

# ‘Not’ Again

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## Abstract

This paper revisits some views about negation I defended in two early papers. Some of the themes of those papers have been developed sympathetically in recent work by Tim Smiley, Lloyd Humberstone and Ian Rumfitt. However, Rumfitt and Peter Gibbard have both criticised arguments I offered in defence of Double Negation Elimination (DNE), against a Dummettian intuitionist. I reconsider those arguments, arguing that although they survive Rumfitt’s and Gibbard’s attacks, the case against Dummett is for other reasons less straightforward than I took it to be. With reference to Rumfitt’s own defence of DNE, I call attention to the attractions of the view defended in my second paper that negation has dialectical origins. I also point out some difficulties for this view which seem to have been overlooked by previous writers, including me.

## I Introduction

This paper revisits some views about negation I defended in two early papers. (Price, 1983a, 1990) Some of the themes of those papers have been developed sympathetically in recent work by Tim Smiley, Lloyd Humberstone and Ian Rumfitt. However, Rumfitt and Peter Gibbard have both criticised arguments I offered in defence of Double Negation Elimination (DNE), against a Dummettian intuitionist. In this paper I reconsider those arguments, arguing that although they offer a response to Rumfitt’s and Gibbard’s criticisms, the case against Dummett is for other reasons less straightforward than I took it to be. More significantly, I think that some of the issues I raised in those early papers have not had the prominence they deserve in recent work. And I think that there is at least one deep problem whose significance I myself missed, and which has not been noticed in the recent revival of interest in these themes. If I’m right, then the most useful task of the present paper will be to call attention to this problem.

I’ll begin by distinguishing four theses defended in those two early papers.

1. *Bilateralism*. In the first paper (1983a), I defended a view canvassed but rejected by Dummett, that sense be taken to be determined by both assertion and denial conditions, rather than either singly. This is what Rumfitt (2000) has recently termed a

bilateral approach to sense. (Rumfitt himself defends such an approach, at least in certain cases.)

2. *Classicality*. In this context, and then later separately in the second paper (1990), I offered arguments that I took to show that even someone beginning where Dummett does was entitled to ‘classical’ negation, with DNE. I suggested that this posed a problem for antirealism of Dummett’s sort.
3. *Dialecticalism*. In the later paper especially, I focussed on the genealogy of negation: the question as to how and why we come to have such an operator in natural language. I defended what might be called a dialectical answer, viz. that negation originates in dialogue, in contexts in which one speaker disagrees with an assertion made by another—it is an explicit, conflict-signalling expression of what the respondent takes to be a contrary belief.
4. *Rejectivism*. In both papers, I defended what Humberstone (2000) calls rejectivism, viz., the view that negation needs to be understood in terms of such a primitive speech act of denial, or rejection, rather than vice versa. (In particular, on this view, it is not ultimately explanatory to say that denial that S is assertion that not-S—the right direction of explanation is the reverse.)

As the references here to Rumfitt and Humberstone indicate, there has been recent attention to some of these theses. In the case of rejectivism, much of the recent interest is generated by the work of Smiley (1996), who notes its affinities with some of the ideas discussed in my two papers.<sup>1</sup> As I said, Rumfitt himself defends bilateralism (in a much more careful version than mine). In that context, he himself argues for what I’m calling classicality, after criticising some other attempted defences of DNE, including mine and one by Peacocke (1987). Rumfitt is also committed to rejectivism, I think, as any bilateralist must be.

More recently, Peter Gibbard (2002) has endorsed Rumfitt’s criticism of my first attempt to defend DNE, and also criticised my later attempt, or at any rate the inference I drew from it concerning classicality. Gibbard also criticises Rumfitt’s defence of classicality.

These recent discussions provide one of my two motivations for the present paper. The other stems from a recent paper of mine (Price 2004), in which I discuss the presuppositions of a theory of meaning in Dummett’s sense, and its relation to other possible approaches. This discussion seemed to me to clarify some of the issues in those parts of the early papers which were critical of Dummett’s program, and hence to offer something useful to the recent exchange between Rumfitt, Dummett and Gibbard.

The present paper has three main objectives:

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<sup>1</sup>Humberstone also notes the importance of early work by Kent Bendall (1978, 1979), to which I referred in my (1990).

1. I want to reconsider my previous arguments for classicality, in the light of Rumfitt's and Gibbard's criticisms. In particular, I want to call attention to a pragmatist element present in both my early arguments, though more explicit in the latter. This element still seems to me to be significant, and to deserve more attention than it has received in the recent discussions. And it provides an answer to Rumfitt's main objection (which Gibbard endorses).
2. I want to argue that the current discussion of rejectivism pays insufficient attention to dialecticalism. While Rumfitt clearly identifies one of the problems that dialecticalism is needed to solve, I think he misses both an easy dialectical solution, and some deeper problems—roughly, the problems of where the bipolarity of judgement comes from in the first place, and what fixes the particular kind of rejection associated with negation.
3. I want to call attention to a difference between bilateralism and a theory of meaning of a Dummettian sort, to which I think I paid insufficient attention in my early papers. The distinction in question turns on crucial differences between two conceptions of what a theory of meaning should tell us. While I was aware of the relevant distinction already in (1983a), I think I underestimated how radical a move it would be to step from Dummett's side of it to mine, and hence was wrong to think of what I proposed as an alternative version of Dummett's program. I think the same is true of Rumfitt's bilateralism. Bilateralism has much to recommend it, I think, but calls for a more radical challenge to Dummett's conception of the goals of a theory of meaning than I previously envisaged.

## 2 The pragmatic defence of DNE

In both my early papers, a key ingredient of my defence of DNE was the claim that there is an important practical sense in which believing  $S$  and believing  $\neg\neg S$  come to the same thing: roughly, they have the same consequences for action and decision. However, there are significant differences between the ways in which this pragmatic point is developed in the two papers.

