# The Importance of Sincerity

Ajeng Putriningrum

Abstract

This paper discusses Richard Moran's account of testimony. Moran argues for the idea that a person who testifies should be considered as giving assurance rather than providing evidence for her assertion. For Moran, it is the fact that the speaker stands by her assertion *P* that should be the hearer's reason for believing *P*. I argue that, even if this claim is true, the speaker's assurance should be considered as weak and untenable by itself. I draw my argument from the role of sincerity in testimony. Moran views sincerity as giving access to what the speaker assumes responsibility for, but I contend that the view is too optimistic. Sincerity does not guarantee access to the speaker's commitment to her own words, and for this reason, it is unclear whether the assurance from sincere testimony is a good reason for belief.

## 1. Introduction

Similar to the way we depend upon our senses, we often rely upon the testimony of others to know things about the world. As such, we frequently use the words of others to guide us along. We trust them and make them a source of knowledge. When we frame testimony in this way, it seems to have an epistemic status equivalent to perception,[1] albeit one that is probably more defeasible.

This picture of testimony, known as the Evidential View, is one Richard Moran rejects in favor of the Assurance View, which claims that testimony is an activity of giving assurance, not evidence. Just like I am giving you assurance that I will do *A* when I promise to do *A*—that you can blame me and hold me responsible if I fail to do so—I am giving you assurance that *P* is true when I tell you that *P*. You can ask me about my reasons why *P* is worth believing and hold me responsible if I was insincere. The Evidential View, Moran argues, does not take into account this aspect of testimony. For Moran, the Evidential View fails to account for the speaker's *choice* and *self-concsciousness* in telling *P*, which are the very reason why testimony is such a different source of knowledge, compared to those which have more evidential qualities, like perception. Testimony, according to Moran, is not a mere report of facts that one happens to believe; it is also a guarantee that the speaker is willing to stand by her claim.

One argument that Moran gives for his Assurance View comes from his rejection of the traditional account of sincerity's role in testimony. The traditional account takes the position that

[1] See Burge 1995 and McDowell 2001 for some of the works that represent those targeted by Moran.

the speaker's intention in her testimony is to match her speech to her actual state of mind.[2] According to this traditional picture, the best testimony is one that is sincere because, through sincerity, the hearer can access the speaker's belief.[3] Some reasons can be provided for this claim, and one of them is the view that sincere assertion is spontaneous. Construed as such, spontaneity is supposed to give the hearer the most transparent insight into the speaker's beliefs. This is because being spontaneous means that the speaker does not deliberately obscure the content of her mind.

Moran does not agree with such view. To Moran, spontaneity is simply an "absence of either inhibition or the intent to mislead."[4] Such absence does not magically clear the fog that shrouds the speaker's beliefs. In fact, a spontaneous utterance does not guarantee a good view of the speaker's mind because being spontaneous brings its own risks: the possibility of "self-deception, confusion, or simple shallowness".[5] Or, in other words, it presupposes an imperfect understanding we have of ourselves, including of our knowledge and beliefs. Moran raises an issue about how it is unclear why sincerity is valuable at all if its access to the speaker's mind is so prone to be distorted.

Despite these limitations, Moran thinks that sincerity has a robust role to play on the Assurance View: sincerely asserting that *P* means that the speaker also takes up a responsibility to provide justification and reason for believing that *P*. This responsibility is rooted in the speaker's awareness of what she is doing—that by speaking, she means to influence the hearer's belief. Nevertheless, given the spontaneous nature of sincerity, this responsibility is not directly related to belief. Instead, it is related to the speaker's apprehension of what she believes or acceptance of a statement as something with which she wants to be associated.[6] Ideally, the speaker utters the proposition which she reasonably thinks deserves the hearer's attention. This

[2] The traditional picture is mostly derived from Searle 1969.

[3] This way of seeing the role of sincerity is not universally accepted. Jennifer Lackey, for example, says that such a view depends heavily on a particular view that sees testimony as a transmission of belief. She calls it the Belief View of Testimony and she argues against such a view. However, the Belief View itself is prevalent, and almost all Belief View arguments (e.g., Owens 2006; Sosa 2006; Fricker 1994) would require sincerity as a condition for a successful transmission of belief. Moran himself does not endorse the Belief View—as I will make clear later in the paper—but he has always been holding sincerity as a requirement (see Moran 2005). But his understanding of sincerity departs from the majority of Belief View holders. In this paper, I mean to argue against Moran's particular version.

[4] Moran 2018, p. 92.

[5] Ibid.

[6] There are some different accounts of the relationship between 'actual' belief and our acceptance of it. One of the influential ones is D. H. Mellor, who views that there are at least two types of belief: second-order belief and first-order belief. First-order belief is supposed to be the 'actual' belief, while second-order belief is our understanding of the first-order belief (see Mellor 1978). Moran's own view of belief is unclear. Although he is sure to reject Mellor's view on the ground that we do not need the capability of understanding the concept of second-order belief to be sincere (Moran 2018, p. 91-92), Moran still accepts that we may hold contradictory attitudes, including beliefs. The responsibility then lies in the attitude that we accept and express, not the actual attitude within.

acceptance is the essential epistemic relation between the speaker and her claim: it shows the claim for which the speaker is willing to be responsible.

