

# Not Function but Function Conquered: Against a Functionalist Theory of Directives

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Submitted to the Department of Linguistics and Philosophy  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN PHILOSOPHY

at the

MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

September 2024

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## ABSTRACT

Ordering, requesting, and inviting are examples of directive speech acts. Philosophers have offered different accounts of what it is to perform a directive, which they have developed using different theoretical resources. Attitudinal theories of speech acts try to explain what it is to perform a directive in terms of a speaker's beliefs, desires, and intentions. Nonattitudinal theories of speech acts try to explain directives in terms of something else.

This thesis is concerned with functionalism, a nonattitudinal theory of speech acts. According to functionalism, performing a directive is making an utterance with the etiological function of causing hearers to act in response to one's utterance. I argue that functionalism is false. I develop counterexamples that show functionalism is too permissive about the kinds of causation suitable for generating directives. I argue further that the most plausible way to address these counterexamples is to become more attitudinal: rather than be permissive, functionalism should hold that directives and hearers' responses to them are caused by specific internal processes.

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# Acknowledgments

I could not have completed this project without the help of many people.

I am especially grateful to my committee, Justin Khoo and Sam Berstler. Justin has been an ideal advisor. I have benefitted from his creativity and his enthusiasm for philosophy. Sam has been a dedicated mentor. I have learned from her philosophical insight and rigor. I thank both of them for their patient support and generous feedback over the years.

I'd also like to thank Bob Stalnaker and Brad Skow, who agreed to be committee members for the discontinued dissertation from which this thesis emerged. Thanks to Brad for comments on early versions of the thesis.

Being a graduate student at MIT has been a dream come true. I have learned so much from this community of philosophers. Special thanks to my cohort, Félix-Antoine Gelineau; Jess Heine; Josh Pearson; and Eliza Wells, for the game nights and dinners. Thanks to Jack Spencer for being a welcoming and encouraging first year advisor. I am also thankful for helpful discussion about directives with Kenneth Black, Luke Ciancarelli, Kevin Dorst, Bennett Eckart, Yonathan Fiat, Félix-Antoine Gelineau, Sophie Gibert, Jess Heine, Michele Odisseas Impagnatiello, Lilian Jin, Cate Leech, Philipp Mayr, Abe Mathew, Saki Munday, Sonia Pavel, Vincent Rouillard, John Schwenkler, Isaijah Shadrach, Jack Spencer, Roger White, Eliza Wells, and Katie Zhou.

I also want to thank my sister, Elizabeth, and my brothers, Matt and Thomas, for being there for me and commiserating with me about academic life.

Of course, I am filled with gratitude for my father, Chris, and my mother, Peggy, who have believed in me and supported me in all my goals.

Most of all, I want to thank Cate for her love and encouragement.



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Not funk but funk conquered is what is  
worthy of admiration and makes life  
worth having been lived.

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Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*

## 1 Introduction

Orders, requests, invitations, and suggestions—these speech acts, *directives*, seem to have something in common, something that sets them apart from speech acts such as assertion, conjecture, or guesses. But what is it, and what theoretical resources should we use to give an answer? According to *functionalist theories of directives*, directives are distinguished from other speech acts by their function. On this view, functions are effects had by utterances that explain why they are reproduced by speakers, and speakers reproduce directives because they cause hearers to act in certain ways in response to them. I argue that functionalism is false: having the function of causing action in hearers is not sufficient for being a directive. It is not sufficient because successful directives cause hearers to act in certain nondeviant ways—ways that functionalism, by design, does not require a hearer to be caused to act by.

Here is my plan for the paper: In the next section, I introduce the notion of a directive speech act within the theory of speech acts in general. Then, I situate functionalism with respect to two popular alternative theories of speech acts, conventionalism and intentionalism, before developing a functionalist account of directives. One of the main advantages of functionalism, according to its proponents, is that it offers an account of directives that avoids appealing to language users' propositional attitudes—their beliefs, desires, and intentions. Next, in my main critique of functionalism, I will describe three cases illustrating how the view goes wrong. Finally, I consider whether functionalism can be modified to avoid my counterexamples. I argue that it cannot without abandoning its commitment to a nonattitudinal explanation of directives.

## 2 Speech acts and directives

We use language to do things.<sup>1</sup> As the following case illustrates, *getting others to do things* is one of the things that we use language to do.

### Order

Sarah owns a small catering business, and she is catering a party for a client named Sean. While she is setting up for the party, a large group of guests arrive early. She phones her employee, Harvey, who is shopping for food, and says, *Come to the party*. Harvey pays for the food and goes to help Sarah.

By uttering these words, Sarah gets Harvey to come to the party. More specifically, she *orders* him to come. Ordering is just one example of a *speech act* or *illocutionary act*—roughly, an action

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1. Austin (1962).



performed by making an utterance.<sup>2</sup> One question that a theory of speech acts aims to answer is: What exactly is Sarah doing when she orders him to come? Another, more general, question that such theories try to answer is: What does one do when one gets others to act on the basis of one's words? Or to use the jargon of theories of speech acts, what is it to perform a *directive speech act*? Functionalism is a theory of a speech acts, and it offers answers to these two questions. My goal is to evaluate functionalism's answers. In this section, I will clarify how I am understanding speech acts in general and directives in particular, highlighting some desiderata that an adequate theory of directives should satisfy.

To describe Sarah as ordering Harvey to come to the party is to hone in on a certain level of activity. There are many descriptions of what Sarah is doing at the moment she utters the words *Come to the party* to Harvey. She is vibrating her vocal cords in a series of specific frequencies while moving her mouth. She is holding her phone at a distance from which its microphone can pick up the sounds she is making. She is catering a party. She is earning a living. How do these different levels of description relate to the description of Sarah as ordering Harvey, the one that specifies the speech act or illocutionary act that she performs, the one that characterizes the *illocutionary force* of her utterance?

Following Austin (1962)'s terminology, when Sarah utters *Come to the party*, she performs a certain *locutionary act*. By performing this locutionary act, she thereby performs a certain *illocutionary act*, namely, ordering Harvey to come to the party.

Sarah's locutionary act consists in uttering the sentence *Come to the party*, which expresses a certain semantic content. The precise nature of this content is controversial. The sentence *Come to the party* has an *imperative clause type*, and there are competing semantic theories of the imperative clause type.<sup>3</sup> Fortunately, we don't need to decide between these proposals to make progress on the notion of a speech act. For our purposes, it is enough to note the correspondence between the imperative clause type of Sarah's utterance and the speech act she performs with it.

Besides imperative clause types, natural languages also contain declarative (e.g., *The door is closed*) and interrogative type clauses (*Is the door closed?*). These different types of clauses are associated with different activities. Just as we use language to get others to do things, we also use language to inquire and inform each other about the world. Clearly, then, there is a correspondence between speech acts and clause types.

The correspondence, however, is not one-to-one, as shown by the following case.

### **Invitation**

Sean is running errands, and he runs into Helen, his friend. He says *Come to the party!* to her. It is clear to both of them that he wants Helen to come to the party. Later, Helen shows up.

As the label for the scenario suggests, it is natural to describe Sean as *inviting her to the party*.

Sean and Sarah utter tokens of the same sentence type. Sean invites, but Sarah orders. Hence, uttering an imperative is not sufficient for performing either an invitation or an order. A theory

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2. Following the usage of Harris, Fogal, and Moss (2018, 1) (who are following Austin (1962)), I use these emphasized terms interchangeably.

3. See, e.g., Portner (2004), Kaufmann (2012), Charlow (2014), and Starr (2020) for some proposals. We should also distinguish the illocutionary force of an utterance of a sentence in context with its *dynamic force* (Yalcin 2018) or *characteristic effect* on the conversational context (Portner 2004). Perhaps these notions ought to be related to the notion of *sentential force* from Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet (2000). See Murray and Starr (2021) for discussion.

of speech acts ought to tell us what makes it the case that Sarah's utterance constitutes an order and what makes it the case that Sean's utterance constitutes an invitation.

