



COLLÈGE
DE FRANCE
—1530—

CHAIRE DE PHILOSOPHIE
DU LANGAGE ET DE L'ESPRIT

Pr. François RECANATI

LA DISTINCTION FORCE/CONTENU THE FORCE/CONTENT DISTINCTION

Collège de France, 16-18 juin 2021
Amphithéâtre Halbwachs



Colloque international en anglais,
organisé avec le soutien de la Fondation du Collège de France



A Scene from *The Beggar's Opera*, William Hogarth

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Dans le jugement (sur le plan mental) ou dans l'assertion (sur le plan linguistique), le sujet donne son assentiment à un certain contenu de pensée (le contenu du jugement ou de l'assertion); mais il est possible aussi de prendre en considération un contenu de pensée de façon neutre, sans l'accepter ou l'endosser. D'où la distinction entre force et contenu, qui s'est imposée dans la philosophie du langage contemporaine depuis Frege. Cette distinction implique que la prédication, opération interne au contenu propositionnel, est elle-même une opération neutre. Parce qu'ils rejettent cette conséquence et conçoivent la prédication comme l'attribution d'une propriété à un objet (attribution qui engage le sujet et ne saurait donc être neutre), certains théoriciens tentent de remettre en cause la distinction force/contenu. D'autres, au contraire, tentent d'étendre son domaine d'application. Ce colloque international, organisé par la Chaire de Philosophie du langage et de l'esprit du Collège de France, vise à faire le point de ces débats et à permettre la confrontation directe des points de vue.

In judgment (on the mental side) and assertion (on the linguistic side), the subject assents to a certain content (the content of assertion or judgment); but the content in question can also be entertained in a neutral way, without being accepted or endorsed. That is the basis for Frege's force/content distinction, a cornerstone in contemporary philosophy of language. That distinction entails that predication itself is a neutral operation, since it is internal to propositional content. Because they reject that consequence and construe predication as the (committal, hence non-neutral) act of ascribing a property to an object, some recent theorists cast doubt on the force/content distinction. Others, on the contrary, attempt to widen its domain of application. This international conference, organized by the *Philosophy of language and mind* chair at Collège de France, offers a forum for discussion of these issues.

Mercredi 16 juin 2021

14h-15h15 / **François RECANATI** (Collège de France)
The Aristotelian View, the Spinozist Thesis, and the Frege Point

15h30-16h45 / **Silver BRONZO** (Higher School of Economics, Moscou)
Assertion and Composition
(en visioconférence)

16h45-17h15 / Pause

17h15-18h30 / **Indrek REILAND** (Université de Vienne)
What Is It to Say that p ?

Président de séance: Dilip NINAN (Université Tufts/IEA de Paris)

Jeudi 17 juin 2021

9h30-10h45 / **Peter PAGIN** (Université de Stockholm)
Two Concepts of Force

11h-12h15 / **Eric MANDELBAUM** (City University of New York)
Belief : The Fundamental Cognitive Relation

12h15-14h / Déjeuner

14h-15h15 / **Michael SCHMITZ** (Université de Vienne)
The Content of Force

15h15-15h45 / Pause

15h45-17h / **Mitchell GREEN** (Université du Connecticut)
On the Semanticization of Force

Président de séance: Jérôme DOKIC (EHESS)

9h30-10h45 / **Peter HANKS** (Université du Minnesota)
Varieties of Cancellation

10h45-12h / Pause

12h-13h15 / **Stephen BARKER** (Université de Nottingham)
Global Expressivism and Truth-Bearers
(en visioconférence)

Président de séance: Ainhoa FERNÁNDEZ (Université du Pays Basque)

N.B. Les conférences, initialement programmées, de Kathrin Glüer-Pagin et de Maria van der Schaar ont dû être annulées du fait de la crise sanitaire.