In the earlier paper, the crucial passages go like this. I begin with a familiar characterisation of belief in terms of its consequences for deliberation:

Roughly, to believe that  $S$  is to be disposed to act as if  $S$ , whenever one thinks that it makes a difference whether  $S$ . Similarly, to disbelieve that  $S$  is roughly to be disposed to act on the assumption that not- $S$ —that is to ignore the possibility that  $S$ —whenever one thinks that it makes a difference to the outcomes of one's actions whether  $S$ . (Price 1983a: 171)

The argument then attempts to establish that someone who takes  $\neg S$  to be deniable, because they reject some proposition  $T$  which they take to be a consequence of  $\neg S$ , should take  $S$  to be assertible. The crucial passage goes as follows:

Let us therefore suppose that we cannot hold open the possibility of disagreeing, or coming to disbelieve, that  $S$  (because if we were to do so we would agree that  $T$ , and we disagree that  $T$ ). Then in assessing the expected utilities of possible future actions, we can discount those outcomes which depend on it not being the case that  $S$  (for such an outcome would give us grounds for disagreeing that  $S$ , and this is just the possibility we rule out). In other words, we can proceed, whenever it makes a difference whether  $S$ , on the assumption that  $S$ . And this is precisely what agreeing (or believing) that  $S$  amounts to. (Price 1983a: 171)

Rumfitt quotes from these passages, and then objects like this:

[E]ven if we waive any doubts about Price's account of belief, this argument begs the question. By his second premiss [i.e. my account of disbelief – HP], one who ignores or discounts the possibility that not  $P$  is disposed to act on the assumption that not not  $P$ . But the inference—marked by the phrase “in other words”—that such a person must also act on the assumption that  $P$  takes for granted the crucial point at issue—namely, the acceptability of double negation elimination. (Rumfitt 2000: 814)

Gibbard endorses this objection, saying ‘I take Rumfitt's criticism . . . as decisive.’ (Gibbard 2002: 300)

I think my argument is defensible, however, at least against a Dummettian opponent—though admittedly the defense turns on a consideration I did not make explicit in the original paper. (I am not now sure to what extent I was aware of the role that it needs to play.) It rests on the qualification ‘whenever it makes a difference whether  $S$ ’, in the inference to which Rumfitt objects, and in my pragmatic account of belief.

I would now put the point like this. To imagine a case in which it makes a difference to the outcome of some action whether  $S$  is to imagine a case in which there is a procedure available for deciding whether  $S$ . What procedure? Simply that of performing the action in question, and seeing what happens—seeing whether the outcome is the one expected if  $S$ , or the one expected if  $\neg S$ . But the intuitionist agrees that when  $S$  is decidable,  $S$  follows from  $\neg\neg S$ . So the crucial pragmatic thought is something like this. To deliberate on the basis of a commitment to a proposition  $S$  is to think about hypothetical cases in which it is decidable whether  $S$ . So a pragmatic view of belief—a view tied to the role of beliefs in such deliberations—leaves no room for a gap between believing  $\neg\neg S$  and believing  $S$ .

Of course, one might challenge this pragmatic view of belief. One might argue that there is a need for a more fine-grained notion of belief than this pragmatic criterion allows—a notion which does allow for a distinction between believing  $\neg\neg S$  and believing  $S$ . More on this possibility in a moment. But I think that if, with Rumfitt, we ‘waive

any doubts about [such an] account of belief', my argument goes through. I'd now put the basic point like this. To take a belief to have consequences for decision is to take it to be decidable, and hence, by intuitionistic lights, to be such that DNE holds of the proposition in question. As a result, there is a very fundamental tension between the intuitionistic rejection of DNE and a pragmatic account of belief in terms of its consequences for decision.

One might also challenge the inference from 'it makes a difference whether S' to 'S is decidable'. Couldn't the difference concerned be epistemically inaccessible to the agent in question—or even, perhaps, to class of all future enquirers? If so, then surely the mere existence of such a difference doesn't make S decidable.<sup>2</sup> Again however, I think that this objection is off-limits to my Dummettian opponents.

The point turns on what is meant by the notions of decidability and 'making a difference'. The notion of decidability is imprecise, obviously, and may be cashed-out in a variety of ways. There's a rough scale of increasingly liberal interpretations: towards the restrictive end, for example, an interpretation as decidability *by me*, in reasonable time, with the resources actually available to me; towards the liberal end, an interpretation as decidability in principle, to an enquirer with unlimited but finite resources, and unlimited but finite time. Clearly, there are other options both more restrictive and more liberal than these two, and many in between.

The pragmatic notion of 'making a difference' (to the outcome of a decision) is similarly imprecise. And if we choose a liberal notion of making a difference and a restricted notion of decidability, then the above argument will fail. Making a difference will not imply decidability, *in the chosen senses*. Equally clearly, however, there is natural interpretation of making a difference, from the point of view of a Dummettian intuitionist, which does not allow the notions to come apart in this way.

For the Dummettian, decidability, in whatever sense, is the key to an intuitionistically-acceptable substitute for realist truth. Call this substitute 'truth\*', and let making a difference be interpreted, in the natural way, as making a difference to truth\*-value. Then making a difference remains tied to decidability, in a way that evades the above objection. To think of an action A as having an outcome is to think of it as being true\* that it has that outcome—i.e., to think of the outcome itself as a decidable matter. In other words, if the outcome in question is taken to be associated with whether S, in the way imagined, this intuitionistically-acceptable notion of making of difference ensures that S becomes decidable, as the argument requires.