It must be noted that by proposing his version of the Assurance View, Moran wants to distance himself from the knowledge picture and shed light on the moral dimension of testimony, but his insistence that the speaker's assurance is a reason to believe *P* puts him in a position vulnerable to criticism from knowledge-oriented views.[7] In this paper, I make a case against Moran's view in the spirit of such criticism. I think the *prima facie* assumption that the sincere speaker is responsible does not seem to have anything to do with the epistemic value of her testimony, including its value as a reason for belief. In particular, I am challenging Moran's idea of spontaneity and its role in sincerity, and attempting to show how it undermines sincerity's function as a guarantee of the speaker's responsibility. Demanding the speaker to take responsibility for what they say *and* expecting the possibility of the speaker being spontaneous will inevitably create a disharmony. The disharmony, I will argue, is not trivial, especially if Moran wants to claim that assurance is an independent reason for belief.

My reasons, as I will defend in the rest of the paper, are as follows. First, in a spontaneous situation, the speaker is often not in a position to be decisive about her purpose in asserting. Therefore, sincerity does not guarantee access to the speaker's purpose in speaking (Section 3). Second, in a spontaneous situation, the assertion itself does not give access to the speaker's commitment to her claim (Section 4). If my reasons are well founded, then relying upon the speaker's supposed assurance as the sole reason for belief in a conversational setting—detached from extraneous observations, such as the speaker's tone, the nature of the relationship between interlocutors, and so on—might not be epistemically prudent. But before I get to my arguments, I will first lay out the details of Moran's view in Section 2.

## 2. Sincerely Expressing One's Belief

The requirement of sincerity is standard and seems indisputable in its role in testimony.[8] In the context of testimony, sincere revelation of thought is a condition for a successful transfer of belief from one mind to another. Sometimes this view—that testimony is essentially a belief transmission—is called the Belief View of Testimony. According to Jennifer Lackey, the Belief View sees statements as a way of enabling private thoughts to be expressed publicly.[9] The words being spoken are treated as vehicles that transport the speaker's beliefs to the hearer's mind. In

[7] For example, Fricker 1994 and Lackey 2010.
[8] See for example, Audi 1997, Fricker 1994, McDowell 1994, and Moran 2005, among others.
[9] See Lackey 2008, p. 37-38.

such view, the speaker's sincerity is suppoed to make sure that what the hearer receives matches what is in the speaker's mind.

However, many philosophers have disputed the assumed interdependency between testimony and belief, and sincerity is trapped in the middle of this debate. Many philosophers—including Moran—reject the Belief View, for the same grounds he rejects the Evidential View.[10] For one, such a picture does not take into account the voluntariness of giving testimony. Even more important is how it leaves out the significance of voluntarily addressing someone. We may be tempted to think of testimony as a mere belief transmission, but transmitting belief is not enough. At this point, when sincerity is supposed to be the passive tool that allows one's thought to manifest accurately in one's speech, it becomes unclear why sincerity is required in the first place.

Yet, Moran maintains that sincerity is nevertheless required. Not as a bridge between thought and speech, but between intention and speech. To see how this is the case, let us take a look at Moran's view of belief in testimony. His view is derived from Grice's distinction between natural and non-natural meaning, in which natural meaning is understood as meaning that does not depend on subjective agency (e.g., 'those spots mean measles'), and non-natural meaning depends on the subject's intention (e.g., 'those three rings on the bell mean that the bus is full').[11] In the context of belief expression, non-natural meaning is equivalent to personal expression of belief, and natural meaning is equivalent to impersonal expression of belief. See the following passage.

> It is only with respect to the sense of "expression" involving the person as such, the intentional action of expressing one's belief, that the person is in a position to speak for the meaning or epistemic import of what she is attesting to. With respect to whatever may express itself unconsciously or inadvertently in someone's speech or other expressive behavior, while this may indeed be a source of knowledge for the audience, he is on his own as far as assessing its epistemic significance goes ... By contrast, in the ordinary speech exchanges associated with testimony, it is taken for granted that if someone asserts that *P*, the hearer is not on his own in the task of assessing its meaning or its epistemic significance.[12]

The passage discusses two kinds of belief expression: the personal and impersonal. The personal expression of belief is the expression that matters to a testimonial speech; the speaker expresses her belief verbally and addresses someone with her speech. There is an obvious intention to direct the hearer's attention to a specific proposition expressed by the speech. On the contrary,

[10] One of Moran's arguments against the Evidential View is based on the assumption that most proponents of the Evidential View subscribe to the Belief View.
[11] Grice 1957.
[12] Moran 2018, p. 93.

the impersonal expression of belief does not have to be verbal or linguistic (although it could be). It may be a non-verbal action or facial expressions. In this sense, the speaker does not have to address anyone in expressing her belief intentionally. She could even express her belief in private, and other people (who happen to notice) could draw a conclusion from it. For Moran, this kind of belief expression is precisely what testimony is *not*.[13] The idea is that addressing someone personally with her speech should involve knowing to whom her expression is directed and the kind of proposition recognized by the hearer. When the speaker possesses such knowledge, she is bound to respect the hearer's understanding that the speaker is committed to standing by her claim.

