Thinking Together: Advising as Collaborative Deliberation

**Abstract**

# We spend a good deal of time thinking about how and when to advise others, and how to respond to other people advising us. However, philosophical discussions of the nature and norms advising have been scattered and somewhat disconnected. The most focused discussion has come from philosophers of language interested in whether advising is a kind of assertive or directive kind of speech act. This paper argues that the ordinary category of advising is much more heterogenous than has been appreciated: it is possible to advise by asserting relevant facts, by issuing directives, and by asking questions and other kinds of adviceless advising. The heterogeneity of advising makes speech act-theoretic accounts of advising look like accounts of special cases, and motivates us to look elsewhere for an account of what advising is. I suggest that we think about advising as a distinctive species of joint practical thinking—which I will call *collaborative deliberation*—and show how our need for a concept to pick out this kind of joint activity emerges from our practical needs as deliberators. This view helps to shed light on a number of puzzling features of advising and offers some guidance to be better at advising and at being advised.

# Introduction

We spend a good deal of time thinking about advising. We seek out advice about relationship problems, household maintenance, and how to write well. We worry how to give advice to our friends, and how to manage the tension when our parents’ advice slides into telling us what to do. There are professionalised roles for scientific, legal, and financial advisors. Government advisors play a central role in shaping policy and are notoriously the first people held responsible when something goes wrong. During the COVID-19 pandemic, we radically altered their lives in response not only to legal restrictions, but also to government and scientific advice.

Despite its practical and ethical significance, philosophical discussions of the nature of advising have been scattered.[[1]](#footnote-1) Partly this is because advising occupies a curious position in the family of speech acts, with connections to both directive and assertive speech acts. Like commanding, advising often involves the use of the imperatival mood to propose courses of action to the hearer. But, like asserting, advising can also involve the use of the declarative mood to make claims about questions relevant to a hearer’s decision. There are two positions which have been taken up to explain this position between asserting and commanding.

What I will call the *directive approach* takes advising to be a directive speech act whose authority is based in knowledge of the hearer’s good (Hobbes 1998, 2012) (Vendler 1972 p.41), (Austin 1975 pp.40-42, 141-2, 155), (Stewart 1978), (Searle and Vanderveken 1985 pp.202-3), (Bach and Harnish 1979 pp.40-7), (Hamblin 1987 pp.10-23), (Wiland 2000a, 2000b, 2021). The best case for the directive approach comes from advising that involves bare imperatives:

1) Water your seedlings after you plant them out!

By contrast, the *assertive approach* takes advising to be an assertive speech act involving a proposition relevant to the hearer’s decision (Searle 1969 p.67), (Hinchman 2005), (Sliwa 2012). Although on this picture advising is a kind of assertion, it can retain a connection to action, either by functioning as an invitation to treat the act of advising as a reason (Hinchman 2005), or by functioning as an indirect directive (Nowell-Smith 1954, pp.146-7). The best case for the assertive approach comes from advising that involves one or other kind of declarative:

2) You ought to water your seedlings.

3) Watering your seedlings helps them to root.

4) If I were you, I’d water your seedlings.

The directive and assertive approaches share a commitment to what we might call a *deference model* of advising. According to the deference model, in the central case advising involves an epistemic asymmetry, and the basic dynamic of advising is an ignorant advisee seeking out a wide advisor to defer to their judgement (see Locher 2006 pp.5-6). The point of difference is whether advising involves the practical deference we find in orders, or the theoretical deference we find in assertion.

The goal of this paper is to argue that neither the directive nor the assertive approach does justice to the ordinary category of advising. I propose that we think of advising not as a kind of speech act, but as a kind of joint practical thinking which we pursue through the means of various different speech acts. In advising, the advisee invites the advisor into his practical problem, and the advisor treats the advisee’s practical problem as if it were a shared concern, without changing the advisee’s question, leaving it to him to make up his mind. I call this kind of joint practical thinking *collaborative deliberation.*

We start from a hypothesis about the function of our talk and thought about advising: that it answers to our needs as deliberators to pool our deliberative capacities (1.1.). This hypothesis is used to motivate the proposal that advising is a distinctive kind of joint practical thinking (1.2). We then consider the diversity of advising (2.1), the possibility of advising without giving advice (2.2.), before showing how the hypothesis that advising is collaborative deliberation allows us to explain the diversity of advising (2.3), and some of its central features (2.4). We then turn to the case against the assertive and directive views, considering the way in which speech act theorists have understood advising (3.1), before arguing that on all available typologies of speech acts, advising spans assertives, directives, and askings (3.2), meaning that both directive and assertive accounts are mistaken, and that advising cannot be unified using the tools of speech act theory (3.3.).

A couple of ground-clearing points.

I will be pernickety about ‘advise’ and ‘advice’. ‘Advise’ is a verb that marks the activity which is the topic of this paper. ‘Advice’ is a noun which has two meanings, referring either to the act of advising, or to the object advised. The sentence ‘Katy’s advice is always so thoughtful,’[[2]](#footnote-2) can mean either that the *way* in which she advises is thoughtful, or that *what* she advises is thoughtful. ‘Advice’ in its act sense is sometimes used as a generic noun to refer to the activity of advising. Although this act/object ambiguity is largely harmless, slippage between the two meanings creates the impression that the act of advising is just the giving of advice. This obscures the linguistic fact that ‘advise’ can occur without a complement supplying its content (‘Alex advised me’),[[3]](#footnote-3) and the non-linguistic fact that we can perfectly well advise without giving any advice (as I will argue in 2.2.). To avoid this slippage, I will use ‘advice’ only in its object sense, and will use the gerund ‘advising’ to refer to the activity type.

The connection between advising, asserting, directing, and asking means that we need to have a model for different kinds of speech acts. I will work with the following basic picture of speech acts, drawn from (Roberts 2018), until section 3., where we will need to supplement it to make more fine-grained distinctions. Sentences in the declarative mood express propositions, and are standardly used to assert, with the goal of changing the hearer’s beliefs and getting propositions in the common ground. Sentences in the imperative mood express tasks directed towards the hearer, and are standardly used to perform directives, with the goal of changing the hearer’s intentions and getting tasks on their to-do list. Sentences in the interrogative mood express questions, and are standardly used to ask, with the goal of putting a question on the shared inquisitive agenda. Uttering a sentence in the declarative mood will be the standard way to assert, but it is possible to assert indirectly, and the same goes for directing and asking.

We need to be careful about the claim that advising is not a kind of speech act. The idea is not that advising doesn’t involve speech acts: it obviously does.[[4]](#footnote-4) The idea is that the kinds which are useful for giving typologies of speech act will not yield an account of advising, because the everyday category of advising cross-cuts the basic categories of communicative acts. There is no reason to think that advising is the only activity which has been masquerading as a speech act, but the arguments we will canvass don’t appear to apply to many communicative verbs.

We will rely on English linguistic intuitions throughout. I will sometimes note differences in other languages, but I won’t try to mount a proper cross-linguistic survey.

