

Hybrid Views in Meta-ethics: Pragmatic Views

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Abstract

A common starting point for ‘going hybrid’ is the thought that moral discourse somehow combines belief and desire-like aspects, or is both descriptive and expressive. Hybrid meta-ethical theories aim to give an account of moral discourse that is sufficiently sensitive to both its cognitive and its affective, or descriptive and expressive, dimensions. They hold at least one of the following: (i) moral thought: moral judgements have belief and desire-like aspects or elements; (ii) moral language: moral utterances both ascribe properties and express desire-like attitudes. This entry concerns hybrid theories of moral language. The main division within such theories is between those treating the expression of desire-like attitudes (hereafter ‘attitudes’) as semantic and those treating it as pragmatic. This entry exclusively focuses on pragmatic forms of (ii) and examines the prospects for treating moral attitude expression as working via certain standard pragmatic mechanisms. I explain these mechanisms, outline the properties that standardly define them, and test to see whether moral attitude expression matches them. At the end, I briefly explain a more minimal pragmatic alternative. The main conclusions are that we should disregard presupposition and conventional implicature views and that the most plausible options for a pragmatic hybrid view are a generalised conversational implicature view and a more minimal pragmatic view.

1. Introduction

A common starting point for ‘going hybrid’ is the thought that moral discourse somehow combines belief and desire-like aspects, or is both descriptive and expressive. Hybrid meta-ethical theories aim to give an account of moral discourse that is sufficiently sensitive to both its cognitive and its affective, or descriptive and expressive, dimensions. They hold at least one of the following:

- (i) Moral thought: moral *judgements* have belief and desire-like elements.
- (ii) Moral language: moral *utterances* both ascribe properties and express desire-like attitudes.¹

This entry concerns hybrid theories of moral *language*, namely theories subscribing to (ii). A major motivation for holding (ii) is its ability to capture an uncontroversial, theory-neutral, observation about moral discourse:

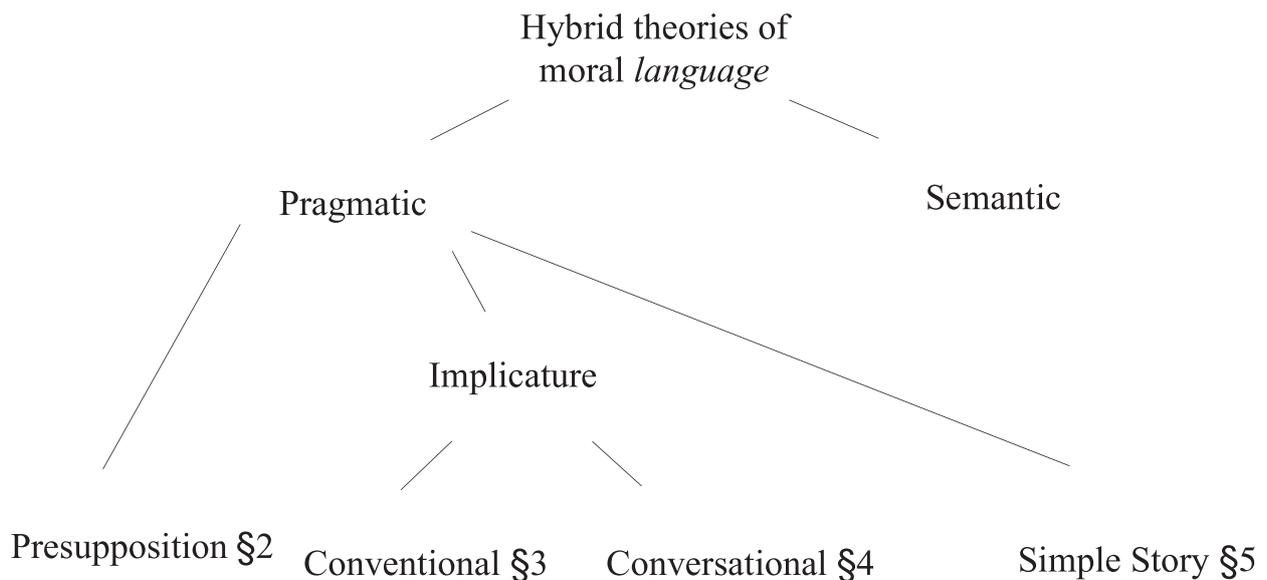
Information about desire-like attitudes: Moral utterances standardly convey information about the speaker’s desire-like attitudes. For example, a person’s saying ‘ Φ -ing is morally wrong /impermissible/immoral’ is good, even if defeasible, evidence that they have some desire-like attitude against Φ -ing.²

Theories that hold (ii) can explain how such information is conveyed by moral utterances whilst avoiding the problems afflicting subjectivist views (which take moral utterances to report the speaker’s desire-like attitudes) and without having to deny that moral utterances ascribe properties at all, in the manner of pure expressivist views (which take moral utterances to simply express the speaker’s desire-like attitudes).