When personally expressing a belief, the speaker recognizes that she will be heard and that she should make the hearer recognize what she is trying to do with what she says. The hearer, then, relies on this assumed mutual recognition to decide whether to believe. It is different from the hearer who overhears, since the epistemic value of overhearing must be detached from the speaker's purpose and conscious presentation. The Assurance View does not support the idea that testimony means transmitting belief, *per se*. The value of testimony as a personal belief expression is not in the transmission of its content[14], but rather, in the intention and choice to express some statement. On the contrary, in the Evidential View, both kinds of expression of belief have the same epistemic status, and thus, fail to account for the speaker's freedom to express her belief. Knowing through overhearing and knowing through directed assertion would derive the same kind of reason for belief, ignoring the speaker's agency in choosing to speak and the hearer's dependence on it when forming a belief. This is the reason why in the Assurance View, the role of sincerity, as traditionally understood, ceases to be meaningful for a good account of testimony. It relies too heavily on the idea that testimony is a belief transmission and the assumption that the speaker's sincerity is what enables a successful transmission. Therefore, it fails to account for the difference between belief coming through one's deeds (including speech), with and without the intention to inform.

To understand this conflict better, we shall frame the idea of sincerity in terms of access for conceptual symmetry. Consider the difference between the two formulations:

> **Belief Account of Sincerity (BAS):** For every assertion $A$, speaker $S$ is sincere if $A$ gives hearer $H$ access to $S$'s belief that proposition $P$ is true.
> **Responsibility Account of Sincerity (RAS):** For every assertion $A$, if $A$ gives hearer $H$ access to the proposition that speaker $S$ assumes responsibility for, then $S$ is sincere.

[13] Moran 2018, p. 83-88.
[14] Which, according to some, also means transmitting with it the epistemic properties of the belief. For an example of its proponent, see Dummett 1994. For an example of its critics, see Lackey 2008.

The most obvious difference between the two accounts is the kind of claim they make. Whereas BAS is descriptive, RAS is normative. BAS only postulates about what it means when one is being sincere, whereas RAS dictates about what one must do in order to be considered sincere. Of course, the difference does not imply that those accounts are mutually exclusive. A speaker can both give access to her belief and intend to be responsible for it. What Moran rejects is the idea that access to belief is necessary for a speech to be considered sincere.

But what does it mean to be responsible for our utterance, when the utterance does not have to match our actual belief? Isn't such mismatch insincerity? Not necessarily. In fact, according to Moran, RAS provides an important epistemic relation between the speaker and her speech that would otherwise be unavailable: the proposition that the speaker chooses to express is the proposition with which she wants to be associated. The hearer should be able to safely assume that the speaker is willing to back up her assertion with reasons and justifications. Such an account is surely not enough, for RAS, as it stands, still allows the speaker to intentionally say something she does not believe, as long as she assumes responsibility for it (e.g., having the answers when questioned and ready to offer clarifications). This is far from what we, as a hearer, usually expect from a sincere speaker. RAS needs a more descriptive account of sincerity. It needs an account that shows what it usually looks like and what makes the act of asserting sincerely distinct from insincere utterance.

Moran is aware of this need and offers a solution that he adopts from his predecessors: claiming that insincerity involves another layer of intention.[15] The assumption is that an agent is more readily familiar with the things she genuinely believes than those that she does not believe, and therefore, to say something that diverts from her own belief would require an important kind of inhibition. To be able to say that "I just saw a ghost," to mess with my young nephew requires an inhibition from saying my actual belief which would have been, "I did not see anything resembling a ghost."[16] Thus, Moran's version of sincerity which is a little bit more sophisticated than RAS:

> **RAS-2:** For every assertion A, speaker S is sincere if
> (i) A gives hearer H access to the proposition that S assumes responsibility for, and
> (ii) A is not a result of S's conscious inhibition from her actual belief.