Sean and Sarah perform different speech acts. However, despite this difference, it is also natural to describe Sean and Sarah as *doing the same thing*: Sean *tells* Helen to come to the party, just as Sarah *tells* Harvey. This intuitive notion of *telling someone to do something* contrasts with the notion of *telling someone something*. Elaborating on the first case, for instance, suppose Sean says *The party is this afternoon*. Again, there is an intuitive contrast between this utterance and his utterance of *Come to the party*. With the former, he tells Helen that the party is that afternoon without necessarily telling her to do anything about it.

I'll use the term *directive* to refer to the category of speech acts that includes these acts of ordering and inviting.<sup>4</sup> Sean performs a directive (more specifically, he performs an invitation) by uttering an imperative. Sometimes, I will also use the terms *directs*, *directing*, and so on, as a shorthand, using phrases such *Sean directs Helen to come to the party by uttering the imperative Close the door*.

The intuitive difference between telling someone something and telling them to do something is related to what philosophers call *directions of fit*.<sup>5</sup> Constative speech acts (which might be thought to correspond to the notion of telling someone something) have a "words-to-world" direction of fit. In responding to a constative act, such as an assertion, a hearer typically forms a belief, thereby changing their mental state to match the content of the assertion (and, in an ideal case, the world). Directive speech acts, on the other hand, have a "world-to-words" direction of fit: in responding to a directive act, such as an order, a hearer acts, thereby changing the world to match the content of the order.

A related difference between constatives and directives is their intuitive relation to truth and falsity.<sup>6</sup> Sean's assertion that the party is in the afternoon is true, and it is easy to imagine conditions under which it could be false, but his invitation does not seem to be true or false.<sup>7</sup> In general, constatives are capable of being true or false, while directives are not.

Why focus on directives as a whole rather than particular speech acts? One reason is to abstract away from irrelevant details of existing accounts of these acts.<sup>8</sup> Another reason is that the problems I will pose for the functionalist account of directives are general. They do not turn on whether we are considering ordering or requesting or any particular directive.

Before I turn to functionalism, let me review the terminology introduced so far: as I am using it, the term *directive* refers to a certain category of speech acts, and I'll distinguish this category

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4. The use of the term *directive* goes back to Searle (1975a). See also Bach and Harnish (1979).

5. The notion of a direction of fit is originally due to Anscombe (1963). Searle (1975a, 355–356) characterizes directives in terms of their "world-to-words" direction of fit, which they share with "commissives," a category that includes promises. See Butlin (2021, 7–8) for a more recent discussion of the notion of direction of fit as it relates to the more general notion of a *directive representation*. Thanks to Sam Berstler for suggesting characterizing directives in terms of direction of fit.

6. Thanks to Sam Berstler for encouraging me to discuss this.

7. Austin (1962) took admitting of truth and falsity to be defining characteristics of constative utterances. See Kaufmann (2021) for a recent discussion of the intuitive judgment that directives do not admit of truth or falsity.

8. Millikan (1984, 57–58) sketches functionalist accounts of requests, advice, and instruction. She also briefly discusses orders, though I am not clear on her final analysis; see also Millikan (2005, 179). Similarly, Murray and Starr (2018, 229) sketch a functionalist account of commands, though it is unclear to me whether they take commands to have a different function from requests or other directives. They do, however distinguish commands from utterances of imperatives with other functions, such as "merely activating the hearer's imagination" (230).

from the category of *constatives*. The terms *imperative* and *declarative*, on the other hand, refer to (clause types of) sentences, which, when uttered, can be used to perform speech acts. Although I don't intend to make any firm commitments about which speech acts are included in the category of directives, I'll assume that ordering and requesting are directives, while assertion is a constative. Some other constative might include supposition or conjecture (Williamson 1996, 2000)).<sup>9</sup>

### 3 Functionalism about speech acts

#### 3.1 Attitudinal versus nonattitudinal theories of speech acts

Historically, the two most prominent theories of speech acts have been conventionalism and intentionalism.<sup>10</sup> According to conventionalism, to perform a speech act is to make an utterance that is governed by a certain linguistic convention. For example, according to Searle (1969), Sarah orders Harvey to come to the party because she utters a sentence governed by a linguistic convention that specifies various necessary and sufficient conditions for performing an order in her language. Her utterance counts as an attempt to get Harvey to do something, he is able to do it, she is sincere in making the utterance only if she wants him to do it, and so on.<sup>11</sup> Other speech acts are distinguished from orders by different linguistic conventions that specify different necessary and sufficient conditions for performing these acts (e.g., the linguistic convention in virtue of which an utterance counts as an invitation specifies that one has authority over one's addressee). According to intentionalism, by contrast, to perform a speech act is to make an utterance with a certain intention. According to Schiffer (1972), for instance, Sarah orders Harvey to come to that party because she intends that Harvey come, that he recognize her intention that he come, and that he comes to the party in part because he recognizes that first intention.<sup>12</sup> For the intentionalist, other speech acts are distinguished from orders by the effects that a speaker intends to bring about in their addressee when they are performed. An utterance counts as an order only when its speaker intends that their addressee act partly because the speaker has authority over them.

Besides offering accounts of various particular speech acts, such as ordering and inviting, both conventionalism and intentionalism have the resources to define the category of directives. According to Searle (1975a, 355)'s conventionalism, for instance, a speech act is a directive if in virtue of the speech act's defining linguistic convention, it is essential to the act that performing it is "[an attempt] ... to get the hearer to do something". Similarly, according to Bach and Harnish (1979)'s intentionalism, a speech act is a directive if it involves an intention for the addressee to intentionally do something (rather than, e.g., form a belief).

Conventionalism and intentionalism fall on opposing sides of a distinction between *attitudinal* and *nonattitudinal* theories of speech acts.<sup>13</sup> Attitudinal theories try to explain what it is to

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9. These terms get used in different ways. Some people contrast directives with assertions. There's Stalnaker (1978)'s characterization of assertion in terms of its essential effect.

10. See Harris, Fogal, and Moss (2018, 2–7) for a recent overview of conventionalism and intentionalism.

11. This is a sketch. I'm omitting some details from Searle's analysis of requesting. Other proponents of conventionalism include Lewis (1975) and Lepore and Stone (2015).

12. Again, this sketch omits some inessential details from Schiffer's analysis of requesting. Other proponents of intentionalism include Bach and Harnish (1979) and Harris (2014).

13. Thanks to Sam Berstler for suggesting this way of framing the dialectic between functionalism and the other views discussed in the paper.

perform a speech act wholly in terms of a speaker's propositional attitudes—their beliefs, desires, and intentions. Since intentionalism claims that performing a speech act is doing something with a certain intention, it is one example of an attitudinal theory, but there are others.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, nonattitudinal theories try to explain what it is to perform a speech act in terms of something besides a speaker's propositional attitudes. Since whether an utterance is governed by a certain linguistic convention depends on something other than its speaker's intentions, conventionalism is one example of a nonattitudinal theory, and so is functionalism.

### 3.2 Intentionalism as an attitudinal theory

For the sake of concreteness, I will formulate my argument against functionalism using intentionalism as an example of an attitudinal theory. It will be helpful to put more flesh on the skeletal version of intentionalism that I sketched earlier.

Intentionalism about speech acts derives from Grice (1957)'s theory of speaker meaning. Roughly, Grice argues that speaker meaning involves a speaker's intending to bring about a certain effect in their addressee by their hearer recognizing this very intention, or *having a communicative intention*. He identifies two kinds of effect that a speaker can intend to bring about through their communicative intention: belief or action, so there are two kinds of speaker meaning.<sup>15</sup> For obvious reasons, I'll focus on the latter kind of speaker meaning.