The main division within hybrid theories of moral *language* is between those treating the expression of desire-like attitudes (hereafter ‘attitudes’) as semantic and those treating it as pragmatic.³ This entry exclusively focuses on *pragmatic* forms of (ii) and examines the prospects for treating moral attitude expression as working via certain standard pragmatic mechanisms.⁴ I explain these mechanisms, outlining the properties that standardly define them, before testing to see whether moral attitude expression matches them. Most space is given to presupposition views and to implicature views (pragmatic hybrid theorists have mainly treated attitude expression as *implicature*).⁵ At the end, I briefly explain a more minimal pragmatic alternative.⁶ The main conclusions are that we should disregard presupposition and *conventional* implicature views and that the most plausible options for a pragmatic hybrid view are a generalised conversational implicature view and a more minimal pragmatic view.

It will be helpful to note here that whilst one *can* combine a pragmatic hybrid view of moral language with a hybrid account of moral *thought* – thesis (i) above – pragmatic hybrid views have mainly been combined with non-hybrid, and purely cognitivist, theories of moral judgements. This is plausibly because existing pragmatic hybrids have been formulated to show how cognitivists can explain how moral utterances express attitudes without such attitudes being part of moral judgements themselves. As it happens, all the pragmatic hybrid views discussed herein have been combined with non-hybrid, and cognitivist, views of moral thought.

A taxonomy which outlines this article is thus:



One word of warning: each of presupposition and implicature has a rich research programme that I lack space to adequately address.⁷ Thus, let me point out before ignoring that the existence of conventional implicature is controversial,⁸ particular instances of each mechanism are disputed and the boundary between conventional implicature and presupposition is vexed.⁹

Before I begin, let me deal with some preliminaries:

a. Variation between views

Pragmatic hybrid views give different answers to these questions with respect to some token moral utterance:

- Q1. What property is ascribed (A natural property? An irreducible moral property?)
- Q2. What attitude is expressed (Desire? Acceptance of a norm or standard? Plan?)

Q3. What is its object (Φ -ing? Agents who Φ ? The property ascribed? Its instances?)

Here is a brief outline of Barker, Copp, Finlay and Strandberg's views, using the example utterances they give, from which we see answers to some of these questions¹⁰:

Barker

Speaker: 'X is good'

Literal content: X has natural property F.¹¹

Implicature: Speaker is committed to *approval of F things*.

Copp

Speaker: 'X is wrong'.

Literal content: X is prohibited by the ideal moral code of the relevant society.¹²

Implicature: Speaker subscribes to the relevant moral standard.

Finlay

Speaker: 'X is good'.

Literal content: X satisfies some (type of) interest N.

Implicature: Speaker has (type of) interest N.

Strandberg

Speaker: 'X is wrong'.

Literal content: X has the property of wrongness.

Implicature: Speaker has 'a certain action-guiding attitude' in relation to X.¹³

The varying answers to questions Q1–3 are important, but herein, these variations – particularly with Q2 and 3 – are problematic. Theorising about pragmatic mechanisms involves assessing the felicity of sentences – whether they are meaningless, contradictory or a misuse of words – and looking at what is conveyed by them. It is unwieldy to do this for each separate proposal for the desire-like attitude pragmatically conveyed by moral utterances. However, a placeholder ('relevant desire-like attitude') will be hopelessly artificial and likely yield indeterminate answers. As such, I will treat the relevant desire-like attitude as that of *caring about morality* where this comprises desiring that people act morally and being disposed to blame/resentment towards those who fail to act morally. I take this to be plausible enough. The person who says ' Φ -ing is morally wrong/impermissible/immoral' gives us good evidence that they *care about morality*.¹⁴

b. Types of claim, types of term

I have referred to 'moral utterances' and 'moral terms'. But there is a distinction between *thin* terms ('wrong', 'ought' and 'good') and *thick* terms ('chaste', 'cruel' and 'kind'). It is unclear whether pragmatic hybridists' working hypothesis is, or should be, that each kind deploys the same pragmatic mechanism.¹⁵ For that reason, I confine my discussion to utterances involving *thin* terms, leaving open whether thick terms merit different treatment. (However, the discussion implicitly illustrates the range of pragmatic mechanisms that thick terms might deploy.)