Let us call (i) the responsibility condition, and (ii) the spontaneity condition. The responsibility condition is just RAS without the spontaneity condition. Whereas the spontaneity condition complements RAS with a descriptive element, it disqualifies assertions that are not made in good

[15] Williams, for one, implies this. See Williams 2004.
[16] Hinchman, another proponent for Assurance View, suggests that sincerity is more about what one genuinely thinks should be believed by the hearer; but that does not have to be her own belief. See Hinchman 2013.

faith from being considered sincere. It does so by appealing to how we normally use the word 'sincerity' to characterize people's utterances. Since we do not usually demand people to be extremely knowledgeable to be sincere—not even about themselves—it is only fitting that the spontaneity condition merely demands the speaker to *not* have the intention to deceive. It does not require her to possess any further qualification. Therefore, it allows the speaker to be considered sincere even when she is inhibited, as long as she is genuinely unaware of it.[17]

At a glance, the modifications that Moran brought with RAS-2 clarifies why we should still care about the speaker's sincerity even when we no longer consider it as an access to the speaker's belief. For RAS-2 implies that when the speaker speaks without intent to deceive, it may be fairly inferred that what she chooses to say is what she consciously avows or committed to.[18] But such an inference is problematic, especially for the hearer's part.[19] Moran does not specify how much the hearer should contribute to communicative activities. Ideally, the speaker knows that she is responsible for her words. But in a less than ideal world, where the speaker could say things without realizing that she must be responsible for it, should the hearer, *prima facie*, assume that she can access what the speaker is responsible for? Even if we assume that all speakers are, to various extents, aware of their responsibility when they assert, should the hearer, *prima facie*, assume that the speaker is committed to that responsibility?[20]

In the next sections, I will argue my way to the answer 'no' to both questions. The reasons for my answer is that the responsibility condition and the spontaneity condition may not be compatible. For a speaker to assume responsibility for her statement, supposedly, is for her to have full understanding of what she is doing, including the expectation of the hearer and how to fulfil it. But the spontaneity condition undermines this normative condition by allowing the speaker to be self-deceived (among other kinds of irrationality and reasoning defects). It may be fine for the speaker; one can assume responsibility to the best of her ability, and she may not blame herself if she genuinely does not know what she is doing. However, for the hearer, that makes it unclear why she should consider every sincere assertion a reason for belief. The speaker's sincerity does not just *not* guarantee access to the speaker's belief; it also does not guarantee access to her commitment.

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[17] This particular view can be traced back to Williams's allowing Freudian irrationalities. For a more detailed elaboration for how sincerity should allow irrationalities—which Moran approves but never explains—see Williams 2004.

[18] See Moran 2018, p. 177-183.

[19] Moran's focus on the speaker is rooted in his criticism of the Evidential View that he considers putting too much weight on the hearer in a testimonial exchange.

[20] It needs to be made clear that Moran does not assume something like this. However, I argue that this is the consequence of asserting that sincere testimony automatically implies an assignment of responsibility to the speaker, which Moran assumes.

## 3. Spontaneity as Instinct

I am now almost in a position to defend my argument that sincerity does not guarantee access to the speaker's responsibility and commitment. In this section, my strategy is to lay out a case which we typically identify as an instance of spontaneity in order to examine the consequences of applying RAS-2 to the case. In particular, I will show how the spontaneity condition allows the hearer to accept a statement as a reason for belief even in situations in which the speaker has little to no intentional power over her own sentence. If this claim is true, it will undermine the responsibility condition.

To make this argument, I need to first further examine the details of Moran's idea of spontaneity. Unfortunately, Moran is brief in explaining what he thinks of spontaneity, despite the fact that it is integral in his account. What we can know with certainty is that Moran's idea of sincerity and its emphasis on responsibility rather than belief is distinct from many of his predecessors. However, the main idea—that to be sincere, the speaker does not have to express a claim compatible with her actual belief—is in line with many recent accounts of sincerity. Many philosophers working on the matter[21]—if not most—no longer think that the 'telepathic ideal[22]' is helpful to understand the value of communicative practices and truth-sharing. For one, Bernard Williams thinks of sincerity as importantly distinct from accuracy.[23] It is the virtue of accuracy, not sincerity, that is supposed to guard against many things that could go wrong within the reasoning process, such as wish-fulfillment and self-deception.[24] Sincerity is more basic than accuracy; it is a disposition that has its foundation in a spontaneous inclination to come up with what the speaker thinks she believes. Williams even goes as far as saying that sincerity is more primitive and basic than insincerity.

Moran is in agreement with many parts of Williams's view, including the idea that sincerity is fundamentally intertwined with the speaker's belief.[25] But he argues that the consequence of spontaneity not guarding against irrationalities is that it is hard to see sincerity as access to the speaker's actual beliefs, and how, without a reliable access to the speaker's actual beliefs, we need to rethink the value of sincerity altogether. Surprisingly, Moran has not sufficiently elaborated on the role of spontaneity—other than how it is one reason why a sincere assertion cannot be a reliable guide to the speaker's mind—and how it could enhance the value of sincerity in testimony.

[21] With the exception of David Owens, who does not allow irrationalities in his account. According to Owens, sincere assertion *is* a transfer of belief, when that transfer fails—either because the speaker does not actually have the belief or because she is confused about what she believes—then it cannot be considered sincere. See Owens 2006.
[22] See Mellor 1978, Ridge 2006, and Eriksson 2011.
[23] Including accuracy about one's own belief. See
[24] See Williams 2004, p. 76.
[25] Ibid., p. 75.