François RECANATI (Collège de France)

The Aristotelian View, the Spinozist Thesis, and the Frege Point

According to Peter Geach, ‘a proposition may occur in discourse now asserted, now unasserted’. Geach calls this ‘the Frege Point’. It conflicts with the view (held by Aristotle) that to predicate a property of an object *is* to ascribe the property to the object (i.e., to *judge/assert* that the object has the property). The Frege Point suggests that the propositions generated via predication are *intrinsically forceless*: force is added from outside, as it were, when the act of judging or asserting occurs. There is another option, however, which Geach mentions and associates with Spinoza. According to the Spinozist thesis, as described by Geach, ‘a thought is assertoric in character unless it loses this character by occurring only as an element in a more complicated thought’. The aim of this talk is to clarify the (complicated) relations between the Aristotelian view, the Frege Point, and the Spinozist thesis.

Silver BRONZO (Higher School of Economics, Moscou)

Assertion and Composition

This talk connects two questions that are seldom brought together: (1) whether propositional embedding requires a force/content distinction; and (2) what kind of compositional model applies to non-atomic propositions. It has three main goals. First, it discusses and criticizes the view that forceful propositions compose non-mereologically on the model of Fregean reference. Some recent accounts of embedding, it argues, can be taken to propose versions of this approach (Hanks 2019, Hom & Schwartz 2020, Schmitz forthcoming). Secondly, it contrasts this unorthodox approach with the dominant view, on which forceless propositions compose like Fregean sense on the part/whole model. Finally, it proposes a third compositional model for propositional embedding, on which *simulations* of forceful propositions, which are neither forceful nor truth-evaluable, compose on the part/whole model.

Indrek REILAND (Université de Vienne)

What Is It to Say that p ?

Many philosophers of language think that in using a declarative sentence ‘ p ’ with its meaning in a language, one thereby performs the meaning-generated speech act of saying that p . The same goes for interrogative and imperative sentences and the acts of asking questions and telling someone to do something. Austin called such meaning-generated speech acts locutionary acts and distinguished them from the further, illocutionary acts that one performs in saying, asking, and telling-to: e. g. asserting vs. conjecturing, inquiring vs. examining, ordering vs. requesting vs. advising. The main idea is that saying something is one thing, what the real point of your saying it is, what you’re trying to communicate or do, goes well beyond it.

However, there is a puzzle in the heart of theorizing about meaning-generated speech acts, consisting in the apparent inconsistency between two points of view. One point of view insists that sentences can generate such acts only if their meaning encodes force. But all force is illocutionary. Hence, sentence-meaning encodes illocutionary force and locutionary acts are very generic illocutionary acts (Alston, Searle, Garcia-Carpintero). The other point of view insists that non-serious uses of sentences can’t lead to the performance of illocutionary acts (Davidson). Illocutionary force is always a matter of serious intentions. Hence, sentence meaning only encodes content.

In this talk I’m going to argue that we can reconcile the two points of view by distinguishing between locutionary and illocutionary force. I will defend a view on which sentence meaning encodes locutionary force which is what explains the difference between sentences vs. clauses and data about reports, something which the content-only view has trouble with. However, this view still agrees with Davidson that sentence meaning can’t encode illocutionary force which is always a matter of serious intentions.

Peter PAGIN (Université de Stockholm)

Two Concepts of Force

In previous work I have suggested two distinct notions of assertoric force. The first concept is cognitive, and divides into two sub-concepts: being assertoric (or having assertoric force) for the speaker and being assertoric for the hearer. The common idea between these two sub-concepts is that of being **prima facie informative**. An utterance is informative for the speaker iff the speaker makes the utterance at least in part because of believing the proposition expressed. An utterance is informative for the hearer iff the hearer believes the proposition expressed at least in part because of observing the utterance.

The second concept is functional: the force of the utterance **applies** the proposition asserted to the relevant index. Typically, the relevant index is the actual world. For a centered-world theorist it is typically the triple of the actual world, the current time, and the speaker. The force thus connects the content to the index. The speaker asserts the proposition **about** the index.