Finally, it is useful to have a list of moral discourse sentences to refer back to:

- D1. 'Tax avoidance is wrong.'
- D2. 'Tax avoidance isn't wrong.'
- D3. 'If tax avoidance is wrong then Francesco will be angry.'
- D4. 'Tax avoidance might be wrong.'
- D5. 'Is tax avoidance wrong?'

We should suppose that each of D1–5 is uttered within a 'normal' conversational context, by which I mean (at least) contexts in which it has not been *made clear that* a participant is an error theorist or an amoralist.

2. Hybrid Views: Presupposition

I start with presupposition. When a speaker makes some utterance, they often transparently rely upon some proposition, such that the utterance would not make sense were this *presupposed* proposition not true. They do not state the required proposition; rather, they rely upon it in making their utterance. For example:

P1 'The British president wears a wig.'

Presupposition: There is exactly one British president.

In making assertion P1, the speaker does not *assert* that there is exactly one British president. Rather, they assume this or take it for granted in making their assertion, by using 'the'.

A major issue within presupposition theory is whether presuppositions are pragmatic or semantic phenomena or if both kinds occur.¹⁶ Semantic presupposition theorists claim that presupposition is a relation between *sentences* holding in virtue of the sentence containing some specific word or construction that carries the presupposition by convention.¹⁷ By contrast, pragmatic presupposition theorists treat presupposition as acts of presupposing performed by *speakers*. Stalnaker provides this account of *pragmatic* presupposition:

A proposition P is a pragmatic presupposition of a *speaker* in a given context just in case the speaker assumes or believes that P, assumes or believes that his addressee assumes or believes that P, and assumes or believes that his addressee recognises that he is making these assumptions, or has these beliefs.¹⁸

Rather than wade into the debate between proponents of semantic and pragmatic treatments of presupposition, I restrict myself to features of presuppositions common to both views.¹⁹

A major test for presuppositions is that presuppositions *project*. This means that the presuppositions generated for simple atomic sentences remain present even in contexts where regular semantic entailments are cancelled, contexts such as negation, conditionals, modals and questions. Take these sentences:

- P2 'The British president doesn't wear a wig.'
- P3 'If the British president wears a wig, it's a convincing one.'
- P4 'The British president might wear a wig.'
- P5 'Does the British president wear a wig?'

Each of P2–5 carries the same presupposition as P1 (that there is exactly one British president). Thus, the presupposition in P1 *projects*. Taking the equivalent set of moral sentences:

D2 ‘Tax avoidance isn’t wrong.’

D3 ‘If tax avoidance is wrong then Francesco will be angry.’

D4 ‘Tax avoidance might be wrong.’

D5 ‘Is tax avoidance wrong?’

It is fairly plausible that each of D2–5 conveys that the speaker cares about morality. This is reason to think that moral attitude expression also projects.

Here, however, is a disanalogy between presupposition and moral attitude expression. With presuppositions, the speaker, or their assertion, takes something for granted. One consequence is that presuppositions are difficult to reject with straightforward negation as this is typically interpreted as rejecting *only* the main claim. For example, rejecting P1 by saying ‘that’s false’, ‘I don’t think so’ or ‘that’s not true’ allows the presupposition that there is exactly one British president to slip through, attacking only the claim that he/she wears a wig.

By contrast, when moral utterances convey desire-like attitudes, this does not seem to be a case of *presuming* or *presupposing* the presence of these attitudes. Take D1:

D1. ‘Tax avoidance is wrong.’

Presupposition: Some behaviours are wrong.

Attitude expression: The speaker cares about morality.

The speaker of D1 *presupposes* that some behaviours are wrong. Someone who believes that no actions are wrong, or could be wrong, will not straightforwardly accept or reject D1.²⁰ They will reject D1 in another way such as the following:

R: ‘Hey, wait a minute. *Nothing* is wrong!’