Even so, there are some hints that we can identify in the fourth chapter of Moran's book, *The Exchange of Words*. He has addressed and offered counterarguments to accounts that seriously take spontaneity as an important feature of everyday conversations. One of those accounts is John McDowell's comparison between speech and the agent's sensory capacity. McDowell points out how assertions made in "suitable circumstances" are "cognitive stand-ins to the states of affairs that they represent". One of his reasons is that it is from early behavioral dispositions that an agent learned how to acquire information from other people's utterances, and the understanding of those people's intentions in speaking is secondary to the need for the information itself. In its most rudimentary form, communicative practices are instinctive; they are "something like conditioned reflex",[26] both for the speaker and the hearer. McDowell made an analogy to a bird that "instinctively emit a characteristic sort of squawk"[27] upon recognizing a predator with their eyes, and that the other bird reacts accordingly upon hearing the squawk.[28] Such an analogy should show the similarity between getting information from perception and from other people's utterance.

It should go without saying that humans' cognitive processes are much more complex than birds. If I walk on a sidewalk in a busy city, and my friend yells, "Look, there's a bear!" to me, I might not do anything to save myself from a possible attack. The idea that there is a bear in the middle of a city is too bizarre, and that background thinking—in addition to the fact that other people around me do not seem to be bothered by any wild animals coming their way—prompts a response, "Ha ha," from me. Even if my friend was right about the bear's presence, and the environment was still the same, it still could not be considered a knowledge transfer mechanism like the squawking birds. The exclamation, "Look, there's a bear!" for humans is not univocal the way squawking is for birds. Therefore, the analogy does not perfectly illustrate how human's instinctive behavior in communication works. It is in this regard that Moran disagrees with McDowell. Moran emphasizes how McDowell's parallelism relies too much on "the fact that we operate with a default assumption of trust",[29] similar to how we trust our senses by default. But in retrieving information from an assertion, there is an important dependency on "someone's self-conscious act for this information",[30] and sensory contact lacks this feature.

However, McDowell does not mean to claim that self-consciousness and the speaker's intention are not in the picture when talking about testimony. In fact, the speaker's intention is

[26] McDowell 2001, p. 47.
[27] Ibid., p. 40.
[28] In a way, McDowell's idea is similar to Williams, except for the fact that while McDowell refers to external reality, Williams refers to belief.
[29] See Moran 2018, p. 102.
[30] Ibid., p.103.

part of the content of testimony. My friend yelling "Look, there's a bear!" in a busy city with intent to deceive is not just deliberately misrepresenting the world, but also her own mind. Humans are capable of recognizing the content of their own mind and misrepresenting it. For that reason, I think McDowell is on to something important. There are assertions that are fully developed; they are completely under the speaker's intentional control. But there are also assertions that are very basic; they are uttered because of a stimulation, like the squawking of birds or language learning in early age. My friend's utterance lies somewhere between the two ends of the spectrum, since the effect of my friend's utterance would be similar to the effect of my own sight of the bear. If my friend yells the sentence in a forest known for having bears, I will immediately take it seriously because the circumstances fit a claim like that. If my example is to be an indication of how we often talk to each other, then McDowell seems to have a better view when it comes to illustrating how spontaneity[31]—or the range of occasions in which a person lacks intent to deceive—works in the real world. Indeed, being told is not equivalent to seeing, but my friend's self-awareness about 'how true' her claim might be eclipsed by the more basic urge to 'say something'.

If it turns out that my friend does not really believe that there is a bear but just panics about the possibility of bears, there are two things that might be happening with her: (i) that there is something wrong with her capacity to form a sentence that accurately represents reality or her own belief, or (ii) that she deliberately misrepresents her own belief about the bear.[32] The first one is a case of inaccuracy or unreliability (i.e., she was sloppy because she was in a hurry), and the second one is a case of dishonesty. We may assume that if the second case is true, then my friend is sufficiently aware of her own intention in speaking, how her sentence would come across, and the ways in which her belief can be concealed. It may be fair to assume that, by being deliberate, my friend is aware of her own choice of speech acts. But such an assumption cannot be applied to the possibility about what happened is the first case. Unlike the second case, the basic urge to spontaneously represent reality in the first case does not imply that there is a conclusive reason for speaking for which the speaker self-consciously assumes responsibility. The

[31] My use of the term 'spontaneity' is not to be confused with McDowell's use, especially in *Mind and World*. McDowell's use of 'spontaneity' is following the tradition of Hume and Kant. In Humean and Kantian lingo, spontaneity is contrasted with receptivity (Kant) and indifference (Hume). For both Hume and Kant, spontaneity is our mind's capability to independently initiate activities. However, in the context of this paper, the word is used differently. Spontaneity, as used in sincerity discourse, refers to the common lack of robustness in one's self-expression. Contrary to such use of the word, spontaneity in sincerity is a much more passive concept; it is because of spontaneity that we can get caught in various reasoning errors when we speak, not in spite of it.