The question arises: What is the connection between these two concepts? More precisely, if the functional concept is adequate, does the cognitive concept implement it? And if so, how? In this talk I shall try to answer these questions.

Eric MANDELBAUM (City University of New York)

Belief: The Fundamental Cognitive Relation

Common forms of functionalism hold that one cannot have any types of propositional attitude without having a whole suite of them. Thus, one couldn't (e.g.) have beliefs but not have desires, hopes, wishes, and the like. Accordingly, it is generally supposed that all attitudes are on equal footing—that is, they come as a package and none has priority over any other. However, this picture is in tension with a psychofunctional approach

to propositional attitudes, which holds that it is an open empirical question as to which attitudes are governed by psychological law and are thus proper objects of study for cognitive science. In particular, belief seems to have a singular cognitive importance among the attitudes. Beliefs are acquired in a ballistic fashion, with people automatically (and often unconsciously) believing the propositions they encounter. Only after acquisition can one attempt to reject the information. After presenting some new data about automatic belief acquisition and fluency, I'll introduce a picture of why belief has certain phylogenetic, ontogenetic, and causal priority among the attitudes. I'll then examine the case study of antivaccination attitudes to show how belief can spur on behavior without the need to posit desire or any other propositional attitude.

Michael SCHMITZ (Université de Vienne)

The Content of Force

A dualism can be characterized as the exaggeration of a distinction, so that it is not intelligible anymore how the opposed entities can function together and play the roles they are naturally thought to have. Recently Peter Hanks and François Recanati have argued that the traditional construal of the force-content distinction makes it unintelligible how propositions can be truth-value bearers: only something that takes a position with regard to how things are and is in that sense forceful can also succeed or fail in representing the world and thus have a truth value. In parallel fashion, we can also say that only something that takes a position regarding what to do can bear a satisfaction value such as being executed.

In my paper I will propose to overcome the force-content dualism by reconceptualizing the distinction. The central claim is that force itself has content, by which I mean that force indicators have representational, or, more precisely, presentational content: they present the subject's theoretical or practical position vis-à-vis a state of affairs (SOA). A subject may affirm the reality of such a SOA either as a fact from a theoretical, epistemic position in an assertoric act, or as a goal from a practical position in a directive act.

It is aware of the position it takes and indicates it in its speech and thought. But this awareness is not introspective. The subject is not directed at its own position as a fact – as from yet another position behind it. It is rather directed at and aware of what is the case, or what to do. But an awareness of its theoretical or practical position is an integral part of such awareness. It is what makes awareness of the relevant SOA awareness of a fact or of a goal. In contrast, a mere representation of a SOA such as “that the door is closed” is not yet, as Wittgenstein put it, “a move in the language game” (PI, §22). “What do you mean?”, we might ask, “are you asserting this or telling me to bring it about?”.

Basic force indicators such as intonation contour, word order and grammatical mood do not express a concept of this position, but only a sense of it. Their content is thus non-conceptual rather than conceptual. I will argue that the position they present is one of theoretical or practical knowledge. By asserting or directing something a subject presents itself as knowing what is the case or what to do. I believe that this proposal is intuitively plausible and also theoretically advantageous in numerous respects. It harmonizes well with knowledge accounts of assertion and opens the door to a satisfactory account of practical deductive inference. It allows for a straightforward response to Moore’s paradox and, most importantly in the present context, to the ‘Frege point’: if the bearers of truth and other satisfaction value bearers are essentially forceful, how can they occur as clauses of conditionals and in other non-committal contexts?

The argument so far has been that ordinary, genuine force indicators complete truth or other satisfaction value bearers by indicating the position from which the subject is directed at the relevant SOA. They are thus different from the Fregean assertion sign which is supposed to operate on a truth value bearer, conceived of as a forceless proposition. I will argue that the Fregean assertion sign and the ‘Frege point’ that motivates it are based on a conflation of illocutionary force proper with several other distinctions such as those between a free-standing occurrence and an occurrence in a logical context, and an occurrence in a serious vs. a non-serious context. Such contexts are created by what I propose to call “higher-level acts” such

as conditionalizing, negating, playacting or joking, but also questioning. These acts operate on forceful acts such as assertions and directions themselves rather than on something forceless. They create higher-level unities such as conditionals, jokes or questions, which present assertions or directions, but may suspend commitment to them.