By contrast, someone who merely believes that the speaker does not care about morality *can* straightforwardly accept or reject D1. They might think that it is strange for the speaker to utter D1, and they might comment on it (‘That’s true, though I’m not sure why *you’re* talking about morality.’), but they are not placed in the awkward position of someone who rejects a *presupposition*.²¹

A further disanalogy between attitude expression and presupposition comes from the *cancellation* properties of presuppositions. If the presupposition is embedded, would-be presuppositions are cancellable, they can be contradicted without the speaker contradicting themselves or misusing words. By contrast, cancellation of a presupposition is infelicitous in unembedded contexts. Notice the difference between the following:

P6 ‘John thinks that the British President wears a wig, which is weird given that Britain doesn’t have a president!’

P7 #‘The British President wears a wig. There is [no/more than one] British President.’

P6 is ok, whereas the speaker of P7 contradicts themselves. Notice the contrast between the infelicity of P7 and the felicity of the following:

D1*. ‘Tax avoidance is wrong. I don’t care about morality.’

One will be *puzzled* by the speaker’s choosing to utter D1*. But D1* is not contradictory or a misuse of words in the way that P7 is.

To summarise, moral attitude expression *projects* and so attitude expression fits presupposition in this respect. However, there are significant disanalogies. First, attitude expression, unlike presupposition, is cancellable in unembedded contexts. Second, the absence of desire-like attitudes on the part of the speaker of D1 does not result in conversational awkwardness for the audience

by precluding them from straightforwardly accepting or rejecting D1. This divergence between moral attitude expression and presupposition suggests that presupposition is not a promising pragmatic mechanism of moral attitude expression for hybrid theorists.

3. *Hybrid Views: Conventional Implicature*

David Copp and Stephen Barker each treat moral utterances as conveying desire-like attitudes via conventional implicature.²² Conventional implicatures are elements of the conventional meaning of expressions which do not contribute to their truth-conditional content.²³ Two classic examples are ‘but’ and slurs such as ‘wop’²⁴:

A1: ‘Luisa is rich but honest.’

A1b ‘Luisa is rich and honest.’

B1: ‘Luisa is a wop.’

B1b: ‘Luisa is Italian.’

There is clearly a difference in what is communicated by A1 over A1b, and B1 over B1b. Nonetheless, conventional implicatures do not affect the truth-conditional meaning of their carriers; A1 and A1b and B1 and B1b plausibly have the same truth-conditions.

There are two main pieces of evidence that each pair has the same truth-conditional meaning, such that whatever is contributed by ‘but’ over ‘and’ and ‘wop’ over ‘Italian’ does not affect truth-conditions.

First, as with presupposition, straightforward negation of A1 (‘that’s false!’) is interpreted as targeting only the claim that Luisa is rich and honest, *not* the proposed contrast between wealth and honesty. Second, conventional implicatures *project*. Observe the way in which the derogatory attitude conveyed by B1 is equally conveyed by B2–5:

B2: ‘Luisa isn’t a wop.’²⁵

B3: ‘If Luisa is a wop then Francesco will be angry.’

B4: ‘Luisa might be a wop.’

B5: ‘Is Luisa a wop?’

(‘Italian’ does not project any analogous commitment of the speaker across utterances that are analogues of B2–B5.) The fact that conventional implicatures project – they are present even when regular semantic entailments are cancelled – is good evidence that they do not contribute to the truth-conditional meaning of the expressions that generate them.

Attitude expression by moral utterances matches conventional implicature with respect to projection as the desire-like attitudes expressed by D1 are also conveyed by D2–5. This is some evidence in favour of a conventional implicature view given that projection is a (non-exclusive) feature of conventional implicatures.

Conventional implicatures are also standardly defined as detachable and non-cancellable. An implicature is detachable when there is an alternative term or way of saying truth-conditionally the same thing without generating the implicature.²⁶ In fact, ‘detachability’ is an unhelpful term because intuitively, one only *detaches* something present, so the term obscures the difference between preventing an implicature from arising (‘detachability’) and *withdrawing* or *cancelling* it. A better term for detachability would be ‘avoidability’. However, because ‘detachability’ is standard in the literature I persist with it.

