an explanation along the latter lines leads to an untenable picture of speech gives us reason to reject, not only the explanation itself, but the supposition of logical independence between belief and the bearer’s reflective relation to it. Whatever else is true of belief, then, we have some reason to think it is to be understood partly in terms of the believer’s reflective relation to it. One might predict: When, in explaining the target fact, we opt for the strategy involving an appeal to the nature of belief, we might well find ourselves looking specifically to conditions on the believer’s reflective relation to the state...

3.3 Explanation: Supplement

On the occasion of belief’s being ascribed to a person from his words, he in fact attends to his belief deliberatively. If not the deliberative relation between state and bearer, what feature of belief does shed light on that fact? Why, where a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief, does he do something involving attending to it deliberatively, i.e., expressing it?

A good way to arrive at the answer to these questions is to ask ourselves in what way, precisely, assertoric speech is informative of the speaker’s belief. Provided we set aside the possibility that it reveals the speaker’s belief in a way entirely free of his agency—as a twitch reveals a lack of sleep, say—we are left with two options. The first corresponds to the alternative account I considered. The proponent of that account appeals to the speaker’s own epistemic agency—his pursuit of an epistemic intention, essentially—to explain how his words
serve as a basis for ascribing him belief. Instead, for her, is the speaker’s description of his own state. Rather than to take assertion to be the speaker’s description of the corresponding belief, however, we ought to take it to instantiate the belief. If not in virtue of the speaker’s epistemic work vis-à-vis his belief—if not in virtue of being a good description—his assertoric speech informs a hearer of his belief in manifesting it. Another way to see this claim is as aiming to close—or to prevent from opening—the metaphysical gap between assertion and belief implied in the alternative account. The natural alternative to thinking of an assertion as something a speaker “does” vis-à-vis his belief, such as describe it, is to think of it as part of the very life of that belief.

What a person does, in making an assertion, then, is not to describe his belief, but—in what is one gesture, as it were, for doing this—have it. My description of assertion as belonging to the life of the corresponding belief builds on Bernard Williams’ discussion of the relation between these notions (81-2). There are certainly many differences between speaking assertorically and thinking; it would be a mistake to claim that assertoric speech amounts simply to thinking out loud. Nonetheless, I think Williams is right to suggest that it is possible to make sense of the notion of belief in terms of the phenomenon of assertion (81). Dispositional accounts of belief make sense of the notion in terms of action. Why think of assertion as any less able to play such an explanatory role? On might say, for instance, that reflective inquiry into one’s belief can consist in “trying out various assertions” (Williams 76). To be careful, an account of belief appealing to assertion would likely be an account appealing first of all to judgment. A precedent for then making sense of judgment in terms of assertion is Michael Dummett’s characterization of the phenomenon as involving “the interiorization of the external

44 At a further remove, the alternative explanation seems to me to involve thinking of a person’s epistemic agency as mediating his being known by others: for one person to know what another thinks, the latter has to do some kind of epistemic work. A certain picture of agency might tempt us to a view like this. We might seem to be more robustly agential if, for every contribution we make to others’ epistemic lives, including letting them in on facts about ourselves, we put our epistemic agency at stake, in the way we do when offering testimony. The alternative is to leave room, in the notion of agency, for such “actions” as simply letting facts about oneself show.

45 I do not use “instantiate” and “manifest” technically. As I explain below, the relation between assertion and belief is also identified in the familiar claim that the first expresses the second. The notion of expression is, I think, legitimately open to theorization. Such theorization would likely lead to another way of making the claims I make in the text. Examples of such theorization are Charles Taylor (1979), McDowell (1998) and Mitchell S. Green (2009).
act of assertion” (362; qtd. in Williams 288). To round out the account would be to then make sense of belief partly in terms of judgment, pointing out that belief is liable to be formed, revised and re-entrenched in acts of judgment. More prudently, then: a sincere assertion that \( p \) is part of the life of the speaker’s belief that \( p \) in being an act of judgment that \( p \).

To call up the terms of the previous chapter, I am saying that the territory of linguistic agency that is assertoric speech is itself an instantiation of epistemic agency. The current point is an elaboration of the thought, on which I touched in section 2.3.3, that a person’s words can serve as a non-evidential epistemic resource in two distinct respects: in what he says and in that he says it. Learning something from the speaker’s reporting it—learning from what he says—one makes implicit appeal to him as a fellow epistemic agent. Learning something from the speaker’s very assertoric speech—learning from “that” he says it—one apprehends, in one of its manifestations, the very fact one learns: the speaker’s belief.

I promised to say why, when it comes to the speaker’s belief, the nature of the fact learned or communicated has an impact on how it may be learned or communicated through words. I have already done that for the second of what I called two conspicuous facts (p. 53)—the restriction on reporting one’s own belief. And we can now see why, when it comes to the way of learning from words that is learning from the expressive dimension of assertion, the speaker’s belief is all that can be learned. That fact is conspicuous, I noted, insofar as the work we do to let others know things and to learn things from them floats largely free of what we thereby let know or seek to learn. Why should learning from the expressive character of assertion allow us to learn only the speaker’s belief? Why should that dimension of speech allow a speaker to communicate only his belief? In the second chapter, again, I answered these questions by appeal to the nature of assertion: belief is simply the state of which sincere assertion is expressive. We can now appeal to the nature of belief to make the same point: belief is such as to be instantiated by assertoric speech.\(^{46}\)

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\(^{46}\) To say that this is the same point is to say, again, that my current claim about the relation between assertion and belief is implicit in the claim—from section 2.3.3—that the first expresses the second. Without delving into the metaphysics of expression, we can nonetheless see that the parallel comes naturally: expressing belief is not, as the formulation might suggest, something the speaker does to or with his belief, but is rather his forming, revising or re-entrenching the belief itself.
Returning to one of our current questions, what feature of belief sheds light on the fact that, where a person’s words serve as a basis for ascribing him belief, he expresses it? Why, when we learn a person’s belief from his words, do we learn from their expressive dimension in particular? The answer to these questions coincides with the answer to the question why, when it comes to the way of learning from words that is learning from the expressive dimension of assertion, the speaker’s belief is all that can be learned. In both cases, it’s that belief is such as to be instantiated in assertion, or, equivalently, belief is the state of which sincere assertion is expressive.

It remains to explain the positive aspect of the target fact: why, on the occasion of belief’s being ascribed to a person from his words, does he attends to the state deliberatively? I have been avoiding taking a good look at the idea that expressing a belief involves paying deliberative attention to it. I first made the claim at the start of the second chapter, when reflecting on Updike’s reply to Wachtel, tacking on the promise of an argument in the current chapter. And not until a few pages ago did I distinguish the deliberative attention paid to belief in assertion from the attention paid to a fact in the effort to inform someone of it. As we will see, given the current point about its relation to assertion, the nature of belief can be seen to explain this deliberative attention, too.

So, what is this basic deliberative attention to belief? When I first noted the phenomenon, I supported it with an appeal to intuition. Wachtel, recall, wants to learn what Updike thinks about the American dream. In answering her as he does, I said, Updike doesn’t strictly convey the fact in question—the way he does the fact of his year of birth. Rather, he seems to bring it about or, at least, to re-entrench it. In sincerely asserting that the American dream is still alive, I am saying, Updike commits or recommits himself to the very thought that the American dream is still alive. Rather than look on at, and somehow get across, his thought on the matter, he thinks about the matter itself. Rather than think of his belief, he thinks through it to the facts. What this suggests is that the deliberative attention paid to belief in assertion is simply a form of the constative thought that goes into the formation and revision of belief per se. I don’t mean to suggest that belief formation involves conscious thought; think of “constative thought”, here, as truth-directed epistemic activity, where that includes the formation of the most automatic perceptual beliefs. That said, some belief formation and revision is conscious. The deliberative reflection on belief present in assertion would fit into that category: confronted with
the question what he thinks about the American dream, Updike puts some conscious thought into whether it is still alive. Returning to the question at hand, why is it that, where belief is ascribed to be a speaker from his words, he attends to the state deliberatively? The answer is that such attention is the epistemic work that, on the occasion of its instantiation in those words, gives rise to, or adds to the life of, the belief.