# 1. Advising and Joint Practical Thinking

# 1.1. What’s the Point of Advising?

It is often helpful to begin philosophical inquiry into the question *what is X?* by asking *what is the function of our concept of X?*.[[5]](#footnote-5) Functional approaches to philosophical analysis have a long history, but have become increasingly popular after Edward Craig’s *Knowledge and the State of Nature* (Craig 1990)*.* Craig proposes that the point of our concept of knowledge is to allow us to pool information, using this functional hypothesis to illuminate features of knowledge itself. How might this approach work in the case of advising?

What is the function of our concept of advising? In his discussion of advising in *Practical Reasoning,* David Gauthier (1963) offers a hypothesis:

Men [sic] give advice, make recommendations, to assist their fellows with their practical problems. A bread-knife is a device to cut bread; advice is a device to bring one person’s judgement to bear on the problems of another; recommendation is a device to transmit one person’s practical experience to another. (Gauthier 1963 p77)

This passage is about the point of advising, but we might translate it into a picture of the function of the concept of advising. Just as we need to be able to pool information between people, developing concepts to facilitate and regulate our information-pooling practices, we need to be able to pool our deliberative capacities and resources, developing concepts to facilitate and regulate our pooling of deliberative resources. Craig suggests that we think about the knowledge from the perspective of an inquirer considering a factual question. I suggest that we think about advising from the perspective of a deliberator considering practical question.

What might a deliberator need? Allan Gibbard makes a helpful suggestion:

When I ask you for advice, we can say, I try to get you to help me with my thinking, to join with me in thinking what to do. (Gibbard 2003 p275)

Let’s take up the hypothesis that a deliberator is after someone who can think through his problem with him. If advising is the kind of activity which answers to the need of deliberators, we might think of advising as a kind of joint practical thinking.

## 1.2. Collaborative Deliberation

This idea is suggestive but needs sharpening. Following de Kenessy (2020), let’s think about the standard case of joint practical deliberation (Bratman 1992, Gilbert 2009) as a joint activity between several agents with three features:

1. It is aimed at producing a joint decision;
2. It aims to answer a question about what the agents should do together;
3. It is responsive to reasons which are shared between the agents.

Consider a group of runners deliberating about the route and pace for a Sunday long run. They aim to reach a joint decision, which will constrain each of their downstream planning (keep to 7.30s, turn around when you get to the bridge). This decision is an answer to a shared question about what everyone should do. And the reasons relevant to this decision will be a combination of individual reasons (which events people are training for) and the shared norms of the group (run at the pace of the slowest in the group).

Advising is not just any kind of joint practical thinking. The runners are not advising one another when they plan their long run. How might we fix on a suitable kind of shared thought?

A first thought is that advising is joint practical thinking which concerns what the advisee should do in light of his reasons. This won’t do. Consider a case in which you and I go for dinner every week, alternating who chooses the restaurant. One week, I ring you up to ask for some help deciding between Phở and Root. You talk me through our preferences and dietary restrictions, leaving the decision up to me. Have you advised me? Plausibly, yes: we’ve pooled our deliberative resources, you haven’t ordered, or threatened me. However, the reasons involved, and the resulting intention are shared. If you had got bored and said ‘Let’s go to Root!’ meaning to express a decision, you would have gone beyond advising taking the decision into your hands. This suggests that advising involves a kind of joint thinking which leaves the responsibility for deciding up to the advisee. Gauthier expresses this point nicely:

To advise, or to recommend, is to assist someone in making a decision or choice, in solving a practical problem. The decision, and the problem, belong to [the] advisee. If the speaker seeks to make the decision, and to impose it on [the] advisee, then he is no longer advising, for he is no longer (just) assisting. He is treating the problem as a joint one, to be faced collectively, rather than the advisee’s own problem. (Gauthier 1963 p70).

There are two ways to fill out this idea.

The first is to say that advising involves the off-line deployment of the advisor’s deliberative capacities to deal with another person’s practical problems without either the authority to generate pre-emptive reasons (as in ordering), or the ability to make shared proposals (as in of joint deliberation).

The second is to say that advising involves a pretence of joint deliberation (see Portner 2018, 310). The advisee and advisor enter into a pretence in which they treat his problem as if it were a shared concern, deploying their deliberative capacities together in a kind of make-believe of shared deliberation. This pretence has an asymmetric character: both advisee and advisor are pretending to engage in shared deliberation, but the advisee genuinely engages in practical deliberation, while the advisor does not. Let’s call the kind of joint practical thinking in which the advisor deploys her deliberative capacities off-line as part of a pretence of joint deliberation *collaborative deliberation.* Collaborative deliberation should be distinguished from joint practical deliberation and merely talking about a problem

Consider a case in which advising shifts into joint practical deliberation. [[6]](#footnote-6) Tariq asks Hannah about the best way to train for a marathon. She writes up a training and nutrition plan, and he decides to follow it. However, to Tariq’s surprise, Hannah starts ringing Tariq up early in the morning to ensure he wakes up for sessions, drops off meals at his house, and books in sessions with the physio. All of this might be very helpful, but by taking on the normative obligations that would be associated with a joint decision Hannah has shifted from advising into joint planning. Tariq could tell her to buzz off. Unlike both proposals in joint action (in which both parties form an intention to do something), and orders (in which the speaker at least takes on an obligation to not interfere with the hearer), in collaborative deliberation the advisor comes away without any commitments.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Next, consider the distinction between advising and merely talking about a problem. This distinction is most familiar from post-work conversations. Zahir is complaining to Marta about one of his work colleagues. As a good friend, Marta chips in with suggestions about how Zahir might get along better with his colleague. Rather than welcoming these suggestions, Zahir gets annoyed and tells Marta that she should stop trying to problem solve. Here’s one way to understand in this conversation. Zahir is venting, not trying to actually resolve the problem. Marta understood Zahir to be inviting a shared conversation about how to deal with his colleague, so engaged in the pretence of shared deliberation*.* In venting, there is no goal to solve the practical problems under discussion; in collaborative deliberation, the goal is to help someone solve their practical problem.

The importance of the locution ‘if I were you…’ to advising might suggest that advising is a pretence of individual deliberation. There is a style of advising that involves thinking through a problem as if it were your own without much input from the advisee. However, in most cases advising involves a back-and-forth in which the advisee’s input is central, and this back-and-forth can only occur in a pretence of joint deliberation.

Collaborative deliberation involves the pretence of joint deliberation, but unlike standard cases of joint practical thinking, it does not aim at a joint decision, involve the shift to a shared practical question, or the shift to a shared deliberative perspective.

Although collaborative deliberation aims to help the advisee to form a decision, it is insulated from the intentions of advisee and advisor. Within the pretence, joint deliberation aims to solve advisee’s problem, but neither advisee nor advisor is committed to that plan outwith the pretence, and deliberative responsibility remains with the advisee. There is a further step for the advisee to take in deciding to followthe advice, and—as the Tariq/Hannah example shows—the advisor should not come away with any commitments about what the advisee does.