The representationalist account makes intelligible how this is possible: we can present a position we have not yet taken, but that we anticipate, or, as François Recanati puts it, simulate. For example, in a conditional we may simulate the eventuality that it is raining in order to decide what else will be the case then or what to do. But we still consider this SOA from a theoretical position. We simulate a possible fact. (Contrast this with a practical conditional such as “To make it rain, dump silver iodide into a cloud!”, where rain is considered as a goal!) We do not only simulate the SOA, but also the position we might take. We therefore still need to use a force indicator to represent it, and this is something we actually do and not merely simulate.

The higher-level act therefore does not cancel or remove the force of what it operates on, but rather shifts or transfers it into the new dimension it creates. It now indicates a position the subject has not yet taken, but anticipates or otherwise simulates. Another example of this are interrogative acts, which I will argue are higher-level illocutionary acts operating on either assertions or directions to yield theoretical questions such as “Is the door closed?” or practical questions such as “Close the door?”. The interrogative force indicator indicates a position of wondering, of seeking knowledge; the assertoric or directive force indicator indicates whether the knowledge sought is theoretical or practical.

We therefore neither need a Fregean assertion sign nor a cancellation sign, but only ordinary force indicators and the various markers of higher-level acts such as interrogative, logical and fictional markers. And we can turn the received view of propositions on its head: a proposition is not something forceless, but a forceful act in its role of being put forward for consideration by a higher-level act. By ascribing content to force indicators, we can leave behind the Frege point and the force-content dualism.

Mitchell GREEN (Université du Connecticut)

On the Semanticization of Force

Recent literature has seen a quickening of interest in ways of domesticating illocutionary force in semantic terms. One line of thought takes inspiration from Chierchia and McConnell Ginet (*Meaning and Grammar*, 2000) who influentially distinguished between *sentential force* and *utterance force*. Recently Murray and Starr ('The Structure of Communicative Acts', *Linguistics & Philosophy*, 2020) have argued on empirical and methodological grounds for a treatment of the former as a phenomenon amenable to analysis in terms of compositional dynamic semantics. If successful, Murray and Starr will have strengthened the case for treating (one aspect of force) in semantic terms. Another strategy conceives of force as represented semantically within declarative sentences. Van Elswyck ('Representing Knowledge', *Philosophical Review*, 2021) for instance argues that declaratives host a covert parenthetical, 'I know', and uses this hypothesis to explain why assertions represent the speaker as knowing the proposition asserted. In this talk I will set forth both Murray and Starr's and Van Elswyck's approaches, and argue that neither is successful.

Peter HANKS (Université du Minnesota)

Varieties of Cancellation

In order for something to be true or false it must take a stand on how things are, which involves a commitment to things being a certain way. These concepts of "taking a stand" and "commitment" are given to us by the concepts of assertion and judgment. Hence, in order for something to be true or false it must, in some sense, assert or judge that things are a certain way. The concept of a truth-evaluable, force-neutral content is incoherent. But what could it mean for a proposition to assert that