Grice proposed the following analysis of speaker meaning aimed at bringing about action:

#### Speaker meaning

$S$  means for  $H$  to  $\phi$  by uttering  $u$  iff

1.  $S$  intends  $H$  for  $H$  to do  $\phi$ ;
2.  $S$  intends for  $H$  to recognize  $S$ 's intention in (1);
3.  $S$  intends for  $H$  to do  $\phi$  partly on the basis of (2).

Intentionalists extend Grice's theory of speaker meaning into a theory of speech acts. Grice's two kinds of speaker meaning correspond to the categories of constative and directive speech acts.<sup>16</sup> As I noted earlier, according to such views, specific types of directives are analyzed in terms of additional constraints on the reasons for the hearer's action. For instance, when performing an order, the speaker intends that the hearer do act partly on the basis of recognizing the speaker's communicative intention and partly on the basis of the speaker's having the authority to obligate the hearer to do the intended action.

Let's say that a speaker has a *directive communicative intention* for their addressee to do something by making an utterance if and only if they satisfy the conditions for speaker meaning aimed at bringing about action in their addressee.

In general, I'll operate with the following definition of intentionalism:

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14. E.g., expressionism (Harris, Fogal, and Moss 2018, 9–11), and some perhaps some interpretations of discourse context theories (14–22).

15. Later, Grice (1969) suggests different effects: belief and intention.

16. Early intentionalists include Schiffer (1972), Bach and Harnish (1979). Harris (2014) is a recent proponent of intentionalism, among others.

### Intentionalism about directives

To direct  $H$  to  $\phi$  is to have a directive communicative intention for  $H$  to  $\phi$ .

According to intentionalism, a speaker's attitudes determine whether and what kind of directive is performed. In **Order**, when Sarah orders Harvey to come to the party, the intentionalist explains Sarah's order in terms of her attitudes towards Harvey. When she makes her utterance, she intends that Harvey come to the party because he recognizes that she intends this. Harvey is disposed to be motivated by such recognition because he knows that if he does not obey Sarah's orders, he might be fired. He has a standing intention to do what Sarah wants him to do (at least within a certain range of actions relating to catering). All of these considerations figure into Sarah's overall mental state when she forms her directive communicative intention. Since she knows something about Harvey's motivations, she knows that when he discerns her intention for him to come to the party, his background desire to stay employed will motivate him to come.

Once a directive has been performed by a speaker the hearer's attitudes determine whether it is successful. According to intentionalism, when a speaker performs a directive, they represent not only the action to be performed by the hearer but also the motivational process involved in giving rise to this action. The speaker intends that the hearer act on the basis of recognizing the speaker's intention that they act.

Being nonattitudinal comes in degrees. For instance, Searle (1969)'s version of conventionalism is not a purely nonattitudinal theory because it makes reference to the speaker's attitudes in the essential condition of directives, namely, that directives are essentially attempts by the speaker to get the hearer to do something. However, Searlean conventionalism is partly nonattitudinal insofar as it holds that these attempts count as directives because they are governed by a certain linguistic convention.

Although a proponent of a nonattitudinal theory does not explain what it is to perform a directive in terms of a speaker's attitudes, they can and should grant that a speaker has certain attitudes when they perform a speech act. For instance, when Sarah orders Harvey to come to the party in the **Order** case, she wants him to come to the party. What the nonattitudinal theorist denies is that these attitudes are necessary for her performing an order.<sup>17</sup> In some other cases, she could still perform the order even if she lacked the desire that Harvey come to the party.

### 3.3 Functionalism as a nonattitudinal theory

The distinction between attitudinal and nonattitudinal theories helps situate functionalism with respect of intentionalism and conventionalism. On the one hand, functionalism is motivated by a desire to avoid intentionalism's commitment to explaining speech acts in terms of language users' attitudes. However, functionalism also tries to avoid what I'll call the *problem of determination by linguistic form*, which plagues conventionalism.

Let me start with the problem of determination by linguistic form. Murray and Starr (2018, 207–209) argue that conventionalism entails that the linguistic form of an utterance completely determines the speech act that it can be used to perform. This is implausible because different

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17. Millikan (1984, 62–63) makes a similar distinction between *having* a propositional attitude when performing a speech act (making an utterance) and *using* it to perform a speech act. According to Millikan, a speaker might have a belief, in some sense, when performing an assertion without using the belief to perform it. The point here is slightly different.

utterances with the same form (e.g., two imperative sentences) can be used to perform different speech acts (e.g., a request and a command).<sup>18</sup>

As I have already discussed, uttering an imperative sentence is not sufficient for performing a directive. Neither is it necessary. On the one hand, von Stechow and Iatridou (2017) argue for the existence of so-called *indifference* or *acquiescence imperatives*, which seem to be used to perform speech acts besides directives (such as granting permission—e.g., *Come to the party, don't come—I don't mind! Do what you want!*).<sup>19</sup> Moreover, imperatives can be used to perform speech acts that are less centrally tied to notions of obligation and permission, such as assertions (Davidson 1979). On the other hand, directives need not be performed with utterances of imperatives. Some directives can be performed using explicit performatives such as *I order you to open the door* or *I request you to open the door*. Moreover, just as imperatives can be used to perform speech acts such as assertion, declaratives and interrogatives can be used to perform directive speech acts. Functionalism avoids the problem of determination by linguistic form by allowing that utterances with the same linguistic form have different functions.

In general, why try to explain speech acts in nonattitudinal terms? Functionalists complain that intentionalists place too demanding requirements on speaker's cognitive capacities to be able to perform speech acts. For instance, Millikan (1984, chap. 3) argues that functionalism is superior to intentionalism because it explains linguistic communication without appealing to an infinite hierarchy of iterated intentions, as some have claimed intentionalism (i.e., Griceanism) requires. Having complicated intentions is not required for being able to perform speech acts because an utterance's having a certain function does not depend on being able to have certain intentions. Hence, functionalism predicts a continuity between the communicative behavior of nonhuman animals and adult humans.<sup>20</sup>

Relatedly, Murray and Starr (2018, 204, 221) argue that functionalism enjoys an explanatory advantage over intentionalism with respect to subordinating speech. Since subordination operates independently of speakers' intentions, intentionalism apparently lacks the resources to explain it. By contrast, functionalism is well-situated to explain subordinating speech in terms of its function, underwritten by social norms that work without speaker intentions.

Besides avoiding these problems, the nonattitudinal approach taken by functionalism seems independently motivated. It integrates cleanly with a naturalistic methodology for explaining human communication. Proponents of functionalism are attracted to functionalism due to its promise in explaining human communication using the same tools as empirical research on animal communication (Millikan 1984, 2004, 2005; Murray and Starr 2018; Starr 2018).<sup>21</sup>

### 3.4 Functions of utterances

According to functionalism, to perform a speech act is to do something with a certain function. In this context, the function of a speech act is its *etiological function*—an effect had by a type of utterance that explains why it is reproduced among a population of language users. The primary

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18. See also Harris, Fogal, and Moss (2018, 2–4).

19. See also Carter (2022).

20. Murray and Starr (2018, 215–217).

21. There are also philosophers who appeal to the function of speech acts—primarily assertion—for the epistemological goal of explaining why hearers are justified or epistemically rational in forming various doxastic attitudes in response to a speaker's testimony. See, among other, Graham (2020), Kelp and Simion (2021), van Elswyk (2023).

functionalist theory of speech acts is Millikan (1984, 1998)'s initial account, according to which performing a speech act is making an utterance whose function is causing a response in a hearer to that type of utterance.<sup>22</sup> A response to a certain type of utterance, according to Millikan, is a reaction in a hearer that has been reproduced from other reactions to utterances of that type.