Collaborative deliberation involves pretending that a problem faced by the advisee is a shared concern, but problem itself is unchanged. If the advisee is working out how he ought to break up with a partner, the problem is *how he should break up with them*, not *how he and the advisor should break up with them*. Many of the features of the problems we seek advice on depend on them being our problems. If the advisee’s problem already concerns what a group of people should do—either because the advisee is a group, or because an advisee has responsibility for a joint decision (as in the dinner club case)—collaborative deliberation will concern a shared question, but this question remains unchanged by the shift into the advisory context.[[8]](#footnote-8)

Within the pretence of collaborative deliberation, the relevant beliefs and preferences are the advisee’s. There is space within the pretence for the advisor to persuade the advisee to change both his beliefs and preferences (see 2.4.1.), but the starting point is the advisee’s point of view. In cases in which the advisee makes a decision from a perspective which is not his own—either because of role responsibilities, or responsibility for a shared question—the context of advising will leave these perspectives as they are.

We can now offer an account of advising:

COLLABORATIVE DELIBERATION: A advises B just in case A and B together engage in joint thinking about a problem P which is B’s responsibility, within the scope of a pretence in which P is a shared concern for A and B, while the nature of that problem, and the reasons which bear on it remain unchanged by the pretence, and B retains responsibility for resolving the problem.

This account understands advising as a kind of joint thinking, not as a kind of speech act. As we noted above, advising will usually (perhaps always) involve speech acts: collaborative deliberation is typically a linguistic pretence. It won’t do any harm to think about advising as the kind of speech act that involves moves within collaborative deliberation, as long as we remember that this is not the standard way speech acts are individuated.

## 2. The Character of Advising

In this section, we shift to consider the features of advising. We first survey the diversity of advising reports (2.1.), before defending the claim that it is possible to advise without offering any advice (2.2.). We then show how the hypothesis that advising is collaborative deliberation can explain the diversity of advising, (2.3), and several distinctive features of advising (2.4.).

## 2.1. Advising Reports

In English, the first-person performative ‘I advise …’ is reserved for strong recommendations (Diedrich and Holn 2012), so to get a sense of the ordinary extension of ‘advise’, we’re better off starting off with third-person reports. There are four basic kinds of report:

4) Laura advised Robin to take up running.

5) Ruth advised Mark that there were frogs on the cycle path.

6) Katy advised Jack where to get a sourdough pizza.

7) Heather advised caution.

In 4) the complement of ‘advise’ is an infinitive. This report would be appropriate if Laura had uttered a bare imperative—‘take up running!’—an ought claim which had the force of an imperative—‘you should really take up running’—or a performative sentence involving ‘advise’ together with either an imperative, ought claim, or infinitive—‘my advice is: take up running!’; ‘I’d advise that you ought to take up running’, ‘my advice is to take up running’.

In 5) the complement is a declarative phrase. This report would be appropriate if Ruth had uttered a simple declarative phrase—‘There are frogs on the cycle path’. Although this assertion may indirectly function as a recommendation (Nowell-Smith 1954, 146-7), it need not. If Mark doesn’t know that the species frog on the cycle path is endangered, or he fails to realise the risk of running over frogs, he might not recover the recommendation to avoid the cycle path.[[9]](#footnote-9) Some writers claim that all advisory assertives always indirectly recommend—see (Wiland 2021, 117-18)—but there is plenty of advising that involves assertions without indirect directives. A financial advisor might advise by asserting some facts which are relevant to investment decisions without making any indication about where to invest.

In 6), the complement is an interrogative phrase. This kind of report would be appropriate either if Katy asserted a proposition which answers the question of where to get a sourdough pizza, or if Jack asked where he could get a sourdough pizza and Katy responded with an imperative—‘go to Flour and Ash!’. Although advising typically concernspractical questions, both information, and directions are appropriate responses.

In 7) the complement is an abstract noun. This kind of report would be appropriate if someone had gone to Heather for advice, having settled that they were going to do something, but without having formed a fine-grained plan about how. Heather’s advice thus concerns the best way to climb Death Mountain, which might either be expressed in a declarative—‘it’s important to be cautious’—or imperative—‘be cautious!’.

It is notable that advising can be reported with both infinitival and declarative complements (Vendler 1972 pp.20-1). Although there are some other verbs—notably ‘tell’—which pattern in this way, this is not a common feature of speech act verbs. We might distinguish two kinds of advising: *advising-that* (advising where the advice can be reported with a declarative complement), and *advising-to* (advising where the advice can be reported with an infinitival complement) (Searle 1979, 28). These categories overlap: a modal statement made with the force of an imperative could be reported in either way, as could a non-modal statement which functioned as an indirect directive. However, they are not identical: the provision of information without an explicit or implicit recommendation is advising-that but not advising-to, and a bare imperative without any justification is advising-to but not advising-that.[[10]](#footnote-10)

I take the distinction between advising-that and advising-to to be good preliminary evidence that advising includes both assertive and directive speech acts. Although this might seem a surprising claim, it has been widely accepted by both philosophers[[11]](#footnote-11) and sociolinguists[[12]](#footnote-12) writing about advising.

## 2.2. Advising without Advice

Besides advising by uttering imperatives and declaratives, it is possible to advise just by asking questions (Gauthier 1963, 50). One might think about an episode of advising composed entirely of interrogatives—without any indirect assertions or directions—as an instance of *adviceless advising* (bearing in mind our pernickety use of ‘advice’).

Consider a case:

MOVING AWAY: Fred is considering moving away from his hometown for an unspecified number of years, and his partner is committed to staying. Fred is worried about whether they should stay together. He goes to his friend Alex for help. She asks him a about various aspects of his relationship, whether he has thought about the different ways of handling a long-distance relationship, and what his partner thinks about the move. However, at no point does she either offer any recommendations about what to do or assert any relevant propositions.

Does Alex offer Fred any advice? Asking a question can give advice when it indirectly recommends a course of action, or conveys information. Asking a question can also be a preparatory move in giving advice to establish the relevant options. [[13]](#footnote-13) Imagine that Alex is simply posing questions simply as suggestions for issues which Fred might consider, without a clear view about what Fred should do. Then I think that we should say that Alex doesn’t give Fred any advice.

Does Alex advise Fred? Fred has come to Alex for help with a practical question, and Alex has engaged in a kind of joint activity which helps Fred to make his mind up. This seems like pretty good preliminary evidence that Alex advised Fred. Add to that the fact that many sociolinguists are happy to classify question-asking as a subspecies of advising,[[14]](#footnote-14) and we have decent first-pass evidence that this case involves advising.