[32] Of course, we could also consider the possibility of this case as a Freudian case in which one has a subconscious desire to mislead, and this intention could only be discovered through thorough therapy sessions. However, for now, I will set such cases aside to focus on simpler cases.

speaker's intention to assert might be either too weak or nonexistent, and for that, she cannot be taken to assume responsibility for it.

Moran could reply that we need to hold my friend responsible in accordance with the speech act that she performs. If my friend's purpose is to alarm rather than to inform, then we should evaluate her utterance as a warning rather than assertion. I must treat her as a person who warns, not a person who asserts. But the fact that the sentence that startled me is uttered and structured like an assertion should matter, because it makes my responsibility as a hearer murky: do I, as a hearer, have the responsibility to figure out what kind of speech act my friend performed? I think the answer is no. As a competent language user, I should have the right to assume that the sentence that is structured like assertion is an assertion. But should this right be extended to the right to assume that my friend intends the sentence to be an assertion? I do not think so. In fact, my right comes with another responsibility: to conceive the sentence as a reason for belief simply because I have background knowledge about how it is uttered in an appropriate setting and has dire implications if true whether or not the sentence is intended as an assertion, not because my friend intends to assume responsibility for her utterance as an assertion.

Here is another possible objection. For her statement to count as testimony, my friend should be fully intentional. It is my right, as a hearer, to assume that sentences that sound like assertion is *intended* to be an assertion. Responsibility in speaking, just like most other kinds of responsibility, is 'thrust' upon the agent by her own decision to act. As a hearer, I have the right to hold my friend responsible by asking follow-up questions such as, "Where did you see it?" "How did you know?" I could even ask, "Did you intend to inform or warn me?" If my friend cannot answer them, then I can blame her for being careless with her utterances. However, if as a hearer I need to be aware that sincerity allows for a range of reasoning defects, including uncertainty of reason for speaking, it is hard to see how the mere fact that I am entitled to ask questions to my friend is an *eo ipso* reason for believing that there is a bear. There needs to be more justification for it, and Moran might have to resort to default assumption of trust, the very feature of the Evidential View that Moran rejects in the first place. If anything, given the situation, it may be a reason for doing something about the bear. But in order to do something, I do not have to believe it. I just have to entertain it as a reasonable possibility. My friend's responsibility, then, is not for inducing belief, but to act as such as to influence me to do something, which could have further practical consequences.

## 4. Spontaneity and the Strength of Commitment

In the previous section, I showed how the view that testimony is instinctive might challenge the

idea that the hearer can assume the speaker is consciously taking on responsibility for her utterance. In this section, I will cover another area of conversation prone to reasoning defects tolerated by the spontaneity condition: the vagueness of commitment. Suppose that instead of being conceived as access to what the speaker assumes responsibility for, the responsibility condition is understood as implying access to what the speaker is committed to. So, when I judge that my friend speaks sincerely about the presence of a bear, I can assume that I have access to her commitment to *P*. Even if it turns out that she does not intend to assert, I can at least fairly assume she is committed to some kind of reality: that there might be a bear, and that by warning, she wants me to be aware of that possibility. But the question that follows is the same: what does the assumption of such commitment entail, and would the answer be in the Assurance View's favor?

To answer the question, I will consider another consequence of accepting the spontaneity condition. First, let us take a look at P. F. Strawson's discussion of intention in speech acts[33] to see more closely how commitment in communicative activities comes in range.[34] Imagine a speaker saying the words, "Don't go!" We can say that she orders the hearer not to go, and her words' success depends on the hearer's recognition that she is not allowed to go. But we can also consider the words to be considered an entreaty. Though order and entreaty share the same aim—making the hearer aware of the speaker's hope for the hearer not to go—the attitudes involved in the two acts are different.

There are many ways to sort out the important differences between order and entreaty.[35] However, for the purpose of our discussion, I will only consider the commitment aspect to it. When the speaker orders the hearer not to go, the speaker undertakes some kind of authority over the hearer (which may or may not be true). Otherwise, she would not exercise it, knowing that her hope will not authoritatively affect the hearer's consideration. By saying what she wishes out loud and addressing it directly to the hearer, we can assume that she is committed to making the hearer comply.[36] The entreating speaker, on the other hand, shows a weaker commitment. Her hope directly concerns the decision which the hearer will make (to go or not to go), but she,