I will take functionalism about speech acts to be the following view:

### **Functionalism about speech acts**

For every speech act-type  $S$ , there is an utterance-type  $U$  and a response  $R$  to  $U$  such that to perform  $S$  is to make an utterance of type  $U$  whose function is causing  $R$  in hearers.

The most prominent version of functionalism about speech acts has been developed by Millikan (1984, 1995, 1998, 2005). More recently, Murray and Starr (2018) and Starr (2018) argue for a similar version of functionalism integrating frameworks from formal semantics and pragmatics and work on social norms.

Functionalism relies on the notion of an *etiological* or *proper function*. Roughly, an etiological function is an effect had by something that explains why the thing is reproduced.<sup>23</sup>

I'll explain the notion of an utterance's function informally before offering an explicit definition.

Any particular utterance is the last item in a causal chain, which I'll call its *etiology*. According to the etiological conception of functions, whether an utterance has a certain function depends on facts about its etiology. There are two constraints that an utterance  $u$ 's etiology must satisfy in order for  $u$  to have the function of causing an effect  $F$ . First, there must be other utterances in  $u$ 's etiology— $u$ 's *ancestors* or *models*, to use Millikan (1984)'s terminology—that caused  $F$ . In other words,  $u$  must be a *reproduction* of some utterances that caused  $F$ . Second, there must be stages in  $u$ 's etiology involving causal processes that constitute a *feedback mechanism* that relies on  $u$ 's ancestors causing the effect  $F$  to produce further utterances, including  $u$ . In other words, the fact that  $u$ 's ancestors caused  $F$  must causally explain  $u$ 's existence.

Let me illustrate this etiological conception of function with a common example: my heart has the function of pumping blood because its etiology includes my parents' hearts, which pumped blood, and their parents' hearts, which pumped blood, and so on, as well as the causal processes of biological reproduction, which constitute a feedback mechanism producing my heart depending on my ancestors' hearts pumping blood. The fact that my ancestors' hearts pumped blood causally explains the existence of my heart.

Functionalism makes a claim about the function of utterances rather than organs. According to functionalism, different types of utterance are produced by speakers because of the particular effects that they have on hearers. Hence, these different effects—the functions of the reproduced utterances—serve to causally explain the existence of particular utterances and differentiate speech act types.

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22. Murray and Starr (2018) and Starr (2018) are more recent proponents of functionalism.

23. In addition to Millikan (1984), whose definition of proper function I will rely on, I have learned much from discussions of etiological functions by McLaughlin (2001, chap. 5), Graham (2020), and van Elswyk (2023). Note, however, that these latter three authors adopt a more general conception of etiological function that does not require a function-bearer to be a reproduction of ancestors to have an etiological function. Following Bedau (1991), they also add an explicit condition to the definition of etiological function requiring that a function benefit the function bearer. See McLaughlin (2001). These complications are orthogonal to my arguments, so I set them aside.

But when is an utterance a reproduction of other utterances? Not every utterance appearing in  $u$ 's etiology is an ancestor of  $u$  in the relevant sense. My utterance of *It's 10:04* is not a reproduction of your utterance of *What time is it?*, even if the latter occurs in the former's etiology.

Throughout my discussion, I will be presupposing Millikan (1984, 19)'s definition of reproduction, since this definition is adopted by Millikan herself and her contemporary followers (Murray and Starr 2018; Starr 2018).<sup>24</sup> However, the finer details of this definition won't be relevant to my discussion, so I'll restrict myself to an intuitive sketch: a reproduction shares some property in common with its ancestor in virtue of the ancestor's causal influence.<sup>25</sup>

A reproduction needn't be an exact replica of its model. My heart is not a perfect duplicate of my parents' hearts. However, it has the same physical structure as their hearts in virtue of my inheriting genes that were responsible for the structure of their hearts. Moreover, this physical structure is what makes hearts able to pump blood. Similarly, an utterance does not need to share every feature in common with its ancestors.<sup>26</sup> For our purposes, we will consider an utterance to be a reproduction of another if it is caused by utterances of the same clause type. And, as with hearts, sharing a clause type with its ancestor is part of what makes utterances able to perform their function.

For instance, Sarah's utterance of *Come to the party* reproduces the imperative clause type of other imperatives she has heard, and Sean's utterance of *The party is the afternoon* reproduces the declarative clause type of other declaratives.

By characterizing reproductions of utterances in terms of clause type, we head off a natural worry about functionalism: many utterances are utterances of sentences that have never been uttered before. Nevertheless, such utterances do count as reproductions of other utterances in the relevant sense because speakers reproduce the clause type of other utterances they have perceived before.

Let me turn to the second constraint, which involves feedback mechanisms. I've already mentioned one feedback mechanism that can generate functions: biological reproduction. Parts of organisms cause certain effects, which allows those organisms to reproduce, thereby creating more of those parts.

The foregoing can be captured with the following definition of utterance function:

### Utterance function (UF)

An utterance type  $U$  has the function of causing  $F$  iff

1. Past utterances of type  $U$ ,  $U$ 's ancestors, caused  $F$ ;
2. that  $U$ 's ancestors caused  $F$  causally explains  $u$ .<sup>27</sup>

One key feature of functionalism as I am developing it is that the view is neutral about the kinds of feedback mechanisms responsible for functions. This is an explicit commitment of some

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24. See previous note.

25. For a full discussion, see Millikan (1984, 18–21).

26. I'm eliding one disanalogy between hearts and utterances. Millikan (1984) distinguishes between *direct* and *indirect* reproductions. Organs such as hearts are indirect reproductions of other organs, reproduced through the direct reproduction of genes. Utterances and other "language devices" are direct reproductions.

27. This definition is based on McLaughlin (2001)'s reconstruction of Millikan (1984)'s definition of proper function. See, e.g., Millikan (1989, 288).



functionalists. For instance, although Murray and Starr (2018) argue that social norms are one important feedback mechanism for generating speech acts, they also claim that “social norms are not essential for generating [speech acts]” (230). The feedback mechanisms involved in the function of utterances might involve various processes, including innate processes in speakers and hearers but also forms of learning (both individual learning and social instruction), intentional design and manufacture, and social norms.<sup>28</sup> For instance, speakers learn to produce certain utterances through trial and error, figuring out which utterances are effective at causing various responses in hearers, or they might be explicitly taught this, or they might produce certain utterances to avoid punishment for violating social norms.

Functionalists argue that identifying speech acts with functions of utterances avoids the problem of determination by linguistic form (Murray and Starr 2018, 222–230). A functionalist can distinguish between an utterance’s linguistic form and the features of the utterance that it determines (e.g., the compositional semantic value and the semantic content of an utterance in a context) and the causal explanation that explains why the utterance was reproduced. Two different utterances of the same sentence type can be reproduced for different reasons, and thereby have different functions. Therefore, functionalists claim that their view avoids the problem of determination by linguistic form.

By making reference to the kinds of internal processes involved in these feedback mechanisms, I can now better articulate the sense in which functionalism is a nonattitudinal theory of speech acts. The view’s permissiveness about feedback mechanisms entails a certain permissiveness about the internal processes within speakers that cause their utterances when they perform speech acts.

In practice, functionalists tend to make quite weak assumptions about such internal processes. For instance, Murray and Starr (2018, 230) claim that the functions of utterances can be explained by “rather low-level psychological facts about how humans work.” For instance, drawing on work in social psychology, they appeal to facts about “scripts, schema, and activity types” that “automatically [trigger] self-fulfilling expectations about how that interaction will unfold” (219).

Millikan (1984, 68) compares making an utterance to starting one’s car:

In starting my car, usually I simply react to my desire that it be started, do what I do automatically, meanwhile expecting the car to start. I make no inferences. I am usually using the higher parts of my brain in thinking about something else.