Lastly, let me reconsider two matters from the current and previous chapters in the light of the recent discussion. The first is whether, and in what sense, the concept of belief figures in the act of assertion. At the start of this section, I described communicating one’s belief or letting it be known, hesitantly, as a “use” of the concept of belief, and the expression of belief as an “operation” with the concept. Those formulations are misleading, however. To express a belief is not to use or operate with the concept but to form, re-entrench or revise a state that instantiates it. Yet further back (p. 23), I stated that the concept of belief “figures” in two ways in what Updike is up to in pursuing an intention to inform Wachtel of his belief. In the more basic of these two, I said, the concept “figures somehow” in whatever it is about his words that makes them an action informative of his belief. We can now say that Updike’s words are informative of his belief in virtue of manifesting it; so, again, the concept of belief “figures”, here, not as applying to a fact the speaker communicates, but in being instantiated by his utterance.

The idea that assertion manifests or expresses belief allows a deeper understanding, second, of the sort of act undertaken in asking someone about his belief. As we saw in section 2.3.3, a person seeking to learn from the expressive character of her interlocutor’s speech requests an assertion; but she does not request him to report the fact she seeks to learn, i.e., his belief. The learner’s question is not a paradigmatic informational interrogative act, that is, since she does not request her interlocutor to provide the information by asserting it. We are now in a position to see in just what sense the interlocutor is requested to, and can be said to, “provide” the relevant information. Here, first, is a correct but radically under-informative way of specifying that sense of provision of information: seeking to learn from the expressive dimension of the other’s words, the learner requests him to undertake an act from whose expressive dimension she will learn. Equivalently, the speaker undertakes an act informative through its expressive dimension. We now know that the fact the asker seeks to learn is not separate from the act her interlocutor performs in reply, but is instantiated by it. Awkwardly,
but instructively, then: the way the act she requests will inform her of the fact of interest is by being it. The assertion she is offered will be informative just of itself.

What does this indicate about the status of the asker’s request and the believer’s reply? The latter’s act is not a specifically informative one, it seems. Likewise, the asker’s question may not count as an informational interrogative act at all. Questions put to a person about his belief ought rather, I think, to be analysed as informationally-motivated imperatives. Such questions closely resemble Groenendijk and Stokhof’s example of an anomalous, i.e., non-informational, interrogative act, “Do you promise to come?” Like that question, “Do you believe that $p$?” is essentially imperatival. In asking Updike her question, Wachtel can be understood as requesting that he think about whether the American dream is still alive. For, his assertoric reply, if sincere, will instantiate his judgment on the matter. As for the information she seeks, i.e., his belief, that will reach her in the same sense that the information that the moon is full reaches her when she is confronted with a full moon.

In this chapter, I brought our attention to the two-person case of the scenario in which a speaker is ascribed belief from his words. In the first section, I argued in favour of the claim that, where we ascribe belief to another person from his words, we ordinarily do so based only on their expressive character. Identifying the negative components of the target fact, I explained them by appeal to the deliberative relation between believer and state. The reason we do not report our beliefs or seek to learn those of others by their report is, arguably, that such activity would entail the believer’s attending theoretically to his state—something ruled out by the nature of belief. In the second section, I considered an alternative explanation of the deliberative attention a speaker pays to his state in expressing it. The problematic picture of assertoric speech implied by that explanation served as a useful contrast in the final section. There, I argued that assertoric speech instantiates or manifests belief. Finally, I appealed to that relation in explanation of the positive component of the target fact—our ordinarily communicating our beliefs by expressing them, and seeking to learn those of others in the same way.
4 Self-Ascribing Belief from one’s own Words

In this chapter, I mount another instance of the argument recommending my characterization of belief on the grounds that it explains how we normally do or feasibly might ascribe a person belief from his words. What I have been calling the target fact speaks to that question: such ascription proceeds through attention to the belief-expressive character of assertoric speech. There are two basic cases of our phenomenon: attributing belief to another and to oneself. In the previous chapter, I turned my attention to the former, two-person case. In broad strokes, I first argued simply for the truth of the target fact understood as stating a condition of normal practice. I then proposed an explanation for that practice. The specific feature of belief picked out by my characterization, I argued, explains the abnormality of ascribing belief from the reportive dimension of the believer’s words. Another feature of belief—its relation to assertion—explains our attending, instead, to the expressive character of speech.

Turning now to the case of learning one’s own belief from one’s own words, I proceed in a different way. The difference stems from the widely divergent status of the phenomena picked out by the two cases of learning a person’s belief from his words. Where the believer is another person, his speech is an obvious way of learning his state. Given that we uncontroversially and often do ascribe others beliefs from their words, I invited us, in chapter three, to bring the relevant range of phenomena into view, in order to then ask, in a limited way, what form(s) of learning from words could be found there. When it comes to self-ascribing belief from words, on the other hand, it is an open question whether such a thing ever occurs. So, rather than to survey phenomena, I examine the mere feasibility of attributing oneself belief from one’s speech for each of the three forms of learning from words: evidentially, and from what is reported or expressed in assertion.

The status of the target fact likewise differs in the current chapter. Here, the claim that a person ascribes belief to a speaker from the expressive aspect of his speech states a condition of feasibility. The question whether we ever do self-ascribe belief from our own words, that is, takes a backseat to the question whether, for each given way of doing so, one might. To be clear,
I do not have in mind *epistemic* feasibility—I am not asking, in a factive voice, whether, for each way of learning from words, one might successfully self-ascribe belief from one’s own words.\(^{47}\) Rather, a procedure counts as feasible, here, if it exerts no more than a usual level of pressure on a person’s linguistic agency and psychological unity. I will be arguing, in other words, that undertaking to learn one’s belief from one’s own report, or evidentially from one’s words, is destructive of agency. Returning to the dissertation-wide view, then, I recommend my characterization here on the basis of its capacity to explain the target fact, understood as the claim that it is feasible to learn one’s belief from one’s words only by appeal to their expressive character.

In the first section, I imagine a person asking himself what he believes on a given matter and going on to utter a reply. I treat this phenomenon as a strong candidate case of learning one’s belief from one’s words. I set it out in order to refer to it, in the subsequent three sections, for illustration and argument. In the second and third sections, I consider and reject the possibilities that a person might feasibly learn his belief from his own report and evidentially from his words, specifying the costs in each case. In the fourth section, I argue that it is at least feasible to learn one’s belief expressively from one’s words, provided we are careful to distinguish between the workings of the two- and one-person cases of this phenomenon. Finally, I reflect on the results of the current and previous chapters in the light of my characterization of belief, detailing its explanatory wherewithal.

### 4.1 Confronting a Question about one’s Belief

Suppose John Updike sits alone in a lounge at the CBC, awaiting his interview with Eleanor Wachtel. He idly looks over a list he’s been supplied of topics Wachtel might bring up. Included is the notion of the American dream in light of the current state of his country. The combination catches his attention—he hasn’t given it any thought—and he says to himself “*Do I*...”