Two worries about adviceless advising. First, one might worry that Alex has helped Fred without advising him. What is the difference between asking Fred questions, bringing him tea, or distracting him with a game of tennis? Although the advising/helping distinction is a little murky, Alex seems to be doing more than just helping with a joint activity. If the game of tennis helps Fred to deliberate well, at most Alex deserves credit for *enabling* good thinking. By contrast, if asking him a string of questions helps Fred to deliberate well, then Alex deserves partial credit for the quality of Fred’s decision.

Secondly, one might worry about the awkwardness of talking about adviceless advising. It does sound awkward to say:

8) ?Alex advised me, but she didn’t give any advice.

The question is whether this awkwardness is generated by a linguistic habit of specifying content, or by the impossibility of adviceless advising. Similar sentences for activities close to advising are less problematic. Consider counselling (in its non-therapeutic sense):

9) Alex counselled me, but she didn’t offer any counsel.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Although some English speakers report qualms about 9), reflecting on counselling reminds us that there are plenty of ways to counsel without offering counsel: going through the options, telling stories, applying decision-making heuristics, and so on. If we allow counselless counselling, then we should allow adviceless advising.

Adviceless advising is not only possible; it is desirable. It respects autonomy, enables skill learning, and avoids social awkwardness.

In some domains it is important that we can make decisions for ourselves. Although offering advice doesn’t impugn autonomy in the same way as commanding, it runs the risk of sliding into a kind of joint decision-making which would be inappropriate for (say) relationship decisions. Adviceless advising mitigates this risk, focusing on what the advisee should be paying attention to, not what he should do.

We care about doing the right thing, and being able to deliberate well. Directive advice gives us a shortcut to the right action, but doesn’t help us to learn in the way that non-directive advising does (Locher 2006, 193).[[16]](#footnote-16) When an advisor works through a decision with an advisee by laying out the relevant practical issues—perhaps withholding a portion of their knowledge—it provides an opportunity to practice good deliberation through joint activity.

Adviceless advising can also avoid social awkwardness. Ordinarily we want issues about our personal lives to be at the core of our *epistemic territory*: those topics which we are authoritative and competent about (see Nagel forthcoming). Soliciting or accepting directive advice or even assertions about personal topics presupposes that an advisor knows more than we do about our business (see Heritage and Sefi 1992, p.410). Adviceless advising can function as a face-saving device which allows an advisor to get her message across without undermining the social-epistemic standing of the advisee (Locher 2006 C6, C9).

## 2.3. Explaining the Diversity of Advising

We’ve seen that advising is much more heterogenous than we might have thought. Our ordinary category of advising spans assertive, directive, and asking-type speech. Neither the assertive or directive approaches are well-placed to explain this diversity, but let’s leave their attempts to account for it until the next section, and consider how the view that advising is collaborative deliberation can account for it.

Above we said that the prototypical deliberator is after someone to help him with a practical problem. What different kinds of help might he be after?[[17]](#footnote-17) We might differentiate four kinds of problem faced by the prototypical deliberator. First, he might be in asituation where he is *out of his depth* and responsible deliberation is beyond him. This deliberator needs a bare recommendation and will face the problem of ensuring that the person issuing the recommendation is trustworthy and has his interests at heart. Secondly, he might be in an *ignorant* situation, lacking factual information relevant to his decision, needing someone to provide him with information about options, outcomes and so on. This deliberator is rather like the Craigian inquirer. Thirdly, he might be in a *high-stakes* situation, having information and deliberative skills, but needing someone to work through the decision with him. Fourthly, he might be in the position of the *novice* who is interested in developing his deliberative skills.

These different kinds of problem call for different kinds of help: deliberators who are out of their depth need simple recommendations (advising-to), ignorant deliberators require information (advising-that), and high-stakes deliberators and novices require someone to think through a decision with them (adviceless advising). By distinguishing different kinds of deliberators, we can neatly predict both the existence and the importance of these different kinds of advising. These four kinds of deliberators are ideal cases. There is no reason to think that they exhaust the options, and real-life deliberators will often face a several problems, requiring a mix of different kinds of advising.

**2.4. Explaining Features of Advising**

Identifying advising with collaborative deliberation helps to explain four important features of advising: its distinctive modal force, the fact that advisory imperatives do not create reasons, the possibility of advising between equals, and the badness of unsolicited advising.

*2.4.1. Advisory modals*

We’ve seen that advising involves imperatives and modal claims (both of which can be reported using an infinitival construction, which has an implicit modal operator). An important feature of advising is that sentences can only be involved in advisingif they articulate a particular kind of modal force. An imperative or ought-claim which appeals to a hierarchical social system, or exclusively to the desires and goals of the advisor is not advising (Portner 2007, 356). Characteristically, advising involves either bouletic modality indexed to the advisee’s desires (‘given that you love aerobic exercise, take up running!’), teleologicalmodality indexed to the advisee’s goals (‘given that you’re trying to get fit, take up running!’), or deonticmodality associated with a system of rules that the advisee is already committed to (‘given that school requires you to take a sport, take up running!’[[18]](#footnote-18)). If advising is a kind of pretence in which advisor and advisee treat a problem of the advisee’s as if it were a joint problem, then the reasons that are relevant to the solution of that problem will not be the advisor’s or shared reasons, but the advisee’s alone, hence this close relation between advising and bouletic and teleological modality.[[19]](#footnote-19)

That advising appears to be indexed to the advisee’s desires and goals does not mean that all advising exclusively takes place from within the advisee’s belief and preference sets (see Nowell-Smith 1954, 155-7, Gauthier 54-6, Andreou 2006). Advisors can attempt to persuade advisees to change their beliefs or preferences, and may issue directives which presuppose beliefs or preferences which the advisee does not have as a means to do so.[[20]](#footnote-20) If these attempts are unsuccessful (or the attempt is viewed as futile), then an advisor may end up issuing advice which is indexed to beliefs or preferences which she does not share.[[21]](#footnote-21)

*2.4.2. Advising and Reasons*

Unlike ordering, which creates normative facts through the exercise of authority, imperatival advising—like warning and recommending—is answerable to prior normative facts (although advising can have normative consequences by making these facts available to the advisee). This point goes back at least to Hobbes:

“Now COUNSELL is a precept in which the reason of my obeying it, is taken from the thing it self which is advised; but COMMAND is a precept in which the cause of my obedience depends on the will of the Commander. For it is not properly said, Thus I will, and thus I Command, except the will stand for a Reason.” (Hobbes 1998 S XIV 1).[[22]](#footnote-22)

The fact that imperatival advising rests on prior normative facts means, advising can be subject to epistemic challenges. Consider a European parent uttering sentences 10 and 11 to a teenager going to a party in a situation where curfew is under the scope of the household rules, and drinking is not:

10) Be home by 10.30! [ORDER]

11) Don’t drink more than two beers! [ADVICE]

The teenager can only challenge (10) by appealing with his parent to change her mind. By contrast, he can legitimately challenge (11) by asking what would be so bad about drinking more than two beers. If he can argue the point, then his parent would be obliged to retract her imperative in a way that they wouldn’t have to with an order. Relatedly, it is quite possible to order someone to do something when it is common knowledge that it is not the best thing to do (‘just do what I say and come home by 10.30!’), but advising must be done under the guise of the good.