This act, according to Millikan, has the function of causing electrical current to flow from the battery to the car’s distributor. It has this function partly because of how the internal workings of the car have been designed to be manipulated by drivers. Other actions, such as banging the dashboard or honking the honk, simply will not start the car. But although her action has this function, Millikan herself does not need to have an internal mental representation of the battery, the current, or the distributor. In particular, she need not form an intention to cause the current to flow when she turns the key.

In the same way, according to the functionalist, when Sarah orders Harvey to come to the party, she simply reacts to her desire that Harvey come to the party, uttering the appropriate words automatically while expecting him to come. Although she might have beliefs about Harvey’s mental states, including beliefs about his motivational profile, these mental states are not part of the process that generates her utterance. That her utterance has the function of causing Harvey

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28. These kinds of feedback mechanisms are discussed by Graham (2020, 729–730).

to come to the party depends on the existence of a specific motivational process within him, but it does not depend on Sarah having an explicit intention of manipulating this process.

Knowledge of the inner workings of others can be hard to come by. Whereas attitudinal theories such as intentionalism build this kind of knowledge into their view, functionalism offloads handling the internal processes of speakers and hearers into their causal environment.<sup>29</sup>

**Utterance function** tells us when a type of utterance has a certain function. However, according to functionalism, simply having a function is not sufficient for being a speech act. Instead, functionalists take speech acts to be utterances whose function is a causing a specific effect, namely, a *response* to the utterance. What is a response to an utterance? Functionalists have relied on the notion of *responding to a signal* in theories of animal communication in order to distinguish genuine responses to signals from what Scott-Phillips and Kirby (2013) call “coerced reactions.”<sup>30</sup>

Let’s make a few distinctions. Not all utterances have functions. For instance, sentences uttered while talking in one’s sleep might not have any function. Among utterances with functions, not all of these functions of utterances involve causing effects in hearers. For instance, I might repeat a mantra because it makes me calm. By contrast, I might shout at someone in order to cause them to jump in fear. When an utterance has the function of causing some effect in a hearer, I’ll say that it has the function of causing a *reaction*.

Functionalism involves a further distinction among the utterances with the function of causing a reaction in hearers. The effect caused by an utterance might itself be a reproduction of another reaction to this type of utterance. Returning to the example of shouting to cause jumping, the jumping itself might not be reproduced because it is caused by shouting. It might just be reproduced because it is caused by something startling.

The distinction between a reaction and a response comes from the literature on animal communication. Consider a moth’s coloration, which has the function camouflaging the moth from predators, such as hawks. When the camouflage fulfills its function, it causes a hawk not to eat the moth. Not eating the moth is the hawk’s reaction to the camouflage. But the hawk’s not eating the prey isn’t a *response* to the camouflage. It’s just something that the hawk does.<sup>31</sup> Speaking loosely, the hawk doesn’t choose to eat the moth based on its coloration. Speaking more carefully, the hawk’s behavior isn’t selected for by feedback mechanisms such as natural selection. The moth has devised a way to take advantage of features of the hawk’s perceptual capacities to avoid being seen and eaten.

By contrast, the male moths’ bodies might also contain ultraviolet pigmentation that serves as a mating display to female moths.<sup>32</sup> Female moths mate with male moths on the basis of their coloration. Again, speaking loosely, we can say that female moths choose to mate with male moths based on their pigmentation. In this case, the female moths’ behavior has been selected to be sensitive to the male moths’ behavior. As Scott-Phillips (2015) put it, the mating behavior exhibits *functional interdependence* between a signal and the response.

Following some remarks by Millikan (2005, 169), I will characterize the notion of a response in terms reproduction. The crucial difference between the female moth’s reaction to the male

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29. Thanks for Sam Berstler for suggesting this.

30. Millikan (2005, 169), Murray and Starr (2018, 216–217).

31. The example of camouflage as a functional trait which coerces a reaction, originally due to Maynard Smith and Harper (2003), comes from Scott-Phillips (2015).

32. See, e.g., Murray and Starr (2018) on mating signals as instances of animal communication that functionalist theories aim to explain.

moth's coloration and the hawk's reaction is that the female's moth's reaction is a reproduction of other reactions by female moths to similar coloration in other male moths, whereas the hawk's reaction isn't a reproduction of anything. Similarly, a response to an utterance of a certain type is a reaction that is a reproduction of reactions caused by other utterances of that type. For example, an assertion is an utterance whose function is causing a hearer to form a true belief in response to the utterance. By contrast, Millikan (2005) argues that although boasting might have the function of causing a certain reaction in hearers—namely, a feeling of being impressed with the speaker—it does not have the function of causing a response in hearers: in general, one isn't impressed with someone merely because they used certain words. Hence, according to functionalism, boasting is not a speech act.

As Millikan (2005, 159) points out, the notion of a response is similar to the intentionalist's claim that speech acts involve complex directive communicative intentions of the part of the speaker. According to intentionalism, when a speaker performs a speech act, they represent something about the internal process by which their addressee will react. However, by characterizing the functions of utterances with functional responses, rather than intentions and recognition of them, functionalism does not have to posit complex internal representations in speakers and hearers.

Characterizing speech acts in terms of responses avoids some obvious apparent counterexamples to functionalism. In **Order**, Sarah gets Harvey to come to the party by ordering him. There are other ways she might have gotten him to come, but many of these are not intuitively directives. For instance, she might have left a trail of coins for him to follow from the supermarket to Sean's apartment. Her action would have the function of getting him to come to the party, but it does not seem to be a directive. Such examples help to motivate the move to a more complicated function for speech acts.

The internal process in speakers that gives rise to directives and other speech acts is partly defined in terms of the internal process in hearers that gives rise to their reactions to directives. Just as functionalism is permissive about the internal processes that work in speakers to produce utterances, it is permissive about the processes in hearers that produce their responses.

Someone who responds to a directive  $\phi$  effectively performs two separate actions.<sup>33</sup> First, they perform whatever action is specified by the directive. Second, they perform a response to the directive. For instance, Harvey comes the party in part because of Sarah's utterance. However, according to functionalism, in order for Sarah's utterance to fulfill its function, Harvey's action must have a further feature, namely, it must be a reproduction of other acts that were caused by ancestors of Sarah's utterance. In this case, Harvey's act constitutes a further action of responding to a directive. To put it another way, he responds to the directive to come to the party by coming.

### 3.5 Functionalism about directives

At this point, we can see the shape of a functionalist account of directives. If speech acts are distinguished from one another by their functions, and certain functions might group together naturally to form a category, then we need to say what collection of functions form the category of directives.

Following Millikan, I will argue that the function of directives involves causing *action in hearers*:

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33. Thanks to Justin Khoo for this way of framing things.

### Functionalism about directives

To direct a hearer  $H$  to  $\phi$  is to make an utterance  $u$  whose function is causing  $H$  to  $\phi$  in response to  $u$ .

I will start to unpack this definition by considering some functionalist arguments and motivations for taking the function of directives to involve action then I will turn to consider some features of the intuitive conception that suggest that they are concerned with action.

### Action and functionalism

To defend a proposal about the function of an utterance-type, one must at least gesture at an explanation of why the utterance is reproduced by speakers. According to **Functionalism about directives**, speakers reproduce the utterances that constitute directives because hearers in the past have acted on the basis of them.

First, let's note that it is quite plausible to think that the speech acts that philosophers have included in the category of directives have something to do with action. After all, Searle (1975b) glosses directives as speech acts in which a speaker tries to get an addressee to do something.

Contrast utterances that have the function of causing action with those that have the function of causing the formation of belief. Language users act on the basis of their beliefs, so one downstream effect of a speaker's assertion is that the hearer does something. Moreover, a speaker might make an assertion with the aim of getting their addressee to do something. If Sean knows Helen likes chocolate cake, he could say, *There will chocolate cake at my party*. Having this information might incentivize her to show up. Intuitively, however, he has not invited Helen to his party. He has merely asserted that there will chocolate cake there.