\(^{47}\) That said, the difference between the bare intelligibility of an epistemic procedure and its epistemic value is less clear in the case of ascribing mental states to oneself than in the case of ascribing them to others. In the latter case, it is possible to imagine means of ascription about which one might conclude that they are *intelligible*, while leaving aside to some extent the question of their epistemic merit. In the former case, by contrast, a procedure’s being intelligible as a means of ascribing a mental state to oneself arguably *includes* its being a means for *authoritative* self-ascription. In this way, a procedure’s intelligibility as a means for self-ascribing belief, for instance, involves its being recognizable as having the distinctive kind of epistemic merit had by beliefs about one’s own mental states, i.e., pieces of self-knowledge. I am here qualifying what I say in footnote 2 (p. 3).
think the American dream is still alive?” A few seconds later, a producer passing the open door to the lounge hears him mutter thoughtfully, “I do, yes. It is still alive...”

Very possibly, Updike here learns what he thinks about the American dream from what he says. If any familiar kind of situation can count as a person’s learning his belief from his own words, I think this one will. Here are its defining features: (1) a person confronts a question what he believes, which he puts to himself; (2) the asked-after belief concerns a topic the person hasn’t thought much about recently; (3) he replies out loud; finally, (4) the reply consists in an answer to the question. Why these features? Let us begin with the third: that the believer should actually say something—that he should reply aloud, in our example—is obviously necessary to his learning his belief from his words. The second condition ensures that his reply apprises him of what he thinks by ensuring that he not have a ready, conscious opinion on the matter. As for the first condition, I include it for two reasons. It is simply more natural to imagine a person learning what he thinks from his words if he has been confronted with a question about his belief. Such a question at least brings to the believer’s mind the idea that someone wants to know what he thinks, and, possibly, that his reply can satisfy that desire. He might well think of his reply as able to satisfy another’s desire to know what he thinks. In our situation, the believer puts the question to himself; so, it is he himself who wants to know what he thinks. Admittedly, it is a more open question—one I will address in section 4.4—whether the speaker thinks of the words he utters in reply as able to inform himself. That said, they cannot do so unless condition four is met—unless the speaker’s utterance answers his question.48

The second reason I include the first condition is to bring my larger claim about how one learns one’s belief from one’s words into conversation with the related philosophical claim that rational agency is a spring of self-knowledge. I will do that in earnest in section 4.4. But let us see now how confronting a question about one’s belief allows consideration of the relation between the way one might learn one’s belief from one’s words and accounts of self-knowledge. A touchstone for the rational agency approach to mental state self-ascription is the phenomenon

48 Note that, intuitively, an answer to the question can take the grammatical form of a statement of the content of the belief or a self-ascription of the belief—a point to which I will return in section 4.2.
of a person’s answering a question about his belief by answering a corresponding question about the world. And a touchstone formulation of that phenomenon is Gareth Evans’:

If someone asks me ‘Do you think there is going to be a third world war?’, I must attend, in answering him, to precisely the same outward phenomena as I would attend to if I were answering the question ‘Will there be a third world war?’ I get myself in a position to answer the question whether I believe that \( p \) by putting into operation whatever procedure I have for answering the question whether \( p \) (225).

Because our situation involves an agent confronting a question about his belief, Evans’ remarks offer additional understanding of what is going on when Updike answers his own question. For a reason I will soon point out, however, I want to deliberately constrain what further understanding we derive from them. Let us accept only that, confronted with a question about his belief whether \( p \), a person answers it by answering the question whether \( p \). Let us leave open what it is to answer a question, insisting, for now, on nothing more than the production of an utterance relevant to the question. Let us also leave open what explains the person’s move from one question to the other, so that it remains possible, for instance, that the move is a result of a brute failure to register “Do I/you believe that \( p \)” as meaning anything different from “\( p \)”

Evans, of course, does not leave open what it is to answer a question: to answer the question whether \( p \), he suggests, requires attending to the “outward phenomena” relevant to whether \( p \). If this is right, and if the move from one question to the other specifies a route to self-knowledge of belief, then Evans’ remarks suggest an account of self-knowledge of belief in terms of rational agency: getting straight what you think is a matter of \textit{arriving} at what you think. And this passage indeed serves as inspiration for philosophers, such as Sidney Shoemaker, Richard Moran, and Sebastian Rödl, who claim that self-knowledge is to be understood in terms of rational agency. The reason I insist on taking so little additional information about our situation from Evans’ observations is to avoid begging the question against the competition. The picture of a person’s learning his belief from his words through their reportive aspect is too unusual to accommodate even just the idea that, confronted with a question about his belief whether \( p \), a person answers it by answering the question whether \( p \).
The more interesting competition—the view that a person might learn what he thinks *evidentially* from his words—*can* accommodate that idea. But it requires flexibility on what it is to answer a question and on why the agent moves from one question to the other. I leave those matters open, for now, in order to better compare—in section 4.4—the evidential picture with the one in which the agent learns from the expressive character of his words.

### 4.2 Report

Is it intelligible for a person to learn his belief from the reportive aspect of his assertoric speech? Might Updike learn from his own report? Let us consider separately the two forms of reply Updike makes, beginning with the fragment that is an elliptical assertion that the American dream is still alive: “It *is* still alive”. In order to construe that utterance as Updike’s report of what he believes, we have to adopt a view of assertoric speech as an enterprise of belief-description. But, as we saw in chapter three, that view is simply false. Provided Updike can self-ascribe a belief that \( p \) from an utterance of the form “\( p \)”, then, it would be a mistake to maintain that it is *always* by his report that a person self-ascribes belief from his words. Still, one might want to say that a person *sometimes* learns from the reportive aspect of his words. Consider the other fragment of Updike’s reply: “I *do*, yes.” If the case can be made that a self-ascription of belief informs a hearer of the speaker’s belief by reporting it, perhaps a further case can be made that the speaker can learn from his *own* report.

Is an utterance of the form “I believe that \( p \)” a report of the speaker’s belief? To see why one might think so, recall the standard analysis, from chapter two, of what a speaker reports and expresses in assertoric speech: he reports the fact that is the grammatical content of his utterance and expresses his corresponding belief. On this analysis, the utterance “I believe that \( p \)” reports the fact that the speaker—the referent of “I”—believes that \( p \) and expresses the speaker’s second-order belief. If anyone, including himself, is to learn Updike’s belief that \( p \) from his self-ascription of a belief that \( p \), then, it looks as though he learns from what is reported.

I want to suggest that we break with the standard analysis when it comes to self-ascriptions of belief. Although, in uttering “I believe that \( p \)”, a speaker *grammatically* reports that he believes that \( p \)—to call up a distinction from chapter three—what he reports or asserts is rather simply that \( p \). And he *expresses* his belief that \( p \). I am suggesting that the report-and-expression analysis for “I believe that \( p \)”, in other words, is the same as that for “\( p \)”. 
The reason to adopt this non-standard analysis is its fit with our experience as speakers and hearers. Consider J.L. Austin’s experience-based recommendation of an analogous non-standard analysis of utterances of the form “I state that p”:

If someone says ‘I state that he did not do it’, we may investigate the truth of his statement in just the same way as if he had said ‘He did not do it’ *simpliciter*, when we took that to be, as we naturally often should, a statement. That is, to say ‘I state that he did not’ is to make the very same statement as to say ‘He did not’: it is not to make a different statement about what ‘I’ state (except in exceptional cases: the historic and habitual present, &c.) (1961, 135).