[33] See Strawson 1964.
[34] Strawson's focus is on the nature of convention of speech act, something that I will set aside for the sake of focusing on the current discussion.
[35] See Strawson 1964, p. 455.
[36] An order usually implies consequence, be it events that will entail the decision or something that affects the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. If the hearer refuses, the speaker may or may not take any action to force her way. A very committed speaker might issue a threat to get the hearer to do things her way, and a less committed speaker might only remind the hearer about the unwanted consequences of her decision not to comply. These actions can follow an entreaty too, but the entreaty itself does not automatically imply them. When they *appear* to be implied, there may be an intention to manipulate.

for some reason, presents herself as having little to no authority to force it. Without this assumption of authority, the speaker supposes that she cannot be committed to enforcing her hope (at least, not with words). Rather, what she can do is state her hope for the hearer's consideration. Entreaty can be considered fully apart from order, but there is also an important relationship between the two speech acts. The entreating speaker might order if she thinks she could commit to it, or if it better serves her purpose. However, to the hearer, both illocutionary acts may appear identical: they are both about how the speaker's wishing the hearer to stay. It is not difficult to figure out what exactly the speaker wants. What is not always clear is how much the speaker is committed to the success of the speech.

Analogously, there are at least two contexts in which a speaker could utter a truth-apt statement. First, when the speaker wants to make the hearer believe what she says, and second, when the speaker wants to make the hearer aware of what she thinks (either as a standalone reason or as a prerequisite for another goal). The first context is relevant to cases in which the speaker and the hearer are interested in the truth and nothing but the truth. The speaker, then, must be committed to a proposition that she accepts as a reason for belief. In contrast, the speaker in the second context does not need to fully commit to a proposition because it is not the most important thing in her speech. In this context, justification and reasons may still be needed. But what matters is what the speaker is thinking, be it a confident belief or a merely entertained proposition. It does not mean that there is no commitment whatsoever. If the speaker addresses someone in particular, then she makes a commitment for a certain claim to be heard and considered. This commitment, however, does not have to involve doxastic justification because presenting the claim as a reason for belief is not a priority. Similar to entreaty, this kind of utterance still does its role in communication, but it may lack a force that should make it imposing.[37]

The weak commitment to one's own claim might be a clue in itself for how much the hearer should believe what the speaker said, and this commitment is not always apparent immediately. But RAS-2 is normative: the speaker must present herself as committed to her claim in order to be successful in asserting sincerely, whatever her actual commitment is.[38] In this way, assertion is similar to promise, as Moran himself has noted. Moran's aim in bringing up promise as an analogy is simply to show how both kinds of speech act similarly implicate consequences for the speaker. When she utters something with a certain aim that affects the

[37] C. S. Peirce has a different view on this matter. He claims that asserting *just means* establishing oneself as having a 'cognitive authority' over *P*. He said, "This ingredient, the assuming of responsibility, which is so prominent in solemn assertion, must be present in every genuine assertion." See Peirce 1978.
[38] See Moran 2018, p. 106.

hearer, she ties herself to the hearer. Just the way a promise is an assurance that the speaker will do something in the future, an assertion is an assurance that the speaker will stand behind what she says.

Here is another way of illustrating the analogy between assertion and promise. The explicit declaration of *P* just means presenting oneself as committing to the truth of *P*, the way promising to do *A* means presenting oneself as committing to doing *A*. By saying *P* out loud, the speaker is bound to the acceptance that she needs to be responsible for the truth of *P*. Surely, assertion and promise are different. This fact seems obvious. The realization of a promise depends solely on the speaker's intention and commitment; the truth of an assertion does not. Moran himself has pointed out that "in promising, the speaker commits herself to some performance, to making something true, where the performance and the truth are 'up to her,' something she can fulfill, whereas in ordinary assertion the truth that is claimed is not up to the speaker and is not presented as such."[39] However, I have argued that a sincere assertion only secures a thin assurance, or assurance as a simple normative force, rather than a guarantee to what the speaker actually commits to. If my argument is right, then we must ask whether the speaker's thin assurance is enough to be an independent reason for belief. Especially given the fact that assertion is only one of many ways of knowing whether *P*, unlike a promise whose truth is completely up to the speaker.

Moran might respond by saying that the speaker's commitment lies in saying what is necessary to ensure the success of the assertion. Thus, the assumption of responsibility for an assertion's reason and justification can only be expected if the speaker has decided that what she says is an assertion and not, say, a warning. That decision is, in fact, part of the speaker's responsibility. Moran says the following:

> To count as a competent speaker of a language is to be recognized as having definitive "say" over which illocution one's utterance count as, whether as informative assertion, or as promise or apology, whether a mere recitation or as a claim expressing one's commitment ... The speaker's authority to determine the illocutionary status of her utterance is the authority she has to present herself as accountable for the performance of some speech act.[40]

According to this passage, the speaker has the freedom to say what it takes to create the effect that she desires (e.g., making the hearer believes what she says), and she is responsible for the freedom that she exercises. In this case, the person who orders must be sure that she intends to order, and the person who entreats must be sure that she intends to entreat. The contents of

[39] See Moran 2018, p. 139.
[40] Ibid., p. 65-66.

both illocutions may be identical, and both of them bring the same kind of responsibility: answering why the speaker thinks the hearer should not go.