things are a certain way? The best way to make sense of this is to identify propositions with types of acts of predication, where predication is understood to be assertoric in character. But as everyone knows, this runs up against the Frege-Geach point. To solve this problem I introduced the concept of cancellation, which is best understood as a kind of context in which someone can perform an act of predication without thereby performing an assertion or judgment. Cancellation contexts come in many different forms. The main point of this paper is that it is a mistake to look for a general explanation of cancellation that will account for all the varieties of cancellation contexts. It is easy to explain what is going on in any particular case of cancellation, but these explanations are local and specific. The error comes in thinking that we have not understood cancellation until we have an overarching theory that covers all the forms that cancellation can take. I will argue for this conclusion by considering an attempt at such a general theory put forward by François Recanati (2019). Before that, however, I would like to make a preliminary point about the *inescapability* of cancellation. Even Frege must accept the existence of something like cancellation. Frege held that assertion is “contained” in the assertoric form of declarative sentences. But then why doesn’t a speaker assert the antecedent or consequent of a conditional, despite the fact that both antecedent and consequent have assertoric form? The answer must be that something about the conditional cancels the normal assertoric force contained in assertoric sentences. So long as there is a semantic or conventional association between declarative sentences and assertion, cancellation is inescapable. The only way to avoid it is to deny that there is any such association, a view also defended by Recanati (1987; 2013). Here I will try to rebut Recanati’s argument. The remaining question is whether to locate assertion in the contents of declarative sentences or to view assertion as semantically associated with the declarative mood but external to content. The incoherence of the force-content distinction shows that it must be the former.

Stephen BARKER (Université de Nottingham)

Global Expressivism and Truth-Bearers

I tentatively explore in an informal way the concept of global expressivism and focus in particular on expressivism about meaning attributions and truth. I indicate that expressivists about meaning should not deny that there are meanings—they should not embrace a first-order nihilism about the subject-matter of domains of discourse that are treated expressively—but rather they should rather accept a second-order nihilism that undercuts inquiry into the true nature of what we are talking about when we talk about meanings. I then address the question of the nature of truth-bearers and the force-sense distinction. Instead of offering a theory of what truth-bearers are, in adopting global expressivism we attempt to give an account of what speakers express when they assert or judge that a sentence is truth-apt and expresses a content that is assertoric. Seeking a theory of what truth-bearers really are—what theoretic model we should accept about their real or ultimate natures—is one that is undercut by the expressivist orientation.



Before his recent election at Collège de France (2018), **François Recanati** was a CNRS research fellow and a 'directeur d'études' at EHESS, as well as the Director of Institut Jean-Nicod, a research lab in philosophy, linguistics and cognitive science hosted by Ecole Normale Supérieure in Paris. He taught in many universities around the world, including Berkeley, Harvard, Geneva, and St Andrews. His publications in the philosophy of language and mind include more than one hundred articles, many edited books, and a dozen monographs, including *Meaning and Force* (CUP, 1987), *Direct Reference* (Blackwell 1993), *Oratio Obliqua, Oratio Recta* (MIT Press 2000), *Literal Meaning* (CUP 2004), *Perspectival Thought* (OUP 2007), *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics* (OUP, 2010), *Mental Files* (OUP, 2012), and *Mental Files in Flux* (OUP, 2016). He was the first President of the European Society for Analytic Philosophy (1990-93), and the Principal Investigator of an ERC-funded advanced research project on Context, Content and Compositionality (2009-2013). A Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and a member of Academia Europaea, he was awarded the CNRS Silver Medal in 2014 and a Honorary Doctorate from Stockholm University (also in 2014). François Recanati belongs to the editorial board of many scientific journals in linguistics and philosophy, and is the general editor of two book series.



Silver Bronzo is Assistant Professor at the School of Philosophy of HSE University, Moscow. He received his PhD from the Department of Philosophy of the University of Chicago in 2015. He works mainly in the history of analytic philosophy, the philosophy of language, and the philosophy of logic. Among his recent publications: "Propositional Complexity and the Frege-Geach Point" (*Synthese*, 2021); "Actions, Products, and Truth-Bearers: A Critique of Twardowskian Accounts" (*Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 2020); "Truth-Bearers in Frege and the Tractatus" (*Analiza i Egzystencja*, 2019); *Wittgenstein on Sense and Grammar* (Cambridge University Press, forthcoming).