As I noted a moment ago, the argument turns on an apparent fundamental tension between the intuitionistic rejection of DNE and a pragmatic account of belief. This tension is of considerable interest in its own right, in my view—especially because the motivations

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<sup>2</sup>This challenge was pressed on me in discussion at *Logic and Language 2003* in Birmingham, especially by Tim Williamson and Peter Milne. I am also indebted to Peter Milne for a follow-up discussion in Oviedo.

for Dummettian intuitionism are themselves pragmatic, in important respects. Roughly, the intuitionist wants an account of the logical connectives which stays close to the way in which they are actually used, and avoids dependence on overly metaphysical notions of truth, and such like. In particular, one of Dummett's main concerns is the requirement that meaning be such that differences of meaning are potentially manifestable in use. The point just made is that the intuitionist's distinction between believing  $\neg\neg S$  and believing  $S$  is sustainable only in cases in which belief does not have its normal implications for decision, so that the claimed distinction between the two beliefs is not manifestable in the normal way.<sup>3</sup> Thus although it is certainly possible to challenge my (1983a) argument by rejecting the pragmatic account of belief in favour of some more fine-grained account—some account which enables us to distinguish between believing  $\neg\neg S$  and believing  $S$ —this move ought to seem less appealing to my Dummettian opponents than it does from positions further from pragmatism.

It seems to have been partly the possibility of such a challenge (pressed on me, I suspect, by Neil Tennant) that led me to take a different tack in my later paper. There, the initial orientation is different. I begin with genealogical questions about negation. Where does negation come from? What does it do for us, and why do we have it? And in the part of the paper that defends classicality, my target is Tennant's proposed genealogy for intuitionist negation (Tennant 1987). I wanted to show that someone who followed Tennant's route to intuitionist negation would have a pragmatic reason for 'upgrading' to classical negation, by adopting DNE.

Perhaps I could have used the pragmatic argument outlined above, but in fact I used a different argument, tailored specifically for the imagined intuitionist opponent. The argument turns on two considerations. The first is an intuition about belief noted by Dummett himself. In 'What is a Theory of Meaning? (II)', Dummett says this:

An assertion is not, normally, like an answer in a quiz programme; the speaker gets no prize for being right. It is, primarily, a guide to action . . . ; a guide which operates by inducing . . . certain expectations. *And the content of an expectation is determined by what will surprise us; that is, by what it is that is not in accord with the expectation rather than what corroborates it.* The expectation formed by someone who accepts an assertion is . . . to be characterized by his not allowing for the occurrence of any state of affairs which would show the assertion to have been incorrect . . . . By making an assertion, a speaker rules out certain possibilities . . . . (Dummett 1976: 124, my emphasis)

My version of this idea goes like this:

[T]he crucial idea is that a commitment or a belief is a stance with which an agent meets the future. To judge that  $P$  is to turn one's back on many of the ways the

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<sup>3</sup>In my view, this tension is related to a deeper tension between pragmatic elements and others themes in Dummett's work. I've noted this deeper tension in a recent paper (Price 2004), and I'll say a little more about it below.

future might have been. Which ways? All the ways in which it would be the case that  $\sim P$ . Turning one's back on a possibility here means something like being prepared completely to discount that possibility in planning and acting for the future—to leave one's flank exposed to that quarter, in the belief that it carries no threat. (Price 1990: 232)

My thought was that if we marry this 'exclusive' conception of the nature of assertoric commitment with something that an intuitionist already accepts about negation, we find that a commitment to  $\neg\neg S$  and a commitment to  $S$  both amount to the same thing—they both exclude the same class of states of affairs.

What we need from the intuitionist—and this is the second premiss in my argument—is the equivalence of  $\neg\neg\neg S$  and  $\neg S$ . Given the above account of belief, the argument is then straightforward. Because  $\neg\neg S$  and  $S$  have equivalent negations, even by intuitionist lights, a commitment to  $\neg\neg S$  and a commitment to  $S$  amount to the same thing, in this sense: both amount to a rejection of the possibility that  $\neg S$ , for all practical purposes.

As in the earlier case, it might be objected that the demonstrated pragmatic equivalence is not sufficient to show that  $\neg\neg S$  and  $S$  are fully equivalent. We might have a language which allowed non-equivalent but pragmatically identical pairs. I noted this, and suggested that reasons of cognitive economy ought to count against the possibility, from a genealogical point of view. Given the pragmatic equivalence, nothing would be lost and something gained by the adoption of a grammar which treated  $\neg\neg S$  and  $S$  as mere grammatical variants of the same proposition—in other words, as I put it, a grammar which treated negation as a toggle operator.<sup>4</sup> I suggested that such a grammar side-stepped concerns about the justification of DNE, by treating it as something other than a logical rule of inference.

In response to this second argument, Gibbard points out that defending DNE isn't enough to guarantee us classical logic. There are logics weaker than classical logic which do have DNE. This is quite true, and indeed Dummett himself notes one such logic, in a footnote following the passage from which I quoted above. However, I think my essential point remains. For an intuitionist, there is a fundamental tension between a plausible pragmatic account of belief and the rejection of DNE. Moreover, it turns out that there are at least two ways of reaching this conclusion—the one implicit in my first paper, which turns on the fact that to think of a proposition as making a difference in a decision context is to think of it as decidable; and the one explicit in my second paper, which combines the intuitionistic equivalence of  $\neg\neg\neg S$  and  $\neg S$  with Dummett's own account of the consequences of belief to argue that belief in  $\neg\neg S$  and  $S$  amount to the same thing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>As I noted, I got the 'toggle' terminology from John Collins.

<sup>5</sup>As in the (1990) paper, I acknowledge that there are open issues about how the project of justifying logical rules intersects with genealogy. My claim was merely that if we had been led by Tennant's proposed genealogy (on which more below) to intuitionistic negation, there would be good pragmatic reasons for 'going classical'.