Likewise, as a hearer, in the usual case, I take another’s “I believe the American dream is still alive” to be an assertion about the American dream, and not the speaker. And, as a speaker, when I self-ascribe belief, I usually am asserting the content of the belief in question.

My analysis of the normal report and expression profile for self-ascriptions of belief is guided, as I say, by a speaker and hearer’s intuition of the form articulated by Austin. The philosophical literature on such self-ascriptions is more markedly shaped by another philosophical interest: preserving the univocality of other- and first-person uses of the concept of belief. Univocality of the concept requires, first of all, that there be a discernible first-person use of the concept, and that such uses have the same truth conditions and explanatory potential as the corresponding other-person uses. So, Updike’s “I believe American dream is still alive” ought to be true under the same conditions as Wachtel’s “Updike believes the American dream is still alive”. And the two utterances ought to have the same explanatory potential.

Now, when it comes to settling on an account of self-ascriptions of belief, it does seem as though we confront a dilemma: we cannot both respect the kind of intuition Austin voices and maintain the univocality of the concept. To maintain univocality, it seems, we must say—giving

49 Wittgenstein makes a similar observation, highlighting the asymmetry between first- and third-person cases: “Think of the expression ‘I say...’, for example in ‘I say it will rain today’, which simply comes to the same thing as the assertion ‘It will...’. ‘He says it will...’ means approximately ‘He believes it will...’” (PI II x).
up the intuition—that self-ascriptions of belief are statements about the speaker. Out of respect for his generality constraint on reference, for instance, Evans treats “I believe that $p$” as an assertion a person makes about himself; unlike “$p$”, he says, it needn’t be withdrawn in the event that not-$p$ (226). Motivated by the manifest fact that we can and do think and talk about our own mental lives, Moran draws a similar conclusion: “there certainly are situations in which one does intend to make an assertion about one’s...belief as a fact about oneself” (72). On the other hand, if we want to honour the intuitive analysis of “I believe that $p$”, we seem driven to a deflationary account that gives up on the univocality of the concept. On such an account, the utterance “I believe that $p$” is, in every important way, equivalent to the utterance “$p$”. Despite appearances, then, first-personal belief-talk involves no use or grasp of the concept of belief. As Moran puts it, such accounts amount to a denial that first-person statements of the form ‘I believe that $P$’ are in fact statements about the speaker as a believer at all, but are instead to be understood simply as the speaker’s way of presenting the embedded proposition $P$. That is, when someone says, ‘I think it’s raining out,’ his statement does not refer to his (or anyone else’s) state of mind, but is instead simply a more guarded way of making the assertion about the rain (71).

What about my view? I may seem to be offering a deflationary account, but I am not. We ought to, and probably can, drive a wedge between the values captured by the demand for univocality, on one hand, and commitment to the view that an utterance of the form “I believe that $p$” constitutes a speaker’s report about himself, on the other. That we ought to drive a wedge seems clear: to assert or report that $p$ is to put one’s epistemic credit at stake—to stand behind it’s being so that $p$. What is implausible in the thought that a self-ascription of belief reports a belief is the idea that the speaker should put his epistemic credit at stake there, in just the same sense as he does in claiming that another person believes that $p$. That we can drive a wedge is

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50 That said, Moran seems ambivalent on the matter: “For all that, we can agree that the normal function of the first-person present-tense of ‘believe’ is to declare one’s view of how things are out there” (74). And later: “in ordinary circumstances a claim concerning one’s attitudes counts as a claim about their objects, about the world one’s attitudes are directed upon” (92).
less clear, and depends on whether we can preserve what is important about univocality. Nonetheless, it does seem too quick to conclude, with Moran, that unless it serves to allow a person to “refer to his...state of mind”, the “I believe” or “I think” in an utterance of the form “I _ that p” serves only to indicate guardedness in the assertion that p (71). There is very likely room to construe the “I believe” of such utterances as (1) evincing the speaker’s grasp of the concept of belief and (2) fulfilling his intention to inform a hearer of his belief without having to say that it alters what the speaker asserts. Provided that an utterance can show the speaker’s grasp of a concept in ways beyond exercising it (where that means making a judgment in which it figures), there is hope for making good on the first of these two goals. “I believe that the American dream is still alive” might evince the speaker’s grasp of the concept without expressing an application of the concept to himself. As for the second, consider Wittgenstein: “The language game of reporting can be given such a turn that a report is not meant to inform the hearer about its subject matter but about the person making the report” (PI IIx) Perhaps the role of “I believe” in an utterance of the form “I believe that p” is to effect just such a turn in what nonetheless remains the language game of reporting that p. Without stating that he believes that p, a person might, in saying “I believe that p”, nonetheless be said to be communicating his belief. The “I believe” might serve intentionally to underscore and draw attention to the fact that the content of the assertion is one the speaker endorses.

One thing these preliminary suggestions aim to acknowledge is that we can and do make our beliefs the object of our own and others’ mutual attention. There is room for an alternative to the view that such an achievement is a matter of making a statement about one’s own state. That phenomenon is, I think, better understood as the exception. As I noted in chapter three, an utterance of the form “I believe that p” is sometimes a report about the speaker. But those are cases in which interlocutors for some reason cannot bring their states to mutual attention by what Wittgenstein calls a turn on the work of reporting their content.

Let us return now to the question whether a person can report a fact—any fact—to himself. The idea I just considered is that a person’s speech can be informative of his belief by expressing it or by reporting it, depending on whether it takes the form of a self-ascription. But even if a self-ascription normally were a report of the speaker’s belief, such that one person could learn another’s belief by his report, there would be reason to deny this possibility in the one-person case. A kind of minimal intelligibility had by the idea of reporting one’s belief to
another is lacking in the case of reporting it to oneself. To report a fact is to share one’s thinking on the matter of concern; to be addressed a report is to be invited to benefit from the other’s thinking. For the language game of reporting to be brought off successfully, each side must think of himself and the other as occupying unequal epistemic positions vis-à-vis the fact in question—the hearer taking himself to be worse off, the speaker taking himself to be better off. Given this underlying dynamic, can a person report a fact to himself? As a speaker, he would find himself, as a hearer, to be in an epistemically worse position; and, as a hearer, he would find himself, as a speaker, to be better off, and in a position to make up for his epistemic insufficiency. It’s one thing to regard oneself as either better or worse off than oneself, epistemically. Crucially, doing so involves “occupying” only one of the two “selves” in which one takes oneself to consist, as it were. John Ames, the narrator of Marilynne Robinson’s Gilead, at one point remarks that he has to take some time to reflect and thereby learn from himself. It is the less-informed “self” whom Ames occupies. Finding oneself simultaneously better and worse off epistemically, however, involves occupying both sides, and so arguably betrays a basic failure of psychological coherence.

The idea, finally, that a person could report his belief to himself is inconsistent with the scant lesson we drew from Evans’ remarks. We accepted that, whatever the details of the process, a person confronting a question about his belief whether p answers it by answering the question whether p. If he is to learn from his reply as from a report about his belief, however, he seems precisely not to exchange one question for the other. To make sense of his self-ascriptive reply as his reporting his belief, we would have to imagine him taking the question about his belief at face value and, as it were, looking inward for a belief whether p.

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51 Robinson’s narrator: “My heart is greatly disquieted... My custom has always been to ponder grief; that is, to follow it through ventricle and aorta to find out its lurking places. That old weight in the chest, telling me there is something I must dwell on, because I know more than I know and must learn it from myself—that same good weight worries me these days” (179).