This difference between advising and ordering is neatly predicted by the idea that advising is collaborative deliberation. Although advisors may employ the linguistic markers of orders or joint decisions, in entering into collaborative deliberation, the issue to be resolved remains the advisee’s problem, and the advisor goes wrong if she changes this problem by creating new normative reasons.

*2.4.3. Advising without Deference*

There are certainly cases in which we go to advisors because we need knowledge: recall the prototypical deliberators who are out of their depth, ignorant, and novices. However, in many cases we seek out advising from people who are just as knowledgeable as us, or who might know *less* than us. In MOVING AWAY, Fred need not think that Alex is an expert on relationship matters, and she doesn’t need to present herself as such to offer useful contributions. Recall the situation of the high-stakes deliberator from 2.3.: sometimes we just want someone to think through a problem with, and it does not matter if they know more, or are more deliberatively skilled than us. This possibility is also predicted by the idea that advising is collaborative deliberation.

## 3. Advising is not a kind of speech act

Let’s take stock. We’ve framed a hypothesis about the function of the concept of advising, used that hypothesis to motivate a view about what advising is, and argued that this view illuminates a wide range of features of advising, including the diversity of forms which advising can take. With the positive case for this view in place, we will now turn to the treatment of advising by speech act theorists to argue for two claims: that the directive and assertive views are mistaken, and that advising is not a kind of speech act. The central part of this negative case against the assertive and directive accounts of advising is that they are unable to make sense of the heterogeneity of advising..

We start off by surveying the way that speech act theorists have classified advising (3.1.), before showing that whatever theory of speech acts is correct, advising spans the distinction between the types of speech act (3.2.), and arguing that this fact presents a knock-down argument against the assertive and directive accounts of advising (3.3.).

## 3.1. Speech Act Typologies and Advising

Advising has been variously classified by speech act theorists.

Austin’s classification of illocutionary acts focuses on the performative uses of speech act verbs. He groups advising with exercitives*,* which he glosses as “the giving of a decision in favour of or against a certain course of action, or advocacy” (Austin 1975 p154). Vendler adds grammatical criteria to Austin’s typology, keeping advising in the category of exercitives on the grounds that advisory performatives involve either an infinitival complement or a declarative ought statement (Vendler 1972 pp.20-1).

Bach and Harnish group speech acts by which mental states they express. They group advising with advisories, which they classify as directives on the grounds that they communicate an attitude toward a prospective action. They offer a pocket definition of this category (see Hinchman 2005):

As for *advisories*, what the speaker expresses is not the desire that *H* do a certain action but the belief that doing it is a good idea, that it is in *H*’s interest. *S* expresses also the intention that *H* take this belief of *S’*s as a reason to act. The corresponding perlocutionary intentions are that *H* take *S* to believe that *S* actually has the attitudes he is expressing and that *H* perform the action he is being advised to perform. (Bach and Harnish 1979 p49)

In a footnote (1979 fn3), they note that advising can be performed by either imperatives or declaratives, and contend that in the latter case, advising involves an indirect speech act.

Searle classifies speech acts based on their constitutive rules. An early time-slice classifies advising as an assertive speech act:

Contrary to what one might suppose advice is not a species of requesting. It is interesting to compare “Advise” with “Urge” “Advocate” and “Recommend.” Advising is not trying to get you to do something in the sense that requesting is. Advising is more like telling you what is best for you. (Searle 1969 p67).

Later time-slices change their minds. Searle (1979, 28) distinguishes between advising-to and advising-that, and Searle and Vanderveken (1985 pp.202-3) classify advising as a directive that can take direct imperatival or indirect declarative forms.

The disagreement among speech act theorists about how to classify advising is no surprise if advising involves bothassertive and directive speech acts. We can easily find examples of advising which provide evidence for both views. Searle and Bach and Harnish’s appeal to indirect speech acts suggests a strategy for the supporters of the assertive and directive pictures to explain the diversity of advising. The idea would be to unify advising not through primary illocutionary acts, but through a combination of primary and indirect speech acts. For example, the assertive picture will maintain that cases of advising-to are indirectly assertions of an underlying normative fact which supports the course of action (which we might think of as making as ifto direct (Harris 2014 pp.106-11, 2021 fn4)), and interrogative advising is indirectly an assertion of a relevant normative or non-normative fact.

## 3.2. Speech Act Theoretic Features of Advising

We now turn to typologies of speech acts to argue that advising cannot be contained with the categories of assertives, directives, or askings. Typologies of speech acts appeal to the following kinds of properties to make their basic classifications:

1. Illocutionary point (the essential purpose of a type of speech act) (Austin 1975, Searle 1979, pp.1-29, Searle and Vanderveken 1985);
2. The direction of fit of the content expressed by the speech act (whether that be word-world as in the case of assertives, or world-word as in the case of directives) (Searle 1979, pp.1-29, Searle and Vanderveken 1985);
3. The kind of content expressed by the sentences uttered in making the speech act (whether that be propositional content, imperatival content, or interrogative content) (Roberts 2018);
4. The effects of the speech act on the conversational scoreboard (assertives update the common ground, directives update the audience’s to-do list, askings update the questions under discussion) (Stalanker 1978, Portner 2007, Roberts 1996/2012);
5. The mental states expressed by the speech acts (with assertives expressing belief, directives desire or intention, and interrogatives expressing the desire to know, or the intention to discover) (Bach and Harnish 1979).

Let’s go through these features in turn, considering how advising displays the features which these views associate with assertives, directives, and askings.

*3.2.1. Illocutionary Point*

Illocutionary point corresponds to the essential point of a type of speech (Searle 1969 C3, 1979 2-3, Searle and Vanderveken 1985, C9). According to Searle (1979 pp.12-4), if a speaker is asserting, she is committing herself to the truth of the proposition asserted, and if she is commanding, she is attempting to get the hearer to do the action commanded, if a speaker is asking, she is attempting to get the hearer to answer her question. For Searle, illocutionary point is characteristic of a type of speech (such as assertives), which is combined with various other features, including degree of strength, preparatory conditions, and mental state expressed, to give an illocutionary force which is characteristic of a particular speech act type (such as telling) (Searle 1979, p.3).