### 3 Dialecticalism and the symmetry problem

At no stage did I think that the actual genealogy of classical negation required this intuitionistic detour. Much better, surely, to make it classical from scratch. My proposal was to try to do this by focussing on the role of negation in dialogue. One of the key thoughts went something like this. Suppose you assert  $S$ , and I believe  $T$ , and take  $S$  and  $T$  to be contraries. So I recognise that we disagree. How should I give voice to this recognition? I could simply assert  $T$ , but unless you also believe that  $S$  and  $T$  are contraries, this won't have the desired effect—you won't take it as a challenge to what you have said. What I need is a linguistic form explicitly tailored to provide a rejection of, or challenge to, your claim that  $S$ . The proposal was that this is where negation begins: if I say 'Not- $S$ ', and you know what negation means, you can't fail to see that I'm disagreeing with you.<sup>6</sup>

In effect, this is a proposal not only about where negation originates, but also about *why we have* an explicit speech act of rejection, as well as one of assertion. I don't think it is unfair to recent writers on rejectivism—Smiley, Humberstone and Rumfitt, for example—to say that they have tended to take the latter fact for granted, and thus to miss one of the most interesting issues in the area.

Suppose this dialectical account is along the right lines. Why should this lead us to *classical* negation? One of the virtues of Rumfitt's paper is the prominence it gives to an important difficulty, that of explaining why rejecting  $\neg S$  should be as strong as affirming  $S$ . Why should rejection be *symmetric*, as Rumfitt puts it? If affirming  $\neg S$  is explained in terms of rejecting  $S$ , why should rejecting  $\neg S$  take us back to  $S$ ? In other words, why should this rejection-based negation satisfy DNE? Rumfitt illustrates the difficulty with reference to Peacocke's (1987) suggestion that  $\neg S$  is the weakest proposition incompatible with  $S$ . As Rumfitt notes, Crispin Wright (1993) objects to Peacocke that to assume that  $\neg\neg S$  (i.e., on this account, the weakest proposition incompatible with  $\neg S$ ) entails  $S$  is to assume a classical logic for the relation of incompatibility.

However, it now seems to me that if necessary, the dialogical approach has a very simple solution to this problem. In a dialogical context, in which I assert that  $S$ , and you reject my assertion (thereby asserting  $\neg S$ ), what is the simplest and most natural move I can make? Simply to reaffirm my original position! This is certainly *a* way of rejecting what you say—saying something in tension with your claim, as you must presumably acknowledge—and it is surely the most straightforward. Defence is the simplest form of attack, so to speak: I reject your alternative simply by standing my ground. We might call this *reaffirmative* double rejection.

The proposal is thus that the natural symmetry of rejective negation might stem from the natural symmetry of the dialogical encounter. A dialogical confrontation automatically provides two conflicting commitments, between which a negation or rejection operator

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<sup>6</sup>I think we also need a distinctive norm at this point, to make the perceived disagreement 'matter', in a way which encourages us to resolve it; see Price (2003).

can simply toggle. It is true that we might hope to do better than this. We might hope to exhibit some natural sense in which when I reject your rejection in this way, my disagreement with you is somehow ‘of the same kind’ as your initial disagreement with me—a true mirror image, as it were, rather than merely a return to the other side of the same coin. In other words, we might hope to show that there is a symmetry to the situation more deeply grounded than the inevitable dialectical symmetry. More later on whether this is possible. For the moment, the important point is that even if it is not possible, the dialectical symmetry alone seems sufficient to account for the classical character of rejective negation.

#### 4 The problem of rejective phase

At this point, it might be objected that reaffirmative double rejection is far too general in its application to be useful in the case of negation. After all, aren’t there many possible ways of rejecting, or challenging, an assertoric speech act made by another speaker? And wouldn’t this trick would work for all of them? For example, consider the practice of rejecting utterances made in a library, on the grounds that they are too loud. It is clear that this kind of rejection does not have natural symmetry, in Rumfitt’s sense—a dialogue of the following form is never going to return to its starting point:

ME: ‘S’  
YOU: Shhh! Your utterance ‘S’ was too loud!  
ME: Shhh! Your utterance “Your utterance ‘S’ was too loud!” was too loud!  
YOU: Shhh! . . .

(For another example, substitute ‘was impolite’ for ‘was too loud’.)

Nevertheless, if I speak in a library, and you tell me I have spoken too loudly, then if I continue to speak at the same volume, I am *in some sense* rejecting what you said. Can’t we thus *define* a kind of reaffirmative double rejection in this case, too, so that we do have formal symmetry? Won’t the same trick work for any species of challenge or rejection?

The formal possibility is undeniable, but why should it be thought to be a problem? For two possible reasons, I think. First, as I’ve already acknowledged, we might hope in the case of negation for some deeper symmetry, not grounded *simply* on the inevitable dialectical symmetry created by any kind of disagreement or challenge. For the moment, I’ve deferred the question as to whether this is possible, for the kind of rejection that underlies classical negation.<sup>7</sup>

The second reason is more interesting. The concern might be that each variety of rejection allows us to define a species of rejective ‘negation’, and for each such species, the

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<sup>7</sup>One reason for hoping that it is possible would be to make the relevant rejection operator blind to an important aspect of the internal structure of the utterance to which it is applied. If we want to treat a rejection-based negation operator as a content-modifier, and want rejection to apply uniformly to assertions of arbitrary content, we want rejection to be blind to whether what is rejected is a negated sentence.

trick just mentioned gives us a kind of ‘double rejection’ which takes us back to our starting point. For a rejectivist, then, the problem is going to be to characterise the particular kind of rejection supposed to ground negation, *without presupposing the very kind of negation that rejection is supposed to underpin*.