The conventional implicatures generated by ‘but’/‘wop’ are detachable. One could use ‘and’/‘Italian’ to say the same thing whilst avoiding the implicature. Moral attitude expression, however, does not match conventional implicature with respect to detachability as there is no expression equivalent to ‘morally wrong’, which does not

standardly signal that the speaker cares about morality.²⁷ There is no alternative way of saying the same thing as *that tax avoidance is morally wrong* without conveying whatever attitudes are conveyed by D1.²⁸

Copp tries to tackle this worry.²⁹ His main reply is that absence of an implicature-avoiding alternative for ‘wrong’ is a contingent feature of English, and we can generate one by saying that some action ‘has the property that would be ascribed by saying that it is “morally wrong”’.³⁰

Can this metalinguistic device help to show that moral attitude expression is actually cancellable? How would an ordinary speaker understand the sentence:

D8. ‘Tax avoidance has the property that would be ascribed by saying that it is “morally wrong”.’

I *think* this will be interpreted as a way of saying either (i) that tax avoidance is *believed* to be morally wrong or as an odd way of saying (ii) that tax avoidance is morally wrong. If (i), then D8 is not a way of saying the same thing. If (ii), D8 would convey whatever attitudes are conveyed by D1, and so would not detach the implicature.

One might doubt that D8 is correctly rendered as either (i) or (ii). Rather than pursue this, let me simply report the dialectical situation. To defend a conventional implicature hybrid, one needs to show that moral attitude expression *can* be detached (and also explain why moral terms have the odd feature of being conventional implicatures without a *clear* alternative or show that there is in fact a clear implicature-detaching alternative).³¹

A second strike against the conventional implicature model is the *cancellability* behaviour of conventional implicatures compared with attitude expression. An implicature is cancellable when either (i) the speaker can make explicit that they do not have the commitment otherwise indicated by their utterance without making their utterance infelicitous (a (non-semantic) misuse of words for example) or (ii) there is a context in which a felicitous utterance would not give rise to the commitment. In contrast with presuppositions, which *can* be cancelled in embedded contexts, conventional implicatures are non-cancellable in both embedded and unembedded uses. Witness the infelicity of the following:

B1*: #‘Luisa is a wop. Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

B4*: #‘Luisa might be a wop. Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

One cannot felicitously follow any of B1–B5 with ‘Not that I have anything against Italian people.’³² Conventional implicatures cannot be felicitously cancelled in embedded *or* non-embedded contexts.

What of the cancellability of moral attitude expression? Copp claims that it is: ‘inappropriate to use the term [‘morally wrong’] in making a moral judgement unless one disapproves of actions that have the property of being wrong.’³³ He thinks that one cannot cancel moral attitude expression because one’s utterance would be infelicitous in virtue of a misuse of the term [‘morally] wrong’. Call this claim ‘non-cancellable’. *Non-cancellable* is an explicit denial that cancellation of type (i) is possible.

If attitude expression works by conventional implicature, we should find an approximately equal level of infelicity between B1*–B5* and D1*–D5*:

B1*:#‘Luisa’s a wop. Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

B2*:#‘Luisa isn’t a wop. Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

B3*:#‘If Luisa is a wop then Francesco will be angry. Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

B4*:#‘Luisa might be a wop. Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

B5*:#‘Is Luisa a wop? Not that I have anything against Italian people.’

- D1*.'Tax avoidance is wrong. Not that I care about morality.'
 D2*.'Tax avoidance isn't wrong. Not that I care about morality.'
 D3*.'If tax avoidance is wrong then Francesco will be angry. Not that I care about morality.'
 D4*.'Tax avoidance might be wrong. Not that I care about morality.'
 D5*.'Is tax avoidance wrong? Not that I care about morality.'

Looking at these two sets of sentences, I think *non-cancellable* is too strong. Sentences D1*–5* do not seem inappropriate in the way that sentences B1*–5* do. D1*–5* are *surprising*, but they are not infelicitous.

The felicity of D1*–5* is arguably a consequence of the earlier observation that attitude expression is non-detachable. Given the availability of an implicature-detaching alternative term, one would not use the implicature generating term in B1*–B5* if one lacked the relevant attitude, which explains why B1*–5* are problematic.³⁴ If, as suggested above, moral utterances *lack* implicature-detaching equivalents, we should expect attitude expression to be cancellable, for there is no analogous alternative to 'wrong'. This possibly explains why D1*–D5* are felicitous.