Advising involves various illocutionary points. Advising-that involves the speaker committing herself to the truth of a proposition. Advising-to involves something close to attempting to get the hearer to do something (although unlike commanding, the grounds for this attempt are the advisee’s antecedent reasons). Interrogative advising is also a little unusual. The standard case of asking a question has often been understood as a request that the hearer answer a question together with an expression of the desire to know the answer to that question (Bach and Harnish 1979, p.47, Searle and Vanderveken 1985 pp.199-200). In the case of advising by asking a question, the point is often to facilitate the advisee coming to know the answer to that question, or to propose that question as a target for shared observation.[[23]](#footnote-23)

The illocutionary point of the direct speech acts involved in advising are diverse, but what about the illocutionary points of the indirect speech acts involved in advising? It is not clear whether we can find evidence for enough indirect speech acts for either assertive or directive version of this strategy work If I ask you to advise me about a possible career change, and you ask me ‘what parts of your job do you like?’ and tell me ’the job market is tough everywhere’, neither piece of advising necessarily involves a recommendation. To make the strategy of unification via indirect speech acts work for either view, we would either need to find evidence that we are systematically engaged in one or other indirect speech acts whilst advising, or drastically restrict the category of advising.

*3.2.2. Direction of Fit*

The direction of fit associated with a sentence corresponds to the way a sentence relates to the world (Anscombe 1957 pp.56-7, Searle 1979 pp.3-4)). Some sentences function to represent the world, meaning that a mismatch between word and world is associated with a fault in the sentence. Other sentences function to change the world to bring it into line with words, meaning that a mismatch involves a fault in the world. Assertives have word-to-world direction of fit, and directives have world-to-word direction of fit.[[24]](#footnote-24) Advising-to involves world-to-word direction of fit: advising someone to do something functions to get them to pursue the course of action recommended, and if the advice is not taken, the fault lies (primarily) with the advisee, not with the advisor. By contrast, advising-that involves word-to-world direction of fit: advising-that functions to represent a relevant part of the world, and if there is a mismatch between word and world, the fault is with the advisor’s word, not the world.

*3.2.3. Kind of Content*

Although there is a long tradition of assimilating all meaning to propositional content (Belnap 1990), there is an emerging paradigm within philosophy and language and linguistics—synthesised in (Roberts 2018)[[25]](#footnote-25)—which claims that different grammatical moods track different kinds of content. If we take declarative sentences to express propositions, imperative sentences to express directed tasks (Portner 2007), and interrogative sentences to express questions (Groenendijk and Stokhof 1984), the fact that advising involves declaratives, imperatives, and interrogatives means that it involves three different kinds of content.

*3.2.4. Scoreboard Effects*

We might think about different kinds of speech acts in terms of the various ways in which they update conversational context, understood as a complex of shared mental states. Roberts (2018) develops this view into a typology of speech acts, suggesting that the basic categories are assertions*,* which are proposals to adopt shared beliefs, and suggestions, which are proposals to adopt shared intentions. Suggestions break down into directions, which are proposals to adopt shared intentions to do things in the world, and interrogations, which are proposals to adopt shared inquisitive plans. According to this view, advising would split between the major categories: advising-that is a proposal to update the common ground with information relevant to the advisee’s decision, advising-to is a proposal to update the advisee’s to-do list with a particular action in response to his practical situation, and interrogative advising is a proposal for the hearer to answer a question.

*3.2.5. Mental States Expressed*

Following Bach and Harnish, we might want to distinguish speech acts via the mental states they express. The standard test for the relation between speech acts and mental states is the Moorean sentence. If combining a performative speech act with a denial of the expression of a mental state is strange in the same way as ‘it’s raining, but I don’t believe it is’ (anomalous, but not inconsistent), then this is evidence that the speech act expresses the relevant mental state.[[26]](#footnote-26) I’ll take it that assertive speech acts express belief, and directive speech acts to express either desires or the belief that the direction will be successfully followed.

Focusing on advising-that and advising-to and the omissive version of Moore sentences gives us six sentences to consider:

1. #I advise you that the train is leaving in ten minutes, but I don’t believe that it will.
2. I advise you that the train is leaving in ten minutes, but I don’t want you to catch it.
3. I advise you that the train is leaving in ten minutes, but I don’t believe you are going to catch it.
4. #I advise you to go to Dotori, but I don’t believe that you ought to go.
5. I advise you to go to Dotori, but I don’t want you to go.
6. ? I advise you to go to Dotori, but I don’t believe that you will go.

13) is weird in the same way as the original Moore sentence for belief. This is unsurprising, given the suggestion that advising-that is a kind of assertion. Neither 14) or 15) is strange. If the first conjunct is a simple assertion without any associated indirect speech act, it would be completely reasonable to combine it with the statement of desire, or disbelief in another proposition.[[27]](#footnote-27) 16) appears weird in the Moorean way. It is possible to advise someone to do something that you don’t believe they ought, but uttering this sentence is very strange. 16) combines a recommendation with a denial of belief relating to the normative grounding of that recommendation. If, as we suggested in section 2.3., advising-to is a directive grounded in knowledge of the advisee’s good, we can explain the oddness of 16) by thinking of it as combining a speech act with the denial that one is properly positioned to undertake that act.

I suggest that sentences like 16) will be weird for all directive speech acts (see Portner 2007), although the explanation for the weirdness in different cases will be slightly different. Consider orders:

1. # I order you to take a seat, but I don’t believe that you ought to.

19) is odd, because the expected upshot of the order in the first clause is that the task of taking a seat is added to the hearer’s to-do list, making it the case that he ought to take a seat. So, although the explanation for the weirdness of 16) goes through some distinctive features of advising, the general pattern occurs for all directives.[[28]](#footnote-28)

17) is fine. Although we normally expect advisors to desire our good, it is possible for an advisor to recommend a course of action which promotes the advisee’s goals, while frustrating the advisee’s. Advising is not unusual in this respect: warnings, exhortations, and suggestions are all indexed to the hearer’s goals and desires, opening up the possibility of a divergence between a direction and the desires of the speaker.

18) seems odd, especially if we replace the first clause with an imperative:

18\*) ? Go to Dotori, but I don’t believe that you are going to go.

18\*) is related to what Mandlekern (2021) calls practical Moore sentences: sentences which combine an order with an indicative that leaves it open whether the order will be followed.

1. # You must close the door, but I don’t know whether you will.

Although it is tempting to assimilate 18) and 18\*) into this category, one can establish contexts in which they are acceptable. Consider a case in which 18) is uttered by a foodie giving unsolicited advice to her disorganised friend. (Imagine the second clause being spoken in an exasperated tone). In this case 18) is perfectly comprehensible, but rather rude. This is not a surprise: practical Moore sentences involve orders, and we’ve seen various ways that advising and ordering differ. Underlining this difference, note that combining an order with a declarative that leaves open whether it will be followed is odd (Mandlekern 2021), but analogous sentences for advising are fine:

1. I advise you to go to Dotori, but you might not go.
2. Go to Dotori! But it’s up to you to decide where to go.

The residual weirdness around 18) and 18\*) owes to the fact that it is usually not going to be helpful to advise someone to do something that they are not in a position to do. These sentences give bad advice but don’t involve pragmatic contradictions.

The data in 13-18 is a little complicated, but the underlying pattern is that advising displays Moorean sentences which are distinctive of both assertive (14) and directive (17) speech acts, suggesting that advising can express both belief in the proposition asserted, and a belief about what the hearer ought to do.