I think that this is a deep and rather important problem, *but not a problem exclusively for rejectivists*. On the contrary, it is a problem that ought to confront anyone who recognises that judgement has a natural bipolarity. Rumfitt quotes an early passage from Frege, in which Frege makes the point that judgement has this bipolar character:

[T]he content of any truth is a ‘content of possible judgement’, but so too is the opposite content. This opposition or conflict is to be understood in such a way that we *ipso facto* reject one limb as false when we accept the other as true, and conversely. The rejection of the one and the acceptance of the other are one and the same. (Frege, *The early “Logik”*, quoted by Rumfitt 2000: 781)

Earlier in the same passage Frege has characterised this bipolarity of the contents of possible judgements in terms of the possible answers to a ‘yes-or-no question’, and this provides Rumfitt with his point of departure: the basic idea of bilateralism is, as he puts it, that “the answer ‘No’ is accorded parity with the answer ‘Yes’”. (2000: 781)

I’ve already noted that Rumfitt doesn’t ask why we have a speech act of rejection in the first place. In effect, he thus fails to ask where the bipolarity of judgement originates, and this is in itself an important and deep question, I think. The new point is that this problem is difficult in a dimension it is easy to miss, unless we recognise that there are in principle many ways to reject an assertoric speech act—and thus (or at least this is the challenge) many possible ‘orientations’ for the second pole of the bipolar speech act.

Think of the problem this way. Imagine a bipolar judgement as like the hand of a clock, anchored at its positive end. Different construals of what it is to reject a positive judgement amount to different orientations for the negative end of the bipolar pointer. If two communities base negation on different kinds of rejection, then their negative judgements ‘point in different directions’—speakers from the two communities mean different things by ‘No’, in response to a Yes-No question. Their respective negation operators are out of phase, as we might say (thinking of rotation in a physicist’s sense).<sup>8</sup>

Let’s call this difficulty *the problem of rejective phase*. How serious is it? We might hope to make short work of it by privileging a notion of rejection based on perceived *incompatibility*, but I suspect that unless we say more, the problem simply re-emerges in new terms. After all, each species of rejection is associated with some notion of incompatibility. Unless one particular notion of incompatibility is already privileged, the puzzling plurality hasn’t gone away.

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<sup>8</sup>Perhaps this possibility requires that positive judgement be out of phase as well. In other words, the two communities in question could not mean different things by ‘No’ without also meaning different things by ‘Yes’. If so, then a compass needle would be a better analogy than a clock hand. However, I’ll ignore this issue, for now.

I think it is clear that if this is a real possibility, it is going to have far-reaching implications. One interesting issue concerns the way in which it intersects with the project of radical interpretation. On the one hand, it suggests a novel dimension of possible variability of meaning, to which the radical interpreter might be expected to be required to be sensitive. On the other hand, it might challenge the radical interpreter's assumed entitlement to her standard construal of her canonical evidence, namely, the circumstances in which her subjects 'assent to' or 'dissent from' test sentences of their language.<sup>9</sup>

Thus I think there is a significant problem here, the nature and depth of which has not been properly appreciated in the recent work on negation I mentioned at the beginning. I think it wasn't properly appreciated by me, either, in my two papers, but I think that I got closer to the point than most. One of the virtues of my (1990) paper was that it did recognise the importance of finding an appropriate and appropriately located notion of incompatibility, on which to ground negation. But perhaps I didn't see how easily incompatibility could be obtained—how we get a species of it with any kind of rejection of a speech act. However, as I'll explain below, I think the pragmatic considerations to which I appealed in both papers play a crucial role in limiting the impact of the phase problem. In effect, they impose a strong external constraint on what kinds of rejection deserve to be called negation. In this respect, too, then, I think I was exploring the right territory.

## 5 Negation with intuitionistic phase?

A useful way to flesh out the phase problem will be to follow some of my discussion in my (1990) paper of Neil Tennant's proposed intuitionistic genealogy for negation. In some respects, as I noted, Tennant's starting point is very like my own. In particular, it is explicitly dialogical. As Tennant puts it:

Once there is survival value in having a means for transferring information within a social group, so too there is survival value in any member having recourse to a method whereby one can cancel or reject an assertion by a fellow member . . . . Dialogue, not monologue, is where negation first flourishes. (1987: 83)

My (1990) paper describes Tennant's elaboration of this idea. I note that Tennant 'emphasizes . . . that there are various ways in which one may reject an assertion, and that it is important to locate negation correctly,' and quote the following passages from Tennant's book:

The challenger must have information to the contrary, rather than be merely playing the uninformed doubter. The [use of  $\sim S$ ] would otherwise be no more than a putting on public record of a call for the warrant putatively behind the assertion of  $S$ . If  $S$  concerned, say, the quality of a distant food source, then by challenging

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<sup>9</sup>In this respect, the problem connects with some issues I raised in another early paper (Price 1983b).

an assertion of S the uninformed doubter . . . could not possibly be understood as saying something *about the same subject matter* (in this case, the food source) to the effect, roughly, of . . . ‘Things there are not as you say they are’.

For [the use of  $\sim S$ ] to have precisely this force of a denial of the content of S as it concerns its subject matter, we have to imagine something stronger. We have to imagine the challenger as representing himself as having . . . a warrant to the contrary. [This] would show how S has consequences in explicit tension with other warranted assertions. (1987: 84)

I note at this point that Tennant recognises the need for a primitive notion of incompatibility, or ‘contrariness’. He says that ‘contrariness is immanent in our categorizations and classifications. It is presupposed by eventually explicit linguistic forms of negation.’ (1987: 84)

Interestingly, in a more recent paper in which Tennant returns to the point, he opts for a surprising view of the source of this notion of contrariety:

Whereas Dummett seeks a logical basis for metaphysics, I think we need, at this point, to put it the other way round. One needs a metaphysical basis for logic, insofar as we seek an origin for our grasp of the meaning of negation. I believe this is to be found in our sense of contrariety, a sense that follows inexorably from our deploying perceptual concepts and objectual categories, and from our understanding of the fundamental features of bodies and events occupying space and time. (Tennant 1999: 217)

It is certainly to Tennant’s credit that he recognises the importance and non-triviality of the notion of contrariety to an account of the genealogy of negation—even if surprising, and to pragmatist eyes a little disappointing, that he is prepared to lapse into metaphysics to find it.<sup>10</sup>

In any case, it is very unclear that the appeal to metaphysics provides any immediate solution to the phase problem. It is one thing to find some primitive opposition in the world, another to explain how it—rather than any other available opposition—comes to be the basis of the speech act marked by negation (which is Tennant’s project, as well as mine).