52 I think such a failure of coherence is what Wittgenstein describes in the following remarks: “Judging from what I say, this is what I believe.’ Now, it is possible to think out circumstances in which these words would make sense. [...] One would have to fill out the picture with behaviour indicating that two people were speaking through my mouth” (PI II x). Similarly: “If I listened to the words of my mouth, I might say that someone else was speaking out of my mouth” (PI II x).
4.3 Evidence

What would it be to ascribe belief to oneself evidentially from one’s words? Having first described what we are to imagine, I will go on to argue that the procedure would require giving up one’s linguistic agency.

For one, we are to imagine that the speaker and hearer are the same person—the speaker learns his own belief evidentially from his words. That said, it will be easier to describe our agent’s procedure by situating him in one role, that of the hearer or learner. The words on whose basis our subject ascribes the speaker belief serve as evidence for him. As such, as we saw in chapter two, the words constitute a kind of reason for belief valid without regard to anyone’s presentation or estimation of them. An example we saw of this way of learning from words is to conclude, from a person’s speech, that he has vocal cords. It is no one’s prerogative that speech should provide reason to draw that conclusion. In our case, the fact about which the hearer draws a conclusion is the speaker’s belief; so, he takes the speaker’s words as evidence for his belief.

The final condition of the case is crucial: the content of the belief ascribed to the speaker matches the content of his grammatically assertoric utterance. Without this condition, one can perfectly intelligibly and unproblematically be said to learn a person’s belief—another’s or one’s own—from his words. Suppose someone is speaking very quietly; in certain circumstances, that is evidence for ascribing him the belief that the baby is asleep. Or suppose one’s cadence is consistently slower when speaking to a certain individual. Noticing this about oneself, one might also realize that one believes the addressee to be easily flustered. In the kind of case we are imagining, by contrast, a speaker is ascribed a belief that $p$ evidentially from a grammatically assertoric utterance that $p$.

To undertake to learn one’s own belief evidentially from one’s words turns out to undermine one’s linguistic agency. The first step in seeing how this works is to grasp a point true of any case—of the two- and one-person cases—of ascribing belief to a person evidentially from his words: the hearer construes the phenomena as something other than linguistic action. In the second chapter, I argued that the integrity of an evidential learner’s receptive linguistic agency is usually compromised insofar as, for her epistemic purposes, she focuses on the phenomena of the speaker’s words in some capacity short of their full reality as linguistic action.
To draw the conclusion about Updike’s vocal cords, for instance, Wachtel focuses on his speech as mere sound. That said, almost all of these compromises of linguistic agency for epistemic ends are very ordinary and involve no denial that the speaker’s words are linguistic action. To draw the conclusion about Updike’s vocal cords, Wachtel needn’t deny that he is speaking. We did (in section 2.3.2) consider one case of learning evidentially from words that does impugn their status as linguistic action. To count as assertoric speech, I argued, the words a person produces must purport to be his stabs at the truth. This fact imposes a constraint on the way a hearer may form a belief as to the truth of the content of the utterance while still acknowledging the phenomenon as linguistic action. Updike’s “The American dream is still alive” may serve as evidence, for Wachtel, that he has vocal cords without her calling its status as linguistic action into question. But if his utterance serves as mere evidence for her that the American dream is still alive, she must deny it that status. Assertoric speech warrants belief in the truth of its content in virtue of having been constituted as such—as linguistic action—by the speaker. If Updike’s utterance affords a hearer reason to believe that the American dream is still alive, he deserves the credit.

We are now in a position to detect a second, related limit on what may be learned evidentially from phenomena one acknowledges to be genuine assertion: the speaker’s corresponding belief. In the second chapter, I explained the fact that assertion aims at the truth by appeal to the fact that, when sincere, it expresses belief, and belief aims at the truth. So the basis on which a speaker is to be held responsible for the truth or falsity of his words is that they express his belief. But if it is a defining feature of assertoric speech that it purports to express belief, that imposes a second, more basic, constraint on how it may serve as evidence: it cannot serve as evidence for the speaker’s corresponding belief. I noted in the second chapter that part of what is involved in constituting one’s words as action is taking responsibility for their truth or falsity; one does that by having one’s words be expressive of one’s belief. And to “have one’s words be expressive of one’s belief” is just to have speech be an occasion for one’s constative thought. That sincere assertoric speech informs a hearer of what the speaker thinks, then, is due to the speaker. To imagine that the correspondence between Updike’s “The American dream is still alive” and his belief about the American dream is an objective correlation independent of him is to disqualify his utterance as linguistic action.
I have been saying that one who ascribes a belief to a speaker evidentially from his words denies their status as linguistic action. Note that it is, in principle, an independent question whether such a learner is correct in that denial. Provided Updike’s “The American dream is still alive” is a genuine assertion, Wachtel, in ascribing him belief evidentially from his words, would be wrong to deny it. She would fail to live up to the basic responsibility of receptive linguistic agency to recognize the phenomena before her as someone’s speaking. But suppose Updike were talking in his sleep; in that case, she would be right. The point is that the answer to the question whether a hearer is correct in her denial depends on facts about the speaker—whether he is indeed speaking. The point applies equally in the case where the speaker and hearer are the same person: the question whether the hearer is right in denying that the phenomena before him count as assertoric speech is, in principle, independent of his denial. That said, in the one-person case, there is generally such dependence in practice. Arguably, insofar as he is set to learn from his own words in a way implying a denial that they are speech, our imagined self-ascriber brings it about that they are not. The hearer, after all, is the speaker. So the words from which he learns the “speaker’s” belief come from him. Admittedly, one possibility is that the subject, as a speaker, utters a genuine assertion, while, as a hearer, he fails to recognize his words as speech. Setting that possibility aside, we should imagine our self-ascriber to be producing behaviour about which it is right to say that it is not linguistic agency.

If this is correct, then undertaking to learn one’s belief from one’s words evidentially requires, in practice, giving up one’s productive linguistic agency. Another way to arrive at this conclusion is through the idea of a speaker’s participation in an evidential learner’s belief acquisition. Recall that, where belief is acquired evidentially from his words, a speaker can participate in that acquisition (only) by presenting and interpreting the evidence. Moran’s example, we saw, is a speaker admitting to a minor fault with the intention of having the hearer conclude that he is being scrupulously candid. Just as there is a limit to the facts that can be learned evidentially from phenomena acknowledged by the hearer to be genuine speech, there is, as we saw, a corresponding limit to the extent to which a speaker can participate in his hearer’s evidential acquisition of belief from phenomena qualifying as his words. There is a limit, that is, to the respects in which a speaker can regard his own words as evidence. We tried in section 2.3.2 to imagine a person regarding his words as evidence for their own truth—regarding the fact that he utters that \( p \) as evidence, for himself or another, that \( p \). But since words for whose truth
or falsity the speaker fails to take immediate responsibility are not genuine assertoric speech, to successfully regard one’s words as evidence for their own truth is to have given up on thinking in one’s words, as it were. Now, our self-ascriber, as a speaker, also participates in the hearer’s evidentational acquisition of belief from his words. The subject produces the phenomena from which he intends someone—himself—to learn evidentially. That participation involves regarding his words as evidence for what he believes. As in the case of the figure from chapter two, the self-ascriber’s participation requires that he give up his basic productive linguistic agency. As a speaker, in order to produce words whose content corresponds with his belief in virtue of something other than himself, those words must cease to be the occasion for his thought.