Indrek Reiland received his PhD from the University of Southern California. Since then he's worked at Rice University and University of Edinburgh and completed postdoctoral fellowships at Institut Jean Nicod and University of Barcelona. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the University of Vienna. His research interests are in philosophy of language and mind, especially the nature of our linguistic and mental capacities, and how they're related to each other. He's the author of papers published in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, *Philosophical Studies*, *Synthese*, and *Inquiry* among others.



Peter Pagin is professor of philosophy at Stockholm University, where he also got his PhD in 1987. He has worked in the philosophy of language and philosophy of logic and in formal semantics. Two of his main topics are semantic compositionality, in formal semantics, and assertion, in speech act theory. Pagin's most recent publications are 'The force of assumptions and self-attributions', in Justin Vlastos and Katja Vogt (eds.), *Epistemology after Sextus Empiricus*, OUP 2020; 'When does communication succeed? The case of general terms.', in Teresa Marques and Åsa Wikforss (eds.), *Shifting Concepts*, OUP 2020; 'Compositionality, computability, and complexity', published 2020 as accepted manuscript in *Review of Symbolic Logic*. Co-authored with Kathrin Glüer, there is an almost complete book manuscript on the semantic framework of Switcher Semantics, under contract with OUP.

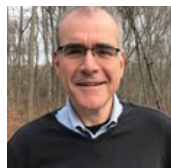


Eric Mandelbaum (Graduate Center and Baruch College, City University of New York) primarily works on questions of attitudes and perception to build broad models of cognitive architecture. He has been constructing a psychofunctional theory of belief, which details the laws of how belief works in cognitive science. The research program specifies how beliefs are acquired (poorly), how they are stored (in a fragmented manner), and how they are changed (in line with a Psychological Immune System for beliefs that are self-defining). Other recent work includes examining the

limits of the computational theory of mind, the feasibility of mental uploading, the iconic aspects of language (particularly for slurs), how outliers are discounted in ensemble representations in vision, the logical basis of unconscious thought, and the role of fluency and abstraction in causing people to believe in the meaningfulness of pseudo-profound bullshit. Prior to joining CUNY, Prof. Mandelbaum held positions at the University of Oxford, Yale University, and Harvard University.



After completing his PhD on the mind-body problem, **Michael Schmitz** has been a postdoc in Konstanz and an Assistant Professor at the University of Vienna, from which he is about to receive his habilitation. He has also been a visitor at UCL and UC Berkeley and has published several edited volumes and numerous articles in the philosophy of mind, language and society.



Mitch Green is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Connecticut, having taught previously at the University of Virginia. His research centers on philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, and aesthetics. He currently focuses on philosophical implications of the evolutionary biology of communication, speech act theory, the force/content distinction, the nature of expression, and types of conversation. Recent publications include *The Philosophy of Language* (Oxford, 2020), *Know Thyself: The Value and Limits of Self-Knowledge* (Routledge, 2018), 'Context and Conversation' (*Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Semantics*, 2021), 'Assertion and Convention' (*Oxford Handbook of Assertion*, 2020), 'Assertion: A Partly Social Account' (with N. Marsili, *J. Pragmatics*, forth.), and 'Force, Content, and Translucent Self-Ascriptions' (forth. in G. Mras and M. Schmitz (Eds.) *Force, Content & the Unity of the Proposition*). A recent special issue of the journal *Grazer Philosophische Studien* (vol. 96, 2019) contained articles responding to Green's research from over the last 25 years.



Peter Hanks is Professor and Chair in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Minnesota. His book, *Propositional Content*, (Oxford 2015) argues against the force/content distinction and defends the view that propositions are types of acts of predication. He has also published papers on Russell and the early Wittgenstein, and is currently working on a book about Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*.



Stephen Barker has been a professor at the University of Nottingham since 2002. He finished his PhD at the University of Melbourne in 1996, and has had postdoc positions in Mexico (UNAM), Monash University, and University of Tasmania. He works on philosophy of language, metaphysics, metametaphysics, and Buddhist philosophy.

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