Back now to my (1990) paper, where my quotation from Tennant continues with this passage:

The thought I am following out here may . . . be put as follows. In order for challenges by means of [negation] to belong to the same language game, or at least to the same level therein as the assertions challenged, they must be conceived of as possessing warrants that are as open to independent public assessment as are the warrants of the assertions challenged. ([Tennant, 1987] pp. 84-5)

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<sup>10</sup>Though perhaps the lapse is half-hearted. In the last sentence just quoted he mixes what might be a non-metaphysical (perhaps Kantian?) talk of ‘our *sense* of contrariety’ and ‘our *deploying* perceptual concepts’ (my italics, in each case), with talk of ‘understanding . . . the fundamental features of bodies and events’.

Concerning this passage I comment as follows:

It seems to me that Tennant here makes a strong move in the right direction, but fails to carry it through. He is right to associate negation with denial, and hence to expect  $\sim A$  to have the same subject matter as  $A$  does. But what he offers us . . . is no such thing. He says:

Denial of  $A$  has the force 'I have good reason to believe that there is no warrant for  $A$ ', rather than the weaker 'I have no reason to believe (apart from your asserting it) that you have any warrant for  $A$ '. ([Tennant, 1987] p. 85)

So construed [I continue], negation is naturally interpreted intuitionistically. Assertion of  $\sim\sim A$  has the force of 'I have good reason to believe that there is no warrant for the view that there is no warrant for  $A$ '; and there seems to be no reason to take this to be as strong as 'I have good reason to believe that  $A$ '. Perhaps I simply believe that it cannot be shown that there is not a reason to believe that  $A$ .

However, the trouble with this construal of denial is that it still fails Tennant's own condition: it entails that to deny that  $A$  is to talk about the warrant for  $A$ , rather than to say something about what  $A$  itself is about. If  $A$  is 'The grass is greener on the other side of the mountain', for example, then on this reading  $\sim A$  concerns the existence of a warrant for asserting  $A$ , rather than the colour of the grass over the mountain. The difference shows up in the nature of the ensuing argument: if we want an expert to settle the issue, we should dismiss our agronomist in favour of an epistemologist. (1990: 230)

As I'll explain in a moment, I now have some reservations about this criticism of Tennant's view, reservations associated with the phase problem. But first let me quote one more paragraph from my (1990) paper, continuing the above passage, which makes a point to which I want to return below:

We need to say not that denial of  $A$  has the force of 'I have good reason to believe that there is no warrant for  $A$ ', but that denial of  $A$  has the force of 'It is not the case that  $A$ '. The fact that this looks (and is) circular simply means that we cannot give a reductive account of the force of negation. We can explicate it in other ways, however. In particular, we can say that denying  $A$  (or equivalently, asserting  $\sim A$ ) is appropriate when one recognizes that  $A$  . . . is incompatible with one's existing commitments—when one recognizes that  $A$  'has consequences in explicit tension with other warranted assertions', as Tennant puts it. (1990: 230)

I go on to note that this is an account of the meaning of negation in terms of its use conditions, rather than its truth conditions—as I put it, it is a *saying when* account, not a *saying that* account. It tells us *when* (under what conditions) it is appropriate to assert  $\neg A$  (or deny  $A$ ). It does not say that in asserting  $\neg A$  one says *that* these conditions obtain. I'll return to this distinction, for it is central to a more general point I want to make in the final section of this paper, about the presuppositions of Dummett's program.

(The relevance here is that Tennant is following Dummett, in wanting a specification of content, rather than merely a specification of use.)

The reservation I mentioned a moment ago is the following. If we have bilateralist sympathies, then the content of an assertion  $S$  is determined in part by what it is to reject  $S$ —in other words, by rejectivist lights, by what it is to assert  $\neg S$ . In other words, the subject matter of  $S$  and the circumstances under we reject  $S$  seem to be a package deal—in which case it is analytic that a denial of  $S$  does not ‘change the subject’. How could it do so, after all, if what the subject *is* is determined, in part but crucially, by the circumstances under which we deny  $S$ ? Thus if there are different possible rejective negations, each slightly out of phase with others, it seems likely that each brings with it its own sense of the ‘linguistic game’, as Tennant calls it. Each thus ensures that by its own lights, negation stays within the game.

Thus I am now inclined to say that in offering us a possible genealogy for intuitionistic negation, Tennant provides a useful illustration of the threat posed by the phase problem. For me, the interesting issue is to what extent this threat can be met by a rival genealogy based on the kind of pragmatic view of judgement at the heart of my defence of classicality. Can these considerations provide some particularly ‘natural’ rival to Tennant’s account—hopefully, in my view, a rival which not only provides a plausible genealogy for classical negation, but at the same time avoids the need for Tennant’s own lapse into metaphysics?

One reason for optimism stems from the apparent role of pragmatic considerations in excluding possible rejective negations even further out of phase. At first sight, it might seem that we could make sense of a community whose primary mode of rejection of an assertion is rejection on grounds of impoliteness, or taste. Roughly, their ‘Not  $S$ ’ means ‘The thought that  $S$  is in poor taste’. However, provided that we can appeal to the consequences of such judgements for the decision behaviour of the speakers concerned, the case resolves into one of two less interesting possibilities. If saying ‘Not  $S$ ’ does not typically indicate that a speaker will ignore the possibility that  $S$ , for practical purposes, then we have a reason not to take it as an expression of disbelief—not to translate their ‘Not’ as a genuine negation, in effect. Alternatively, if saying ‘Not  $S$ ’ does correlate with decision behaviour, we can translate their ‘Not’ as negation in our sense, but say that they take poor taste as evidence of falsity.