Millikan (1984, 2004, 2005) offers an argument for this claim.<sup>34</sup> In brief, Millikan's argument is that only hearer action is of sufficient interest to speakers to continue their production of the utterances constituting directives. Inevitably, speakers and hearers need to coordinate with one another. If, in these situations, hearers did not act but, say, merely formed unsuccessful intentions to act, then producing utterances would cease to be a means for generating action, so speakers wouldn't have reason to produce them. Therefore, Millikan concludes, causing hearers to form intentions (or other downstream effects of making utterances) cannot be the function of directives.<sup>35</sup>

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34. A few notes: First, Millikan's actual argument is about the function of imperative sentences, rather than directives. Others have adapted Millikan's analogous argument about the function of declarative sentences into arguments about the function of assertion and/or the category of constative speech acts generally (Graham 2020; Kelp and Simion 2021; van Elswyk 2023). Second, Millikan claims that the function of imperatives is producing *compliance* in hearers. Millikan does not define compliance, but it is clear that compliance entails purposive behavior on the part of the hearer. Millikan (1984) distinguishes action guided by intention from such purposive behavior, and she suggests that much of what we might intuitively describe as intentional action is not guided by explicit intentions. Hence, she might not agree with my construal of the function of directives as involving intentional action. On the other hand, she also seems to think that the cooperative response to a directive (imperative) on the part of a hearer is forming an intention, in her sense. So, she might agree with me after all. Regardless, I think the intuitive considerations discussed above motivate taking the function of directives to involve intentional action rather than merely purposive behavior.

35. Although Murray and Starr (2018, 219–200) do not explicitly discuss directives as a category, their view seems close to the view that the function of directives is causing hearers to form certain preferences, which would be subject to Millikan's arguments as well.

In assuming that directives have the function of causing action in hearers, I do not assume that this function is generated by a particular feedback mechanism. Different proponents of functionalism have proposed different mechanisms that generate speech acts in general, such as general purpose learning (Millikan 1984; Graham 2014) or social norms (Murray and Starr 2018; Graham 2020).

### Action and the intuitive conception

There is intuitive support for the claim that directives aim, in some sense, at external changes in the world rather than internal mental changes in their addressee. One way into this intuitive thought is to consider judgments about when various directives are successful. Returning to **Order**, suppose Harvey were to merely form an intention to come to the party, but he gets a flat tire. Intuitively, Sarah's order would be unsuccessful. Another way to pump this intuition is to consider judgments about blameworthiness of hearers who do not comply with directives: when Sarah orders Harvey to come to the party. If Harvey fails to show up, he is blameworthy for failing to follow through, even if he forms an unsuccessful intention to come.

But there is certainly more to directives than effecting some change in the world. Clearly, the doctor does not request for me to move my leg when he hits my knee with a reflex hammer; he still wouldn't be requesting for me to move my leg if humans evolved a mechanism to trigger patellar reflex by speaking. The same reasoning applies for ordering and other directives. Functionalism's identification of speech acts with utterances whose function is to produce responses seems to be in accord with this intuitive judgment.

Minimally, functionalism's commitment to directives being for causing action is *prima facie* compatible with the intuitive conception. Moreover, even if further conceptual analysis reveals that the intuitive conception involves a different aim, such as causing intentions, many of the worries that I will press later have more to do with the structure of functionalism rather than specific claims about what the function of directives is.

By identifying directives with utterances whose function involves causing action, the functionalist account of directives aligns with these intuitive considerations, and so it serves as a minimal base for our analysis.

## 4 Counterexamples to functionalism about directives: insufficiency

I will now turn to my main argument against functionalism about directives. It relies on cases in which an utterance has the function of causing action in hearers, but intuitively, the utterance is not a directive.

I begin with a scenario that challenges the sufficiency of having the function of causing action in hearers for being a directive.<sup>36</sup> The case is somewhat outlandish, but although it is far-fetched, it highlights the main tensions of functionalism, and some of its unrealistic features are in fact in line with functionalist commitments.

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36. This case is based on a version due to Brad Skow involving a single individual paired with attendants. The modification to an entire population is due to Justin Khoo.

## Guardian Angels

In this imagined situation, God has paired each human with a more or less omnipotent—but unseen—guardian angel. Unbeknownst to the humans, God has tasked the angels with making their human charge's wishes about the weather come true: When and only when a human utters certain phrase to describe how they would like the weather to be—*Weather thus: rain*, *Weather thus: snow*, *Weather thus: sun*—their guardian angel works behind the scenes to make it happen. One angel, Alex, has been paired with Hilary, a human. Suppose it is raining, and Hilary says, *Weather thus: sun*. Most immediately, Hilary's utterance is explained by her beliefs and desires: she makes the utterance because she thinks it will likely cause the weather to change, and she wants it to be sunny. More distally, she thinks this because she has observed that various changes in the weather have occurred when other humans made certain utterances. She observed, for instance, that it started to snow when Harry said *Weather thus: snow*.<sup>37</sup> In fact, it started to snow because Harry's angel, Alice, responded to his utterance by changing the weather, though neither Hilary nor Harry know this. Alice's making it snow was a response and not a mere reaction because it was sensitive to Harry's utterance. If Harry hadn't said those words, Alice wouldn't have changed the weather. In general, the regularity that Hilary, Harry, and other humans observe, between their words and the weather, is explained by the angel's motivations (and ultimately, perhaps, by God's motivations). For whatever reasons—innate benevolence, fear of divine threat—they want to make the weather align with the expressed wishes of their humans.

The existence of Hilary's utterance in particular and the persistence of weather-changing utterances in general is explained by the historical effects of ancestors of the utterance. These utterances caused angels to change the weather, which contributed to later humans deciding to make similar utterances. In general, humans keep using the weather-changing phrase because it has the effect of changing the weather. If the angels went on strike and stopped changing the weather, eventually the humans would stop using these phrases. All this is to say that Hilary's utterance has the function of causing Alex to act so as to make it sunny.

By uttering *Weather thus: sun*, has Hilary directed Alex to make it sunny? It seems not. She has not ordered Alex to make it sunny. Neither has she requested, demanded, nor even suggested that he make it sunny. Hilary is utterly oblivious to Alex's existence. This seems to preclude her from performing a speech act towards him, even if her utterance has the function of causing him to act.

To bolster this intuition, it is helpful to compare the guardian angel case with more realistic cases where we judge similarly.<sup>38</sup> The situation between Hilary and Alex seems comparable to our relationship with our smart devices, which can be triggered through specific phrases such as "Hey Siri" or "Alexa". We do not take these utterances to be literal orders.

Orders can be polite or impolite, but like speaking to set a timer on one's smartwatch, Hilary's utterance does not seem to admit of politeness or impoliteness.<sup>39</sup> Alex cannot complain that

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37. An obvious question is how humans initially stumbled upon the relevant phrasing. Perhaps someone just decided to utter it one day. This first utterance did not have the function of causing angels to act because it was not a reproduction of anything. In general, according to the etiological conception of functions, the first instance of a type will not have a function. This feature of the view has been a source of complaint against it. See McLaughlin (2001). I will set these worries aside to focus on what I take to be more pressing problems for functionalism.

38. Thanks to Sam Berstler for the following suggestion.

39. I'm indebted to Sam Berstler here.

Hilary has being impolite towards him by making her utterance. Similarly, Hilary seems to lack the special standing that someone performing an order takes themselves to have—she cannot complain to Alex if he fails to change the weather as she wishes (though God might have reason to complain, offering another contrast with Hilary’s act).