## 3.3. The place of advising in speech act theory

We’ve seen that advising displays the characteristic features of assertive and directive-type speech acts. There are four possible reactions to this evidence:

1. Advising is not a unified category; ‘advise’ is ambiguous;
2. Advising is a unified speech act, but we frequently make false claims about advising;
3. Advising is a unified speech act, but it is systematically pursued in an indirect way;
4. Advising is not a unified speech act, it is unified by some other feature.

The view that ‘advise’ is ambiguous between an advising-to and advising-that seems to be Searle’s 1979 position. If ‘advise’ were ambiguous we would expect to detect it using the standard tests for ambiguity (Zwicky and Sadock 1975) but applying the standard tests doesn’t detect ambiguity.[[29]](#footnote-29)

An alternative way to maintain the assertive or directive view would be to adopt an error theory for troublesome advising reports. Someone committed to the directive view of advising might think that sentences like ‘I advise you that…’ and ‘Alex advised me that…’ are inappropriate uses of force markers, in the sense that what speakers are doing is not advising, but merely helpfully asserting. Two problems with this view: it is unattractive to ascribe widespread error to sociolinguists, who classify declaratives under advising (see footnote 14), and the proponent of this view would need to find a good reason why we ought to accept an error theory about advising that, rather than an error theory about advising to.

The view that advising is unified through indirect speech acts has some evidence in favour of it: we do engage in various forms of indirect advising. There are three problems with both the directive and assertive versions of this view. First, as we observed in 3.2.1., it is a substantive claim that allassertive advising or all directive advising involves indirect speech acts. We should only posit indirect speech acts where we have some familiarly good evidence for their existence, and there seem to be many cases of assertive and directive advising which do not involve indirect speech acts. One could develop an error theory to account for these cases, but this would also involve ascribing error to sociolinguists (see footnote 12). The second problem is that the linguistic evidence will equallysupport the view that advisory assertives and askings involve indirect recommendations (the indirect directive account), and the view that advisory directives and askings involve indirect assertions (the indirect assertive account). If both the indirect assertive and indirect directive views can appeal to broadly similar kinds of evidence, any attempt to arbitrate this dispute will look pretty futile, and both will collapse into the ambiguity view. Thirdly, neither view is in a position to vindicate the function of the concept of advising. If the concept of advising is a tool to facilitate the pooling of deliberative resources, and deliberators have different kinds of needs, the choice of one kind of deliberative problem as central will be fairly arbitrary.

The alternative is that advising is simply not a kind of speech act. Advising is an activity which we typically pursue via the means of speech, but it is not a kind of speech act. It is a kind of joint practical thinking. Rather than sifting through various complex indirect forms of advising to determine what advising is, we should see the variety of advising as illustrative of the diversity of forms which collaborative deliberation can take. For the purposes of typologies of speech acts, we might still think about the speech acts of advising-to, advising-that, and adviceless advising, and think about advising as a kind of speech act which involves moves within collaborative deliberation. The point remains that while the tools of philosophy of language are useful for mapping out the complexity of advising; we need to look to the theory of joint practical deliberation to understand what unifies it.

# 4. Conclusion

We started by considering what the point of our talk and thought about advising might be, framing the hypothesis that our concept of advising answers to our need to pool deliberative resources. The pooling of deliberative resources turns out to be a surprisingly complex activity, involving the provision of propositions, directions, and questions, and this complexity is reflected in the diversity of forms which advising can take. Recognising the diversity of advising is an important advance in our understanding, but we’ve also seen how to unify these diverse forms using the idea that advising is collaborative deliberation. This view also explains the possibility of adviceless advising, the distinctive modal force involved in advising, the relation between advising and prior normative facts, and why advisors are often not always wise. I don’t think that we need to throw out previous work on advising in ethics and philosophy of language, but quite a bit of it turns out to be about special cases of advising.

Seeing advising as collaborative deliberation can help us get better at advising and at being advised. By understanding the different needs of deliberators and the diversity of forms which advising can take, we can better tailor our style of advising to the needs of advisees. And by understanding collaborative deliberation, we can understand when as advisor is overstepping their responsibilities and advising is coming close to venting, joint deliberation, or ordering.

In closing, I want to note three issues for future research.

There is no reason to think that advising is the only activity which cross-cuts the categories proposed by typologists of speech acts. It might well be that other communicative verbs which take both declarative and infinitival clauses and systematically bridge grammatical moods—‘promise’, ‘tell’, ‘warn’, ‘guarantee’—turn out to not be kinds of speech acts, but rather kinds of joint thinking or joint action which we pursue via the means of speech acts.[[30]](#footnote-30) One might worry that much of the evidence that suggests that advising is not a kind of speech act will overgenerate, committing us to the view that there are very few (if any) kinds of speech act. This worry is worth taking seriously, but to my knowledge there are no communicative verbs that are connected with declaratives, imperatives, and interrogatives as systematically as ‘advise’ is.

We have been focusing on advising in general, and the majority of high-stakes advising—government advisors, financial advisors, lawyers—involves role responsibilities which shape and limit the way in which they can advise, and place responsibilities which make offering certain kinds of advice non-discretionary. It would be interesting to try to understand what the norms of professional advising are, and how they might shape distinctive forms of collaborative deliberation.

There is a rich connection between advising and friendship: we evaluate friends by the quality and quantity of their advising, and seeking out advice is a way to deepen that friendship. If advising involves treating someone else’s practical situation as your own, then advising will have connections to the Aristotelian ideal of friendship as treating someone as an other self.

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1. See (Nowell-Smith 1954), (Gauthier 1963), (Stewart 1978), (Wiland 2000b, 2021), (Hinchman 2005) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I will use ‘she’ for advisors, ‘he’ for advisors, and singular ‘they’ for incidental characters. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The French *conseiller* appears anomalous without a complement clause specifying advice. 1) is weird, perhaps ungrammatical:

   1) ?Alix m’a conseillé.

   Interestingly, some cleft constructions appear acceptable:

   2) C’est Alix qui m’a conseillée.