It is worth emphasizing, finally, that, these figures from chapter two and the current discussion both actively undermine their linguistic agency, and for the epistemic purpose of communicating a fact evidentially. The figure from chapter two acts (somehow) on an intention to produce utterances whose truth is not to be credited to him. The self-ascriber acts (somehow) on an intention to produce utterances whose correspondence with his beliefs is not to be credited to him. This is why I said that, as a hearer, our self-ascriber of belief brings it about that, as a speaker, his words cease to be his own. This is also why it is fair to say that the attempt to learn one’s belief evidentially from one’s own words requires not just losing, but positively giving up one’s basic linguistic agency.53

Learning evidentially from one’s words shows up as a cost, I want to suggest, finally, of a certain construal of the technique of learning what one believes by moving from a question about belief to a question about the world. The construal is to be found in work by Nishi Shah and David Velleman on the nature of doxastic deliberation. I want to conclude this section by explaining their interpretation of the question-replacement technique and showing that the upshot is a person’s seeking to learn evidentially from his words. In the subsequent section, Shah and Velleman’s construal of the question-replacement technique will serve as a contrast for the more

53 Note that the identity between speaker and hearer is not, by itself, enough to ruin the linguistic agency of the person who seeks to learn evidentially from his own words. Imagine a person who speaks in pursuit of his intention to learn whether his vocal cords have been damaged. Like our self-ascriber, he is both the speaker and hearer on an occasion of learning evidentially from a person’s words. As a speaker, he can be said to produce phenomena intended to be taken as evidence by himself, as a hearer. The difference is that the production of this evidence does not undermine his linguistic agency—“producing evidence”, here, means simply saying something.
plausible phenomenon I think Evans had in mind—a phenomenon according to which, I will suggest, a person learns from the expressive character of his words.

The subject of Shah and Velleman’s essay is the fact that we, as it were, see through the deliberative question “should I believe that p?” to the factual question “p?”. Because it is closely related, they also discuss the phenomenon of a person’s seeing through the factual question “Do I believe that p?” to the question “p?” They treat the transparency of the initial questions in these pairs not as an empirical observation, but as a normative claim about how they may be answered. So, answering the question “p?” supplies, somehow, an answer to the question “Do I believe that p?” They begin their discussion of the second transparency by noting an ambiguity in the question. “Do I believe that p?” can mean “either ‘Do I already believe that p (that is, antecedently to answering the question)?’ or ‘Do I now believe that p (that is, now that I am answering the question)?’” (506). These questions ask after each of two facts about the believer: his belief antecedent to the question and his belief as of the moment he answers the question. The authors go on to argue that each of these questions is transparent to the question whether p in its own way. There are, then, two transparencies of the question “Do I believe that p?”, depending on how it is interpreted. Of interest here is the procedure Shah and Velleman envision for the first interpretation. Where the question asks after the antecedent fact of one’s belief, they say, one must, to answer accurately, assay one’s state of mind. One must not, that is, alter the fact one seeks to find out in finding it out. One way to do this, they claim, is to ask oneself whether p strictly “as a stimulus applied to oneself for the empirical purpose of eliciting a response” (506). One poses oneself the question whether p and “see[s] what one is spontaneously inclined to answer” (506). The idea is that one’s reply provides a good indication of what one currently believes. In this way, answering a question about the world supplies an answer to a question about one’s antecedent belief concerning the world.

It looks as though Shah and Velleman’s subject learns from his own words, but in what sense? In his capacity as asker of the question “p?”, the subject fits the description of an evidential learner. As we saw in chapter two, such a learner’s question is not a request for an

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54 For the procedure Shah and Velleman envision for the transparency of the question “do I now believe that p?”, see note 54 below.
assertion, but a kind of triggering of phenomena. Shah and Velleman’s subject puts the question to himself as a stimulus, akin to the small targeted blow to the knee used to check a reflex. Indeed, the authors specify that the relevant contrast for this action is asking oneself whether \( p \) as an invitation to reason to a conclusion as to whether \( p \).\(^{55}\) So, in my terms, Shah and Velleman’s subject can be said to seek to learn his (antecedent) belief evidentially from his words.

This evidential reading of the question-replacement technique, finally, is determinate on the two matters I left open in section 4.1: what it is to answer a question and what explains the subject’s move from one question to the other. What is it to answer a question here? To my ear, Shah and Velleman themselves are ambivalent about the character of their subject’s reply to himself. On one hand, they suggest that the subject’s reply will be novel to him—that he will “see” what he says—as though it bears only a causal connection with the question. On the other hand, they suggest that the reply is the expression of thought, referring to it as “one’s first thought upon entertaining a question” (507). If my argument above is correct, Shah and Velleman’s self-ascriber undermines his own productive linguistic agency. If that is so, it is unwarranted to describe him as expressing his thought as to whether \( p \). To “answer” the question whether \( p \), rather, is, here, to somehow produce a string of words, and not to make an assertion whether \( p \). As for what explains the subject’s move from one question to the other, it is the epistemic promise of that operation. An answer to the factual question “Do I (antecedently) believe that \( p \)?” may be had on the basis of evidence generated by putting to oneself the question “\( p \)”?  

4.4 Expression

We have seen that attempts to learn one’s belief from one’s own report, and evidentially from one’s words, involve serious costs for, respectively, psychological unity and linguistic agency. By elimination, then, if a person ever learns his belief from his words, he does so through their expressive character. Whether he does depends, of course, in part on whether it is feasible. In this section, I maintain that it is. I do that by arguing that self-ascribing belief from the expressive character of one’s words correctly describes what is going on in the, as it were,

\(^{55}\) Such reasoning would be out of order because it might change the antecedent belief one is trying to discover (506).
out-loud version of the procedure Evans recommends for answering questions about one’s belief. We will see that, if it is to count as a correct characterization of that procedure, self-ascribing belief from the expressive character of one’s words cannot involve any serious psychological or linguistic-agential difficulty. Of course, it’s one thing to say that the subject Evans imagines may be described as self-ascribing belief from the expressive character of his words. How such a procedure is meant to work, whether it succeeds, and whether I am committed to its being successful are further questions to which I will return.

In section 4.2, we saw Evans’ description of how one answers a question about one’s belief. Confronted with the question whether one believes that \( p \), he says, one answers it by answering the question whether \( p \). The context of these remarks is a discussion of self-ascription of mental states. Evans takes himself to be describing a technique for achieving self-knowledge of belief. As he puts it, “[i]f a judging subject applies this procedure, then necessarily he will gain knowledge of one of his own mental states: even the most determined sceptic cannot find here a gap in which to insert his knife” (225). The idea behind this procedure is that self-knowledge of belief may be achieved by forming, revising or re-entrenching belief. Answering the second question—the question whether \( p \)—involves attending to the “outward phenomena” relevant to whether \( p \). Such attention issues in the belief whether \( p \). Having formed his belief, the subject is in a position to ascribe it to himself. This is, as I noted earlier, an account of self-knowledge of belief as springing from the exercise of epistemic agency.

That the formation, revision, or re-entrenchment of his belief should be what allows the subject to ascribe it to himself tells us something about what is going on in Evans’ procedure understood as a linguistic exchange. When the procedure is undertaken out loud, the subject makes an utterance as the upshot of his thinking whether \( p \). So construed, Updike’s answer to himself in section 4.1 issues from his thinking about the American dream. If a subject can be said to learn from his words, then, he learns from their belief-expressive character. Can he be said to learn from his words? Is there an “out loud” version of Evans’ procedure? Provided one accepts the view of assertoric speech I presented in chapter three, the answer is yes. On that view, assertoric speech is related to belief in being an occasion for its formation, revision or re-entrenchment: in sincerely saying something, one thinks it. If the exercise of epistemic agency is central to Evans’ epistemic procedure, and the procedure is—as it can be—undertaken out loud, it will be the expressive character of speech that is central. If it is his thinking whether \( p \) that
allows a person to self-ascribe a belief whether \( p \), then, where his words play a role, they do so in virtue of being an occasion for his thinking.