In neither case do we ascribe to these speakers a genuine negation out of phase with our own. But the thought in the background is that genuine negation expresses disbelief, which is manifest in decision behaviour. Without this pragmatic criterion, it is hard to see what would stand in the way of negations more seriously out of phase.

## 6 Pragmatic foundations for classicality?

Thus the pragmatic considerations seem likely to play some role in deciding what rejective operations might count as negations. But how far can these considerations take us? And do they lead in some natural way to classical negation? Ideally, we need at least two things. First, a ‘natural’ kind of rejection, as a ground for the intuitive bipolarity of judgements. And second, if possible, a demonstration that this species of rejection is tied to something which already has the required symmetry—in other words, something which will ensure that double rejection equals the original assertion, without being reaffirmative by fiat. And here, even though I didn’t appreciate the full depth of the problem, I think my (1990) paper provides the beginnings of the most plausible answer.

Let’s go back to the idea that commitment involves ignoring a range of possibilities for decision purposes. (As I noted, Dummett himself endorses something like this view, at least at one point.) If we allow ourselves this starting point, then here’s a possible genealogy for rejective negation. We begin as ‘positive’ signallers of commitments which have this ‘exclusive’ character. Mastery of language involves acquiring a grasp of what one should exclude, in light of commitment to  $S$ , and what circumstances justify doing so—i.e., the assertibility conditions for  $S$ .  $\neg S$  is a signal that one takes things to be of a kind excluded by commitment to  $S$ . It challenges ‘verbally’, in the way that the world challenges ‘actually’, when something in the excluded range is perceived to occur. In other words, the rule is that it is appropriate to reject a previous utterance of  $S$  when one holds a belief  $T$ , where  $T$  is one of the states of affairs one would exclude, if one were to be committed to  $S$ . (Note that we thus extract our notion of contrariety from the materials provided by the exclusive conception of commitment!)

So much for negation, but why DNE? There are two possibilities. One is to exploit the structure of dialogue, in the way suggested above—to rely on reaffirmative double rejection. The other is to try to show ‘directly’ that rejection of commitment to rejecting  $S$  is same as commitment to  $S$ . To do this we have first of all to represent rejection of  $S$  as a ‘positive’ commitment in its own right—that is, according to our exclusivist model, as a commitment to ignore a certain range of possibilities, for decision purposes. (In the process, we come to treat the rejection as an assertion, with a content of its own.)

The assertion conditions of  $\neg S$  are straightforward—they are simply the denial conditions of  $S$  itself. What needs to be explained is why what is ruled out in accepting a commitment to  $\neg S$  is precisely that  $S$ , rather than some possibly weaker condition  $\neg\neg S$ . The exclusivist model tells us that what should be excluded by a commitment to  $\neg S$  are the contraries of  $\neg S$ —i.e., all states of affairs  $T$  such that a belief that  $T$  would lead a speaker to challenge an utterance  $\neg S$ . At this stage, however, we are looking for guidance about what states of affairs to regard as in that class—treating  $\neg S$  as an assertion in its own right requires that we settle that question.

The crucial question is this. Can we imagine someone who claims to have such a belief

T—a contrary to  $\neg S$ —who does not take T to imply S? (If not, then it will follow that S is the weakest contrary, which is what we wanted.)

We can certainly imagine someone who rejects  $\neg S$  *in some sense*, without accepting S. Imagine someone who says that it is impolite to say that  $\neg S$ , for example, and accordingly rejects it on those grounds. The question is whether we can imagine someone who rejects  $\neg S$  ‘in the right way’—‘in the way that the utterer of  $\neg S$  rejects S’. But is this ‘way’ well-defined, in advance of the very issue we are trying to settle? The nature of the rejection involved in saying  $\neg S$  in response to S was given to us by the dialectical account of the rejection operator, built in turn on the exclusivist conception of commitment. But now, in order to treat  $\neg S$  as a commitment in its own right, we are trying to apply the exclusivist conception to it—in other words, we are trying to specify in a natural way what circumstances should be ruled out in adopting the ‘commitment’ that  $\neg S$ . The threat seems to be that the definition of these circumstances is subject to the very same indeterminacy as the definition of rejection. If so, then the former cannot be used to fix the latter.

It is worth keeping in mind that this is not a disaster for a classicist, because we can always fall back on reaffirmative double rejection. Then it will follow immediately that rejection of  $\neg S$  requires a commitment to S. Here, uniquely, there does seem to be a way of defining rejection of  $\neg S$  which can’t be accused of changing the subject, for it stays within the boundaries of the existing disagreement. So this will do, as we noted earlier. But if we are to rely on it, it would be nice to be sure that we need to—that we can’t turn the trick in some other way.

I think that if the trick can be turned, the argument will go something like this:

1. In general, accepting  $\neg P$  implies excluding P, in a sense which turns on the notion of contrariety built into the exclusive picture of commitment—a sense which includes, or at least implies, exclusion ‘for the purposes of decision’. (In other words, accepting  $\neg P$  implies excluding P in the way that accepting P implies excluding  $\neg P$ .)
2. Therefore, if  $\neg S$  is to be treated as a ‘positive’ commitment in its own right, accepting  $\neg\neg S$  will have to imply excluding  $\neg S$ , in the same sense as in (1)—this follows by substituting  $\neg S$  for P in (1). (In effect, we thus deal with the problem identified above by imposing a constraint on what circumstances could be the ones marked by  $\neg\neg S$ , which are to be excluded by a commitment to  $\neg S$ . The constraint is that accepting that these circumstances obtain should exclude  $\neg S$ , in the way that in general, by (1), accepting  $\neg P$  excludes P.)
3. But the exclusive conception of commitment defines accepting S in terms of excluding  $\neg S$ .
4. Hence, by (2) and (3), someone who accepts  $\neg\neg S$  meets the criterion for accepting S—they exclude  $\neg S$  for decision purposes.