The scenario shows that having the function of causing action in hearers is compatible with a speaker’s being completely unaware of those hearers: the speaker of an utterance with this function need not have any beliefs about the hearers whose action it is the function to cause. It is plausible that the performance of directives, however, does require a speaker to at least be aware of their addressee. Hence, having this function is not sufficient for being a directive.

A natural reply on behalf of functionalism is to add a constraint on the account of directives. Strictly speaking, merely having a certain function is not sufficient for being a speech act. One also needs to be aware of one’s addressee or otherwise have beliefs about them.<sup>40</sup>

However, despite the availability of this response, functionalists have made claims that are close to denying it. For instance, here is Millikan (1984, 69):

... it seems reasonable to me that humans learn first how to talk and how to understand—a fairly automatic business of expressing and forming beliefs and intentions. ... It is very likely that small children speak and understand long before they have any such concepts [of belief and intention].

In other words, according to Millikan, an utterance can have the function causing action in hearers even if the speaker who produces it lacks the concept of action. Moreover, even if a speaker has the concept involved in a certain function (e.g., belief or action), according to Millikan, they need not use it when they are making utterances. Murray and Starr (2018, 230) similarly claim that the functions of utterances can be explained by “rather low-level psychological facts about how humans work”. Drawing on work in social psychology, they appeal to facts about “scripts, schema, and activity types” that “automatically [trigger] self-fulfilling expectations about how that interaction will unfold” (219).

But if speakers can make utterances whose function is causing hearers to act without having the concept of an action, it does not seem a large step to admit that they can make such utterances even if they do not have the concept of a hearer, or at least to admit they need not employ it when making the relevant utterances.

Regardless of whether existing functionalists would be tempted by the proposed modification of functionalism about directives, I will consider this revised view. The problem is that there are further counterexamples to functionalism about directives.

Next, I will to consider a different, slightly more realistic scenario.<sup>41</sup>

### **Food Narrative**

In the imagined scenario, each person within a population of language users is such that the desire for a certain food triggers the memory of a specific event from that person’s past, and episodes of remembering the event triggers a desire for food. For instance, when Francesca

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40. Or perhaps the very making an utterance entails having the necessary awareness of one’s addressee. If that is right, then perhaps the linguistic activity of the humans in the scenario doesn’t count as making utterances in the relevant sense for theorizing about speech acts.

41. Compare this case with the honeybee’s waggle dance (Millikan 1995; Butlin 2021).

wants French fries, she remembers a particular trip to the state fair when she ate French fries; when she recalls this trip, she starts to crave French fries. People also tend to want to eat some foods after eating other foods. For example, after Francesca eats French fries, she wants strawberry ice cream (and according to the first stipulation about the case, this, in turn causes her to remember the time when she had strawberry ice cream after her first swim meet). Moreover, assume that people's lives are more or less similar: there's a significant overlap between the kinds of things that have happened to them, and the kinds of foods they were eating when they did. Fred, for instance, also associates French fries with his own trip to the state fair, and so on. Finally, when people recall events from their pasts, they talk about these incidents to whoever is around.

Suppose this goes on for some time. At a certain point, people's stories start to have the function of causing others to bring them a certain kind of food. Ultimately, each person's decision to tell a story is causally explained by the fact that past stories caused others to bring speakers a certain food.

Consider Francesca and Fred. Suppose that Francesca starts to want French fries. She is reminded of her trip to the state fair, and she tells Fred about it. She does not intend for Fred to do anything other than listen to her story. She is in the dark about their shared associations between state fairs and French fries. But when she tells him about the fair, he is reminded of a trip to the state fair, where he also had French fries, and he starts to want them. He brings French fries, which she eats. Eating French fries triggers a desire for ice cream, which reminds her of the swim meet. She tells Fred about the swim meet. He's reminded of a similar swim meet, where he had strawberry ice cream.

Again, it is not plausible to think that people are requesting to be brought a certain food when they share their memories. They are not hinting or advising others to bring them food. In general, they are not directing each other with their stories. Like Hilary in the guardian angel case, Francesca seems to lack the special standing that someone performing an order takes themselves to have. It would not be reasonable to complain to Fred if he did not bring her French fries. Moreover, it makes sense to ask whether her utterance, considered as a report of her memory, is true or false. Intuitively, it does not make sense to ask whether requests and other directives are true or false.<sup>42</sup>

Although the scenario involves some fanciful assumptions, there are more realistic cases that exhibit similar features. For instance, Murray and Starr (2018, 230) briefly consider the function of imperatives on advertisements (e.g., a sign that says, *Get a jelly donut*). They suggest that such utterances have the function of causing their addressees to act by "merely activating the hearer's imagination."<sup>43</sup>

Let me offer a final scenario.

### Reporting

Alice has been ordering Bert around for a long time. She couches her orders with sentences of the form *You will  $\phi$*  (*You will wash dishes the now*, *You will mow my lawn*, etc.). Bert wants to

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42. Thanks to Sam Berstler here.

43. I am not sure whether they claim that this is the function of such imperatives, although it is suggested by their discussion of the reason why these signs are reproduced.



defy Alice's demands. But in the end, he always ends up doing what she tells him to do. Claire has observed this cycle. Whenever Bert explains to her about how this time will be different, Claire politely disagrees: if Alice has ordered Bert to do the dishes, Claire says *You'll do the dishes*. Suppose Alice says *You will take out the trash* to Bert. Bert rants to Claire: *Enough's enough! I'll show Alice. I'm not going to do it!* Once again Claire predicts what Bert will do: *You'll take out the trash*. Bert denies it, but at the end of the day, he feels guilty, and he takes out the trash.

Intuitively, when Claire makes her utterance to Bert, she isn't ordering Bert to wash the dishes. She's just reporting (or perhaps asserting or predicting) what he will do. Unfortunately for Bert, she's always right. In other words, her utterances are true, which, as we have seen, is a property not intuitively had by directives.<sup>44</sup> Like the speakers in the other counterexamples, Claire lacks the standing had by Alice to blame or otherwise hold Bert accountable.<sup>45</sup> Unfortunately for functionalism, the view seems to predict that Claire is directing Bert. Each of Claire's utterances, including this one, are explained by the same thing as Alice's utterances, namely, Bert's past obedience: Alice's utterances have resulted in Bert acting as she demands, so she keeps ordering him around, so Claire keeps reporting that he will comply. Moreover, in making her utterance, Claire uses the same words as Alice. Plausibly, her utterance is a reproduction of Alice's. Hence, according to functionalism, her utterance has the function of causing Bert to take out the trash.

I think that the most plausible response to this case on behalf of the functionalist is to maintain that Claire's utterance has two functions: it is a directive, since it has the same function as Alice's utterance, but it also has a different function, in virtue of being a reproduction of other declaratives.<sup>46</sup>

The main worry with this response is that it overgeneralizes—why stop at two functions? Declaratives might be reproduced for a variety of reasons within a population. It seems to follow that an given utterance of a declarative will be endowed with a variety of functions, and so it follows that speakers are performing many different speech acts simultaneously. This threatens to dilute functionalism's explanatory power.

## 5 Diagnosis: Functionalism and attitudes

In each of these hypothetical cases, there is an utterance with the function of causing action in hearers, but the utterance is not a directive.

One reply to the scenarios is to deny that they pose a problem for functionalism. For instance, Murray and Starr (2018) are clear that their version of functionalism isn't intended as a conceptual analysis of directives. Instead, they offer their theory to explain how humans use linguistic signals to coordinate, which they advocate to be the primary explanatory goal of any theory of speech acts. Concerning the question of how this theory relates to our ordinary notion, they say:

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44. Thanks to Sam Berstler for this point and the following.

45. Perhaps Claire has a kind of parasitic standing in virtue of her relationship with Alice, but intuitively she does not have the very same standing as Alice. Talks about standing by Anni Raty, Abe Mathews.