Despite the propriety of D1*–5*, it is plausible that the following two claims are true. First, absent special contextual features, someone who does not care about morality and who utters D1–5 has provided misleading, defeasible, evidence that they care about it. Second, cancellation in the manner of D1*–5* is quite odd and surprising. Nevertheless, I do not think that these observations provide great support for a conventional implicature view.

As highlighted by an exchange between Copp and Finlay,³⁵ a major issue for assessing the cancellability of attitude expression is the possibility of *amoralists*, namely agents able to make moral judgements without caring about morality, and their making felicitous moral utterances. If this is possible, *non-cancellable* is false. There would be no reason to think that amoralists are incompetent with moral terms, even though it might be somewhat *surprising* that they make moral utterances.

Leaving aside whether amoralists are possible, there are two other plausible claims that would explain why *non-cancellable* might seem plausible as applied to moral attitude expression when it really is false. These explain the *oddness* of D1*–5* without postulating misuse of words.

First, most people care about morality at least somewhat. Second, in general, someone's engaging in utterances about what is required, permitted or prohibited by some standard makes it reasonable to infer that they care about (conformity to) that standard. These explain why utterances D1–5 from an amoralist will tend to be misleading even if linguistically proper. If someone did not care about morality, we would want to know why they are making utterances about what is permitted or prohibited by morality. And this will be quite an unusual context, given that (avowed) amoralists are not frequently encountered.

Some other examples will help here. Suppose, absent special conversational setup, someone makes one of these utterances:

- 'Opening at 9am is illegal. Not that I care about the law.'
- 'Eating beef on friday violates Catholic doctrine. Not that I care about Catholic doctrine.'
- 'Wearing white socks with black shoes is unfashionable. Not that I care about fashion.'

Without some special explanation, these utterances seem *somewhat* odd in the same way as D1*–5* seem odd. They do not seem *equally* odd as D1–5, which is presumably explained by the much greater frequency with which we encounter people indifferent to these standards, as compared with amoralists.

To test the cancellability of attitude expression, we should not look only at sentences like D1*–5* in abstraction. Doing so gives an inflated impression of infelicity. In testing for

cancellability, we should be sure to look at utterances in contexts that provide the best possible explanation of why someone who does not care about morality might nonetheless talk about what it permits or requires. Such contexts are those in which someone is an amoralist but who nonetheless has some reason to give moral verdicts (perhaps they are trying to prove their competence with moral terms). Focusing on these kinds of cases undermines the sense that utterances like D1*–5* are improper. D1*–5* are unusual but, unlike the predictions of the conventional implicature view, they are not infelicitous.

I have pointed out weaknesses in the view that conventional implicature is a good mechanism for pragmatic hybrids to appeal to. The main problems were, first, the way in which attitude expression is non-detachable due to the unavailability of alternative terms. Second, the fact that attitude expression is cancellable without impropriety (even if this is unusual). There is, I concede, something odd in making moral utterances like D1–5 if one does not care about morality. But the connection is not as tight as if a conventional implicature model was correct. If we are searching for a pragmatic mechanism which explains projection, accommodates the non-detachability of attitude expression, and explains why attitude expression is cancellable, we should look elsewhere.

4. Hybrid Views: Conversational Implicature

Conversational implicatures are propositions communicated by a speaker's utterance act without being something they literally say. They are generated by the combination of what the speaker says, the background context and general conversational norms such as Grice's:

Cooperative principle: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.³⁶

Snappy definitions of conversational implicature are scarce creatures, but Potts provides this helpful version, adapted from Hirschberg:

Proposition q is a conversational implicature of utterance U by agent A in context C , if and only if

- (i) A believes that it is mutual, public knowledge of all the discourse participants in C that A is obeying the cooperative principle;
- (ii) A believes that, to maintain (i) given U , the hearer will assume that A believes q ; and
- (iii) A believes that it is mutual, public knowledge of all the discourse participants that, to preserve (i), one must assume that A believes q .³⁷

An example will help make this clearer.³⁸ Suppose that your car has clearly run out of petrol and you ask 'Is there a garage around here?' and I reply 'There's one around the corner'. My utterance conveys that the garage I refer to is a place to buy petrol (it is not a *parking* garage, it is *open*, it sells *petrol* etc.). I do not *state* any of these propositions, but they are implicated by my utterance. This is because my saying that there is a garage around the corner is only consistent with my being a cooperative interlocutor if it sells petrol, it is open etc. for otherwise I would be violating the maxim of quantity and relevance (at least).