So far as I can see, this argument does not involve any objectionable circularity, or disguised appeal to DNE. If I am right, then there is a prospect of a basis for classical negation in these pragmatic terms—a basis which does not depend on a detour via intuitionistic negation.<sup>11</sup>

As I noted earlier, however, this depends on the exclusive conception of belief or judgement—and I have some sympathy for the objection that because this conception already builds in a notion of contrariety, it makes the problem easier than it really ought to be. I regard it as an open question whether there isn't a more basic genealogical account of judgement to be found, from which exclusivity itself could be seen to emerge.

## 7 Dummett, expressivism and representationalism

Pragmatists want to account for truth in terms of use, but this means different things for different pragmatists (even, sometimes, for the same pragmatist in different moods). Sometimes it is the view that we should retain truth as an important theoretical notion, but define or analyse it in terms of use—to *reduce* truth to something characterisable in terms of use, such as assertibility. Sometimes it means that our interest shouldn't be in truth at all, but in the *word* 'true'—we should be interested in the use of the word, in what it does for us, in what its genealogy might be, and so on. Often, the latter view accompanies the view that truth isn't a 'substantial' notion—i.e., roughly, that it isn't a notion we need for theoretical purposes. This is the view of disquotationalists such as Quine and Horwich, for example.

A parallel distinction may be drawn in the case of meaning. Let's use the term *expressivism* for the view that the study of linguistic meaning is primarily a study of use. Sometimes this is taken to mean that we should be interested in defining or analysing meanings in terms of use. (Interestingly, Horwich (1998) is here an example on this reductive side of the fence.) Sometimes it is the more radical view that we shouldn't be interested in analysing or specifying meanings at all, but simply in saying how words are used. This distinction connects in various intimate ways with the one drawn for the case of truth. For example, if specifying meanings is thought of as a matter of specifying truth conditions, and truth is defined in terms of use, then specifying meanings becomes by this route a matter of specifying use conditions. On the other side, the view that the right approach to truth is to say how the word 'true' is used, not to say what truth itself *is*, exemplifies an alternative way of appealing to use—a way which doesn't offer use conditions as a kind of substitute for truth conditions.

This is rather quick, of course, and these distinctions need to be drawn more carefully.

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<sup>11</sup>Another way to look at this seems to be the following: combining Peacocke's account of  $\neg S$  as the weakest proposition incompatible with  $S$  with the exclusive conception of commitment guarantees that a commitment to  $\neg\neg S$  amounts to a commitment to  $S$ ; thus evading the difficulty identified by Wright.

For the present, I simply want to call attention to a large choice-point for those who want to begin with expressivist raw materials. The choice is between trying to use those materials for what I'll call traditional representationalist projects—*defining* or *analysing* truth, meaning and content, and *specifying* truth conditions, meanings and contents—or giving up on those traditional representationalist projects altogether, in favour of using the expressivist raw materials to different philosophical ends. Expressivism and a suspicion of representationalism are both important themes in pragmatism, but they don't always go together. In particular, there are many expressivists who are also representationalists, and I think Dummett is a prime example.

Dummett's representationalism is very deeply ingrained. One major source of it is Frege. In my view, its present relevance turns on the fact that some of the views I've been discussing here—the rejective approach to negation itself, I think, and bilateralism—are most at home in, and may require, a nonrepresentational conception of expressivism. If so, then the fact that Dummett, too, is in some sense an expressivist doesn't at all imply that these views can be offered as alternatives to his own, in a mutually acceptable expressivist spirit. On the contrary, to present them as alternatives we need to do the much harder work of presenting an alternative to representationalism—of showing how the motivations for representationalism in Dummett's work can either be met in some other way, or properly put to one side. And this, of course, is a much bigger project.

This is what I meant when I said that I now feel that my early papers on negation underestimated the gulf between bilateralism and a theory of meaning of a Dummettian sort. In a number of papers since then I've discussed and defended a nonrepresentationalist brand of expressivism. And in one recent paper (2004), in which I argue that such a view makes sense of the later Wittgenstein's linguistic pluralism, I contrast this conception of the task of a philosophical theory of language to Dummett's. I think I've thus made a start on what was missing from the early papers. In my view, Rumfitt's project requires the same sort of background work, in so far as he, too, has anti-Dummettian aims.

On the other hand, it deserves to be stressed that the interest and importance of the topics with which Rumfitt, I, and the other writers I've mentioned are concerned—rejectionism, bilateralism and the origins of classical negation, for example—is not confined to the intersection of these topics with Dummett's project. I've claimed that in some respects, my early papers still tackle these topics in greater depth than more recent work. For example, they raise in a useful way the genealogical question about denial or rejection—why do we have such a speech act in the first place? This question needs no Dummettian motivation.

## 8 Summary

I have argued for four main conclusions:

1. My (1983a) argument for DNE can be defended against Rumfitt's and Gibbard's criticisms, at least for the purposes of providing an argument for classicality against a Dummettian opponent. The defence turns on the fact that for intuitionists there is a tension between pragmatism about belief, on the one hand, and rejection of DNE, on the other.
2. Rejectionists ought to be interested in the genealogy of rejection—in the question as to why there is such a speech act at all. Why does assertion have a second pole, as it were? Dialecticalism provides a plausible answer at this point—and brings with it, via the notion reaffirmative double rejection, the possibility of a simple explanation of why negation 'toggles'.
3. The problem of rejective phase is a significant issue, with ramifications which extend well beyond rejectivism itself. The association that pragmatists highlight between commitment and action seems important in picking out a 'primary' phase for rejection and hence negation itself, rejectively construed. Given an account of commitment in terms of what it excludes, there is some prospect of an alternative to reaffirmative double rejection, as a natural genealogical basis for classical negation.
4. Bilateralism has much to recommend it, but needs to be accompanied by a defence of expressivism, in order to provide a serious challenge to Dummett.

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