However, given the nature of spontaneity in being sincere, someone can say the words "Don't go!" without being sure about the kind of speech act she just committed to while also having no intent to manipulate. Strawson is right when he said entreaty could have an even more intense force on the hearer because it could show how desperate or passionate the speaker is. It could also show how the speaker may benefit from the apparent low amount of authority,[41] but the only thing that differentiates the presentation of order and entreaty in the same sentence ("Don't go!") might just be the speaker's tone or the context of the conversation. The speaker and the hearer could be on the same page about what the sentence is supposed to do (convincing the hearer not to go) but not on the same page about the commitment of the speaker to her utterance. While it is possible for the speaker to study the different illocutionary acts available to her and which one is better suited to her purpose, that would still be too remote from what is happening in ordinary spontaneous situations.

The next question is whether it matters. Surely, the epistemic standard may not have to be that high. The speaker does not have to expect the speaker to be completely certain in order for her to make a sincere statement. Would it not be fair to assume that the speaker who utters *P* is, at the very least, surer of the truth of *P* rather than *not-P*, and that she is more ready to be responsible for *P* rather than *not-P*? It may be true, but it still does not follow that such an assumption is drawn from the supposed access to the speaker's commitment to what she says. At the end of the day, the access that the speaker's apparent sincerity gives does not pertain to the speaker's agency or her self-awareness about the epistemic weight of her speech act. Rather, it pertains to the mere event of the agent's utterance. If this is the case, when deciding whether to believe, the hearer should not rely on the assumption that the speaker might commit to their own words. The hearer can only rely on the presumption that the speaker self-consciously endorses *P*, and *not-P*. If I am right, then the agent's self-consciousness is only part of a range of evidence that *P* is probable, and it cannot stand by itself.

## 5. Conclusion

In Section 3 and 4, I have offered my arguments why the responsibility and spontaneity conditions are incompatible. I showed how the two possible ways of interpreting the responsibility condition—that we should assume that the speaker assumes responsibility for what

[41] Strawson 1964, p. 455.

she says or that she commits to what she says—fail in light of the possibilities that are brought about by the spontaneity condition.

By endorsing the Assurance View, Moran seems to want to remove the contingencies in the Evidential View's reliance on the *prima facie* belief of the speaker. However, because the hearer cannot assume that belief is accessible through sincere testimony, the Assurance View must be able to account for the substitution of belief as the hearer's reason to believe *P*. Moran argues that it is the speaker's assuming responsibility for what they say. But I have argued that even that view, if understood descriptively, does not seem entirely effective in its strategy. The speaker's assuming responsibility is not guaranteed through the mere fact of uttering sentence. The guarantee, if any, lies in the norms imposed by the responsibility condition. However, such a guarantee will need to depend on the *prima facie* assumption that the sincere speaker knows about the norms she needs to follow. Even when the speaker is not ready to justify, having no stance whatsoever regarding the illocutionary status of her claim, or simply indifferent towards whether the hearer considers her claim as a candidate for belief, the hearer could still legitimately consider the speaker as giving assurance under this view.[42]

Ultimately, a sincere assertion is not a sincere promise. Unlike a promise—which is a paradigmatic example of the value of sincerity as the overt assumption of responsibility—assertion involves more than the speaker's intention to do something in the future and the hearer's reliance on the overt expression of that intention. An assertion involves the proposition itself, something that is completely independent of both the speaker's intention and the hearer's understanding of the speaker's intention. The truth at stake goes beyond the relationship between the speaker and the hearer. To form a belief, the hearer must not treat that assurance as an independent reason for belief but must identify circumstances external to the speaker's mere goodwill.

I will wrap up the discussion by summarizing the efforts I made throughout the paper. I have argued that the speaker's commitment to her own claim can be independent of the speaker's well-meaning intention to claim what appears to be true. Therefore, a sincere assertion only secures an assurance as a normative force, rather than access to what the speaker commits to. The speaker's commitment and self-apprehension are as much of a mystery as her belief. Because of that, the Assurance View faces a very similar problem as the Evidential View: how can the speaker's commitment enhance rather than detract?[43] I have not answered that question, nor have I offered an argument for the claim that the frailty of one's commitment detracts from

[42] See Moran 2018, p. 139.
[43] One of Moran's argument against the Evidential View is how the vulnerability of testimony to insincerity and unreliability makes the intentional nature of testimony detracts from its believability. See Moran 2018, p. 45.

the believability of the assertion.

At this point, since the access to the speaker's intention and readiness to be responsible cannot be guaranteed, it would be much simpler to account for the role of the normative requirement for the speaker to assume responsibility as part of a range of fallible evidence of *P*. It seems that the burden is still on the hearer to investigate the speaker's commitment to her claim and how much the speaker's commitment can be relied upon. But that is not what the Assurance View endorses.

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