   Two possible explanations for the difference. i) The cleft construction triggers ellipsis, meaning that 2) isn’t referring to adviceless advising. ii) The default information structure for advising reports includes *what* was advised, making 1) bad because it doesn’t provide expected information, whereas the cleft construction in 2) foregrounds the question of *who* advised me, which 2) does provide. The first explanation explains away the appearance of adviceless advising, whereas the second provides a pragmatic explanation for the badness of talking about adviceless advising (if the default question is *who advised whom to do what?,* a sentence like 1) will be pragmatically infelicitous rather than syntactically bad). An informal survey of Dutch, Greek, and German suggests that it is acceptable but awkward to use cognates of ‘advise’ without a content clause [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. On the possibility of advising without speech acts see (Searle 1979 pp.6-7). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. We should distinguish between the function of a concept, the function of the thing, and the function of the speech acts used in talking about the thing. Following (Habgood-Coote 2019) I take functional approaches to focus on the functions of concepts, reflecting the fact that our concepts are answerable to our collective practical needs. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See the Joey/Ross storyline in the Friends episode *The One with the Inappropriate Sister.* [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Wiland draws on legal cases to argue that in some cases advisor and advisee are engaged in a form of shared activity (Wiland 2021, C7). Although we might talk about advising in connection to shared activity, I take the Tariq/Hannah case as evidence that this is a fringe usage which ought not to be central to our understanding of advising. In these cases the language of advising might mask what are really commands, joint decisions or threats. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. The dinner club case highlights that collaborative deliberation occurs within other deliberative contexts. If you and I are making a cake together, and I’ve got the job of taking the cake out of the oven, I can ask you for advice about whether the cake is cooked since the question of when to take the cake out of the oven is my responsibility. We can also embed collaborative deliberation within pretences. In a job interview, an interviewer might ask for hypothetical advice. Here the interviewee is asked to engage in collaborative deliberation within a pretence, so we might think of the response as a pretence of a pretence of joint thinking. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The translations for ‘advise that’ are of doubtful acceptability in French, German, Dutch and Italian. In Greek *simvulevo* only takes declaratives involving priority modals (Oikonomou 2021). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. We can report imperatives using declaratives: ‘go to the shops!’ can be reported by ‘Jared said that I ought to go to the shops’. Does this mean that all cases of advising-to are cases of advising-that? Speech act reports are notoriously flexible: the reporter seem to confuse what the advisor has said with a modal statement made true by what they have said, meaning that the report is loose speak. An analogy: one might loosely report a declarative sentence using an epistemic modal: ‘the shop is open’ might be reported by ‘John said that the shop ought to be open’. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Nowell-Smith (1954 C11) distinguishes between advising involving what he calls *Aptness-words*—such as ‘the film is entertaining’—and *Gerundive-words—*such as ‘the film is worth seeing’—suggesting that the former merely contextually entails a recommendation, whereas the latter explicitly commends a course of action. Gauthier (1963, pp.50, 53-5) and Hamblin (1987, p,11) point out that advising can take the form of either imperatives or declaratives, and that the latter need not recommend a course of action. Searle is the first to point out that advising can have the illocutionary point of both assertive and directives, proposing the distinction between advising-that and advising-to (Searle 1979, pp.28-9 See also Stewart 1978, 204, Raz 1979 fn14). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Heritage and Sefi (1992) studied health visitors working with first-time mothers. They distinguish between advising involving recommendations, imperatives, deontic modals, and factual generalisations (1992 pp.368-9). In a study of district nurses Leppänen (1998 p223) classified recommendations given using imperatives, deontic modals, presentations of proposed actions as alternatives, and descriptions of future actions as advising. Locher’s typology of advising includes declaratives, questions, imperatives, referrals to other experts, general information, descriptions of one’s own experience, explanation, and metacommentary (Locher 2006 pp.63-69). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See (Locher 2006 p.65) for examples. Sartre’s famous response to his student “vous êtes libre, choisissez, c'est-à-dire inventez.” [you are free; choose! Which is to say invent!] (Sartre 1946, p.47 my translation) also appears to be a case of adviceless advising, despite the use of imperatives. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Silverman et al. (1992) studied HIV counselling in England and the United States, finding both information-delivery and interview styles of advising. They found that counsellors often switched between these styles, but give a number of examples of discourse fragments in which counsellors only asked questions (1992, 75-78). In her corpus of 280 online advice columns, Locher classified 31% of advisory moves as imperatives inviting future action, 5% as imperatives inviting introspection, 2% as interrogatives inviting actions, 9% as interrogatives inviting introspection, and 52% as declaratives (Locher 2006, 88). Although her category of interrogatives inviting actions plausibly involves a lot of indirect direction, the category of interrogatives inviting introspection is non-directive (except in the sense that asking any question is a proposal to answer it). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. (Stewart 1978 p.207, fn 17). [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I am not suggesting that following advice is morally deficient (see Hills 2009), just that we should care both about doing the right thing and being able to work out what the right thing to do is. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. This paragraph takes inspiration from Craig’s discussion of knowledge-how (Craig 1990, C17). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. I take this terminology from (Portner 2007). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. A caveat: if the advisee’s problem involves shared reasons, or role-responsibilities, we will find a broader range of modals involved in advising. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. The possibility of persuasion in the context of advising means that—contra (Andreou 2006)—advising does not provide support to motivational internalism. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. The acceptability of persuasion is contextual and may be limited by role responsibilities: it would be surprising for a financial advisor to try to persuade you to care more about your family. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. For disagreement about the significance of this distinction see (Raz 1979), (Hamblin 1987 pp.10-14), (Wiland 2000b, 2004), (Darwall 2006 pp.12-13), (Mcmyler 2011 C.5). We need to caveat this claim: sometimes the point of imperatival advice is to break deadlocks: think about advice given to an advisee who faces a Buridan’s ass situation with multiple equally good options, or advice given to a group of people who are facing a co-ordination problem with multiple equilibria. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. A general observation: all types of speech acts can modify the commitments of speaker, hearer, or both. In the case of assertions, unmarked declaratives (‘It’s cold out’) propose shared commitment, rising declaratives (‘It’s cold out[↑]’) propose hearer commitment, while falling declaratives (‘It’s cold out [↓]’) propose speaker commitment (Gunlogson 2004, Portner 2018, pp.207-8). In the case of directives, we can propose hearer commitments (‘feed the cat!’), commitments for both speaker and hearer (‘let’s feed the cat!’), or commitments for the speaker (‘let me feed the cat!’). Interrogatives can also generate commitments for the speaker, as with self-directed questions in essays. On the relation between speech acts and commitments, see (Geurts 2019). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. It is a complicated question what direction of fit askings involve: the presuppositions of a question represent the world, as do its answers, but asking a question plausibly involves the proposal to answer it. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For the view that imperatives express propositions (see Kaufman 2012) and for the view that interrogatives express propositions, see (Karttunen 1977). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. A different kind of Moore-style sentence for advising shows up in Nowell-Smith (1954, p154), who suggests:

    12) You ought to climb it [the mountain], but I don't advise you to.

    Gauthier concurs that this sentence is weird suggesting that in 13) ”the speaker is advising both for and against in the same breath“ (1963, p153). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. In support of the idea that some assertions do not involve indirect recommendations, consider:

    1) I advise you that the train is leaving in ten minutes, but I wouldn’t take it.

    This sentence is not weird in the way that the following sentence is:

    2) #I advise you to take the train in ten minutes, but I wouldn’t take it if I were you. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Weak imperatives (‘take an Oyster’) which are used to make suggestions or to change option spaces do not determine normative facts in this way, either in the case of or ordering and advising. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. For example:

    1. Jane advised Harry that he was going to be late, and to take a Taxi.

    Is quite acceptable. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. See (de Kenessy 2020, 2023). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)