In the third chapter, we saw that one form of epistemic significance speech may have is to make itself “available”, as it were, as a fact to be recognized, where that fact is just an instance of the speaker’s thought. We saw, in other words, that a consequence of the relation between assertion and constative thought is that one’s speech makes one’s thinking known. Evans’ procedure—whether or not it works—can be seen as exploiting the same principle. The idea is that the epistemic opportunity to ascribe a person belief based on what he says is open, not only to others, but to the person himself. And for the same reason: the person’s sincere assertoric speech, in being expressive of his belief, just manifests it.

Insofar as the subject’s out-loud reply can be said to afford him knowledge of his own belief, then—and I have yet to say how this might work—it does so through its expressive character. So much is enough to show that—whether or not it yields self-knowledge—the process of undertaking to learn one’s belief from one’s words through their expressive character is at least compatible with basic psychological integrity and linguistic agency.

I turn now to the question of how Evans’ procedure is supposed to afford self-knowledge of belief, and whether any of my claims commits me to its doing so. Beginning with the second question, I am not committed to the validity of Evans’ procedure as a route to self-knowledge. My claim that a subject following such a procedure is correctly described as undertaking to learn from the expressive character of his words does not commit me to his being successful. Given my view of the relation between assertion and belief, I am committed to the idea that Evans’ procedure sees the subject making up his mind out loud. But it remains an independent question whether and how forming the belief that \( p \)—out loud or not—generates self-knowledge of that belief. I will conclude this section by setting out one possible interpretation of how Evans’ procedure is supposed to yield self-knowledge, along with the rough shape of an alternative. I am not, as I noted, committed to the validity of Evans’ procedure, no matter how it is interpreted. Still, what I am calling the feasibility of the phenomenon is threatened by one of these interpretations. So, I am, as we will see, committed to rejecting that interpretation.

How might a judging subject applying Evans’ procedure gain knowledge of one of his own mental states? As part of a discussion of Evans’ procedure as a possible explanation of the
distinctive security of avowals, Dorit Bar-On suggests one interpretation. Bar-On identifies a broad form of explanation of avowals’ security she calls the Epistemic Approach. Such accounts aim “to explain the security of avowals by appeal to the security of the epistemic basis on which they are made. If avowals are especially secure, it is because they are (or express) self-judgments that are arrived at via an especially secure epistemic route, or deploying an especially secure method or procedure” (112). As she reads Evans, his procedure belongs in this category. She imagines Evans’ subject as answering the question whether \( p \) in order to generate an epistemic basis on which to then make the further self-judgment whether he believes that \( p \). She takes the procedure “to require one first to attend to the world, and then figure out on that basis what one is thinking” (113). For Bar-On, then, applying Evans’ procedure yields self-knowledge in two steps: the subject first judges whether \( p \) and, registering that judgment, judges that he believes that \( p \).

Bar-On rightly complains that this is a roundabout and generally problematic picture of the achievement of self-knowledge of belief. But note that this reading of Evans is contingent. The subject need not be imagined as forming a second-order judgment on the basis of his first-order judgment. His knowledge of his belief that \( p \) might rather follow immediately on his forming the belief that \( p \), without any further judgment. Bar-On’s reading of the

56 The procedure Bar-On takes Evans to be recommending resembles the procedure described by Shah and Velleman for answering the second sense of the ambiguous question “do I believe that \( p \)?”, namely, “do I now believe that \( p \)?” That question, too, may be answered by passing from it to the question whether \( p \). To do so, one asks oneself whether \( p \) in the ordinary way, inviting oneself to reason about \( p \). The point of the initial question remains accurately to grasp the current fact of one’s state of mind. One makes that fact available to oneself—and so puts oneself in a position to answer truthfully—by actually reasoning about \( p \). Reasoning about \( p \), for Shah and Velleman, is reasoning to a judgment as to whether \( p \). Provided one’s reasoning also determines one’s belief on the matter—provided one is, as it were, convinced by one’s judgment—reasoning about \( p \) will determine one’s belief as to \( p \). With one’s current belief so determined, one is in a position to report accurately on it.

57 Bar-On arrives at her reading of Evans from the fact that he describes the subject’s move from one question to the other as a procedure for gaining self-knowledge, one she notes he suggests can replace the inward-glance of the introspectionist. But there is reason to reject the reading. Evans himself is silent on the matter of how the subject’s forming his belief whether \( p \) yields second-order awareness of that belief. And it seems uncharitable to read him as envisioning a procedure involving bringing one’s epistemic attention to one’s own mental phenomena, when he repeatedly insist on and indicates the contrast between his own thinking and an introspectionist view of self-ascription.

58 How might the second-order state follow immediately upon the first-order state? A possible resource for answering this question is Akeel Bilgrami’s view that there is no need to explain the appearance of such second-order states. These ought to be construed neither as the result of perception-like activity on the agent’s part, nor as
procedure implies an answer to the question, raised and left open in section 4.1, *why* the subject answers one question by answering another. On her reading, the subject raises and answers the question about the world as a way of producing an epistemic basis for self-judgment, and so in fulfillment of an epistemic intention to learn what he thinks. But we need not think of Evans’ procedure as a specifically *epistemic* one. The subject’s move to the second question, rather than being epistemically motivated, might simply be a response to the nature of belief—the matter of concern in the *first* question. It might, that is, simply reflect the fact that belief is the kind of thing one finds out about (immediately)—not by “looking inward”, but by looking outward.

I am, as I say, committed to rejecting Bar-On’s reading of the way Evans’ procedure yields self-knowledge. Why? In her remarks, Bar-On is not (and need not be) determinate as to whether the procedure is undertaken out loud. But let us apply her construal to the procedure envisioned specifically as a linguistic exchange. In reply to his question whether he believes the American dream is still alive, Updike mutters “Yes, I do. It *is* still alive...”. On an interpretation consistent with Bar-On’s reading, we should imagine Updike going on to register his own reply and, on its basis, judging that he believes the American dream is still alive. One problem with this construal is that the subject seems at an excessive remove from his own beliefs—his awareness of what he thinks depends on making a dedicated epistemic effort (to listen to what he says). This is the unintuitive roundaboutness noted by Bar-On. The more interesting problem for us is that this construal assimilates learning one’s belief from one’s words to learning another’s belief from his. The final step in the procedure envisioned by Bar-On—the speaker’s judgment that he has a given belief based on his utterance—characterizes the two-person case. Where it is someone *else* to whom a person ascribes belief based on his words, she is indeed confronted with an utterance that serves as a reason for believing that the speaker has the relevant belief. Where it is *herself* to whom a person ascribes belief from the speaker’s words, those words play a different epistemic role.\(^{59}\) The way in which a person is apprised of her

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\(^{59}\) If learning from the expressive character of words differs in the two- and one-person cases, these then call for different epistemological treatments. Understanding how one learns another’s belief from his expressing it raises
belief from her own words, that is, must differ from the way she is apprised of another’s belief from his. Otherwise, the subject who learns from her own words would relate to herself too robustly as another person. If her speech were an object for her epistemic attention, she could raise questions about it that she ought not to be able to. She could, for instance, wonder how much care went into the utterance—whether it was really considered or just tossed off. She could also wonder about its sincerity—whether the utterance really does or only purports to express the speaker’s belief. These phenomena are not impossible, but, in being indicative of psychological incoherence, they cannot be features of the normal way a person learns her belief from her own words.