46. Millikan (2005, 179) makes this suggestion for similar utterances involving the sentences of the form  $\ulcorner$  You will  $\phi$  $\urcorner$ .

Perhaps our approach will vindicate common sense thought and talk about speech acts, but doing so is not the central task in the study of speech acts. (Murray and Starr 2018, 231)

However, I think an adequate theory of directives must bear some connection to the intuitive conception of directives that I sketched earlier. Our ordinary practice of using language presupposes something like a notion of directives, at least implicitly. Of course, this notion might be confused or even somewhat contradictory.<sup>47</sup> Be that as it may, I do not think that a functionalist should bite the bullet and ignore the conflict between their view and intuitions about these scenarios.

Conventionalism, intentionalism, and other theories of speech acts take coherence with our intuitions to be a key explanatory goal of their accounts. Insofar as functionalists reject this goal, they are not offering a true alternative to these theories.<sup>48</sup> Instead, they risk changing the subject matter of their view. This undercuts functionalism's reductive ambitions.

Here is a tempting diagnosis of where functionalism goes wrong: having the function of causing action in hearers is not sufficient for being a directive because there might be various causal mechanisms that give rise to this function. However, only certain ways of causing hearers to act are compatible with performing a directive. Other ways of causing hearers to act are deviant. Since functionalism is neutral with respect to the kinds of causation that sustain the function, it ends up overgenerating, counting too many utterances as directives.

As I have already noted, functionalists are neutral about the specifics of the historical mechanisms that might give rise to utterances with the function of directives. As a result, two different utterances might have the same function—and hence, count as directives—even if the causal explanation of each utterance is quite different. This is borne out in each of the cases that I have described. In each situation, the last link in the causal chain leading to each utterance is the speaker's beliefs and desire. However, these beliefs and desires are explained in different ways. In **Guardian Angel and Reporting**, the speaker's utterance involves a belief, roughly about how to bring it about a certain effect. In **Food Narrative**, the speaker just has a tendency to make certain utterances when they want a certain food, a tendency which gets reinforced through contingent features of their environment.

One crucial difference between intentionalism and functionalism is the kinds of processes that these views require to underlie the performance and uptake of speech acts. Intentionalism takes a restrictive view of these processes. According to the intentionalist, speech acts must be caused by specific attitudes about the hearer, their actions, and the motivational processes that give rise to them. For instance, in **Order**, when Sarah orders Harvey to come to the party, she intends not only that he come but that he do this due to his recognition of her intention. Functionalism, on the other hand, takes a permissive view. According to the functionalist, directives can be caused by a variety of processes, which might not involve attitudes at all. The upshot of Millikan's car-starting example in section 3.4 was that speakers need not have any sophisticated representation of their addressee's motivational processes in order to perform a directive. Moreover, functionalism takes a permissive view of the corresponding processes that give rise to the hearer's action.

The cases introduced in the last section suggest that performing and complying with directives does require that speakers and hearers represent each other's motivational processes.

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47. Thanks to Justin Khoo for discussion.

48. Thanks to Sam Berstler here.

Consider how an intentionalist might explain these cases. First, intentionalism correctly predicts that human speakers do not direct guardian angels: being unaware of the angels' existence, humans don't intend to cause them to do anything. In **Food Narrative**, in which Francesca gets Fred to bring her French fries by telling him a story about her childhood, intentionalism also delivers the intuitively correct verdict: Francesca does not intend for Fred to bring her French fries. Even if she did, she would not count as requesting him to bring her French fries unless she had also intended that he recognize her intention for him to bring her French fries. Of course, we could imagine cases in which a person does have these intentions in telling a certain story about their past. However, in such case, it would be plausible to judge that the speaker would be requesting that their addressee bring them French fries. Finally, intentionalism handles **Reporting**, the case in which Claire correctly predicts that Bert will take out the trash. Since Claire does not intend for Bert to do anything, much less do anything on the basis of her utterance, according to intentionalism, she does not direct him to do anything.

I have already discussed how an adequate response to the guardian angel case requires a concession by functionalism to attitudinal resources, relying on the attitude of awareness to constrain their account of directives. It's not sufficient for an utterance to have the function of causing action; it is also necessary for the speaker to be aware of the hearer.

To deal with **Food Narrative**, the functionalist needs a way of distinguishing the causal process by which Francesca gets Fred to bring her French fries from the kinds of responses that are proper to directives. One way to exclude such processes is by restricting the process by which the hearer arrives on their action:

#### **Functionalism about directives (hearer restricted)**

To direct a hearer  $H$  to  $\phi$  is to make an utterance  $u$  whose function is causing  $H$  to  $\phi$  in response to  $u$  by means of internal process  $i$ .

There might be different candidates to consider for internal processes. Following the intentionalist, we might require that the hearer's action be caused by practical reasoning from the fact that speaker made  $u$ . In **Food Narrative**, although Fred's action arises from a process that depends on Francesca's utterance, the fact that she has told him a story is not a premise in his practical reasoning. Hence, the hearer restricted version of **Functionalism about directives** where  $i$  is interpreted to range over a hearer's process of practical reasoning does not predict that Francesca requests that Fred bring her French fries.

However, it seems like a corresponding restriction is also needed for Francesca's utterance. The functionalist needs to restrict the motivational processes that cause speakers to make utterances as well. Consider a modified version of **Food Narrative**, the only difference being that Fred infers that Francesca's story about the state fair has something to do with her wanting French fries. If Francesca, as in the original case, has no idea that Fred knows this, then intuitively, it still seems that Francesca has not requested that Fred bring her French fries. Only a further restriction that requires directives to be produced by internal processes that represent something about the hearer's internal processes would address the modified counterexample.

#### **Functionalism about directives (speaker + hearer restricted)**

To direct a hearer  $H$  to  $\phi$  is to make an utterance  $u$ , by means of internal process  $j$ , whose function is causing  $H$  to  $\phi$  in response to  $u$  by means of internal process  $i$ .

The restriction of speaker processes also is necessary to address **Reporting**. Recall, in that case, Alice and Claire's utterances of *You will take out the trash* had similar etiologies. Hence, the original version of **Functionalism about directives** predicted that both utterances were directives. In order to block this prediction, we need some way of distinguishing Claire's utterance from Alice's.

The intentionalist can distinguish their utterances by the effect that Claire is aiming at and the means she intends for bringing it about: she intends for Bert to believe that he will take out the trash, and she wants him to believe this based on her recognizing her intention for him to believe this. The functionalist can try to mimic this move by distinguishing between the internal process in Claire involved in causing her utterance and the internal process in Alice and the corresponding processes in Bert related to them.

While these modifications might address the counterexamples to functionalism, in addition to being somewhat ad hoc, they undercut functionalism's status as a nonattitudinal theory.<sup>49</sup> The simple version of functionalism was permissive in two ways: it was flexible about the internal processes in speakers and hearers that contributed to the feedback mechanisms generating the functions of their utterances, and it did not require speakers and hearers to have complex internal representations of each others' attitudes in order to perform and respond to speech acts. The more complex version of the theory avoids the problems of the simpler account at the cost of giving up the first kind of permissiveness.

## 6 Conclusion

A main appeal of functionalism is a plausible nonattitudinal theory of directives. Functionalists aim to avoid both the problems of other nonattitudinal views, such as conventionalism, while offering a reductive account of speech acts. I have tried to spell out the resources that functionalism relies on in this project, and I have offered some cases that pose a challenge to its ambitions. My proposed counterexamples target functionalism's flexibility about the mechanisms by which directives come to have their function. Addressing these cases, I have argued, requires modifications to functionalism that are at odds with its nonattitudinal commitments.

Although the notion of function might have a role to play in theorizing about directives, the upshot of my thesis is that this role will be part of a theory of directives that makes use of speakers' and hearers' attitudes.

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49. Thanks to Sam Berstler for discussion.

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