The same point can be made by returning to the question, from section 4.2, whether a person replying to his own question whether he believes that \( p \) can be said to think of his reply—his words—as informing him of his belief. There is no problem, as I noted, in considering the person as thinking of his reply as informing someone else. We are comfortable with this thought, I suggest, because the reply informs the other person very concretely by serving as an epistemic basis for their ascription of belief to the speaker. We hesitate to say that the person thinks of his reply as apt to inform himself insofar as we have in mind the same sense of “informing”, and this sense rightly seems not to fit the one-person scenario. The subject indeed does not think of his words as apt to serve as his basis for a subsequent judgment as to what he thinks. But he can be said to think of his reply as apt to inform him in another sense—in itself being a manifestation of the belief.

4.5 Return to the Characterization

In chapter one, I proposed a partial characterization of belief as a state to which its bearer stands in a deliberative relation. A deliberative relation is one such that, where a person reflects on his state, he does so deliberatively. Reflecting in this way on his belief, a person brings it to mind not as an antecedent fact, but as the live attitude it is. He attends to it in such a way as to

broader questions about the epistemology specific to expressive phenomena. That is not so in one’s own case since the self-knowledge issuing from Evans’ procedure does not take the form of a judgment arrived at through an encounter with expressive phenomena.
think *through* it. Such attention, then, issues not in a judgment about the belief, but in the state’s own formation, revision or re-entrenchment.

I proposed to defend this characterization of belief by appeal to its capacity to explain features of our practices of ascribing and communicating belief linguistically. I encapsulated the features of interest in what I called the target fact: where a person’s words afford the opportunity to ascribe him belief, they do so through their expressive character. I identified two variations on the basic scenario of linguistic belief-ascription according to whether a person learns another’s belief or his own. The status of the target fact differs in these variations. In the two-person case, it states a condition of normal practice. We clearly do communicate and ascribe belief to one another linguistically, and we normally do so through the expressive character of assertoric speech. In the one-person case, the target fact states a condition of mere feasibility. Only through the expressive character of speech might a person self-ascribe belief linguistically in a way free of inordinate pressure on his psychological unity and linguistic agency. So, if we do self-ascribe belief from our own words, we do so through their expressive character.

I concluded chapter three by showing that my characterization of belief serves to explain features of our practices of communicating and ascribing belief to one another linguistically. Let me conclude the current chapter by adding to our understanding of the explanatory potential of that characterization. How does my claim about belief help make sense of its being feasible to self-ascribe belief through only the expressive character of speech? As it turns out, the deliberative relation between believer and belief nicely explains the unfeasibility of learning one’s belief by one’s own report. In this, unsurprisingly, my characterization plays an explanatory role parallel to the one it plays in the two-person case. Also parallel is the fact that the relation between belief and assertion can be said to explain the feasibility of learning from the expressive character of one’s own words.

Let me start with that last point. My characterization of belief puts a condition on the kind of reflection possible for belief: where such reflection occurs, it is deliberative. But the claim is silent about whether and when a believer does reflect on his state. As a result, it neither predicts nor requires that, on the occasion where a person is ascribed belief from his words, he attends to it. This is the sense in which the characterization *might* have, but in fact does not, explain why we normally communicate our beliefs and seek to learn those of others through
expression. What *does* explain that is, as we saw, the relation between belief and assertoric speech. The reasoning is straightforward: a sincere assertion manifests the speaker’s belief. Thus, the province of linguistic activity that is speaking assertorically is, by its nature, suited to making known a person’s beliefs. It is because of the nature of such speech that it easily and naturally serves to fulfill a person’s intention to communicate his thinking. It is in virtue of this same fact about assertoric speech that it provides the only feasible prospect for self-ascribing belief from one’s own words. If an out-loud version of Evans’ procedure is a route to finding out what one thinks, that is because sincerely stating whether *p* constitutes making up one’s mind on the matter.

I turn, finally, to the explanatory work done by my characterization. On one hand, the very same considerations that explain the abnormality of reporting belief to another and seeking to learn another’s belief by his report also tell against the selfascriptive versions of those phenomena. But, as we will see, an additional, more informative claim can be made: the deliberative relation between believer and belief predicts the specific difficulty involved in reporting one’s belief to oneself.

For the former, weaker explanatory claim, it will help to consider the communication and ascription of belief separately. As we have seen, the abnormality of seeking to communicate one’s belief by reporting it can be put in terms of my characterization of belief. A belief is a state to which its bearer is deliberatively related. To report a state is to attend to it theoretically. Thus, to be the subject of a state instantiating the concept of belief is to be prevented from making it the object of one’s report. Hence the abnormality of putting one’s epistemic credit behind the claim that one believes the moon is full. Of course, this explanation applies equally no matter to whom one reports one’s belief—whether another person or oneself. As we have also seen, it is equally abnormal to ascribe belief to a speaker from his report—to seek to take someone’s word that he believes the moon is full. That abnormality can be put in terms of the thesis about ascription of belief that falls out of my characterization (p. 9). To apply the concept of belief is to think of the person to whose state one applies it as deliberatively related to that state. To report a state is to attend to it theoretically. Thus, it would be inconsistent to apply the concept of belief to a state whose bearer reports it. Here, too, the explanation is indifferent to whether the person to whom one ascribes belief is oneself or another.
Lastly, there is the stronger explanatory claim to make good: the deliberative relation between a believer and his state allows us to expect the kind of psychological compromise we see in the imagined case of a person’s ascribing belief to himself from his own report.

One way of putting the impossibility of reflecting theoretically on one’s own belief is this: in some essential respects, a state liable to such reflection is, for its bearer, akin to the state of another person. Consider that such a state is conspicuously indifferent to its bearer’s thinking. And, for each of us, the paradigm case of a belief that is indifferent to his thinking is the belief of another person. Recall (from the introduction) the subject who believes her sister is selfish and is astonished to find herself behaving as though she believed her sister were considerate. Reflecting on the resistant strain in her epistemic activity, she might well express her frustration by saying, *whose thought is that?*

Now, when a belief is the object of a speaker’s report, it is normally the belief of another person. When a person reports his own belief, in fact, it is, for him, akin to the belief of another. Recall from chapter three the subject who must resort to reporting his belief in order to communicate it. I proposed that such a speaker would feel odd, having to pronounce on his own mental life as he might any subject on which he is expert. More sharply, the feeling is one of having to settle for doing with one’s own belief the best one can do with another’s, namely, report it with confidence.

Why should it be that reporting one’s own belief gives one the eerie sense that it is someone else’s? The reason is that reporting a fact, as we have seen, involves attending to it theoretically. And, in the case of one’s own belief, attending to it theoretically involves regarding it as though it were someone else’s. Our constrained communicator’s eerie sense of having to do with someone else’s belief is simply a much milder version of the psychological disunity implied by self-ascribing belief by one’s own report. Why—to return to the explanatory task—should such an undertaking imply a divided mind? The reason is that a believer stands in a deliberative relation to his state. The liability to theoretical reflection of a world-representing state exacts a cost: it is, for the bearer, no longer his own. Instead, it is, for him, akin to the state of another. Reporting one’s belief requires attending to it theoretically. Thus, a state liable to report is, for the bearer, akin to the state of another. The subject who self-ascribes belief from his own report constitutes a limit case of this dynamic. He exerts an intense pressure on his own
psychological unity by seeking to learn what he thinks by his own report. Taking his states to be such as to be liable to be reported by himself, he regards them, as it were from the start, as the states of someone else.
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