An important distinction within conversational implicature is between *particular* and *generalised* conversational implicatures. Particular conversational implicatures arise because of specific features of the context. In the example above, the utterance of 'there's one around the corner' only generated the implicature that there was an open petrol station around the corner because of specific features of the context. Generalised conversational

implicatures, by contrast, are triggered by the use of expression *types* and thus arise across contexts generally.³⁹ Two generalised conversational implicatures (GCI) triggers are ‘or’ and number terms:

GCI1. ‘The gold is in the bank vault or in the desert.’

Implicature: Speaker does not know in which location the gold is.

[Trigger: ‘P or Q’]

GCI2. ‘John has six children.’

Implicature: John has exactly six children.

[Trigger: ‘six’]

Moral attitude expression is connected to the use of particular terms and does not arise due to idiosyncratic features of a context.⁴⁰ Further, the most detailed implicature view – Caj Strandberg’s – is a *generalised* conversational implicature theory.⁴¹ Thus, I only discuss the GCI view henceforth.

The features of conversational implicature most relevant here are as follows: they are *non-detachable*, they are *cancellable* in both embedded and non-embedded uses and they can project.

I suggested above that attitude expression projects; the attitude of caring about morality is conveyed not only by D1 but also by D2–5. We saw that a *conventional* implicature view would explain this given that conventional implicatures project. However, although projection of conversational implicatures is more complicated and non-constant, it can occur.⁴² For example, take the GCI carried by utterances using ‘partner’, thus

GCI3. ‘John’s partner is meeting us here.’

This implicature – that John’s partner is male – is present in the following embedded utterances:

GCI4. ‘If John’s partner comes along then there’ll be ten of us.’

GCI5. ‘Is John’s partner here?’

Each of GCI3–5 carries the implicature that John’s significant other is male. Thus, the implicature carried by ‘partner’ projects.^{43 44}

Whilst the projection of conversational implicatures is less common than for conventional implicatures, it is enough here to note that *generalised* conversational implicatures can project. Thus, the fact that attitude expression by moral terms projects is consistent with a conversational implicature model.

Conversational implicatures are also non-detachable. Conversational implicatures are non-detachable because they arise from what is said, in context, not from any particular *way* of saying it (such as the choice of one word over another). Any way of saying *the gold is in the bank vault or in the desert* will trigger the implicature that the speaker does not know where the gold is. A conversational implicature model can thus accommodate the apparent fact that moral attitude expression is non-detachable. For attitude expression is not generated by the speaker’s choice of a particular term over another. Any way of (actually) saying the same thing as D1 will convey that the speaker cares about morality.

Conversational implicatures are also cancellable. One can signal that one did not mean to convey the otherwise implicated proposition without thereby making one’s utterance linguistically improper. For example, the speaker can say the following:

GCI1*. ‘The gold is in the bank vault or in the desert. I won’t tell you which.’

The second sentence cancels, or preempts, the implicature that the speaker does not know where the gold is. Conversational implicatures are cancellable in both embedded and non-embedded uses. Some other examples are as follows:

GCI2*. 'John has six children at the very least'.

[Preempted/Cancelled implicature: John has *exactly* six children.]

GCI8. 'If the gold is in the bank vault or the desert, and I'm not telling you if it's in either, you should start looking soon.'

[Preempted/Cancelled implicature: Speaker does not know where the gold is.]

In this way, a GCI model can explain why utterances such as D1*–5* are felicitous though surprising.

To sum up, moral attitude expression projects, which a GCI story accommodates. Moral attitude expression is also non-detachable and cancellable (though unusual), which fits with a GCI view. Generalised conversational implicature is thus a good fit with moral attitude expression and a better fit than either conventional implicature, or presupposition.

Whilst the conclusion just given suggests that I am rejecting Copp's pragmatic view, given its billing as a *conventional* implicature view, let me briefly explain why the distance between Copp and *conversational* implicaturists is less than it initially appears.

Much of the complications here stem from the details of Copp's view. Though he calls it a conventional implicature view, two of its features are unorthodox.⁴⁵ First, at least in earlier work, Copp claims that moral expressions convey attitudes by conventional implicature *only* when used to make 'basic moral assertions' where '[a] "basic" moral proposition is a proposition that entails, for some moral property M, that something instantiates M.'⁴⁶ He holds that *non-basic* moral propositions, such as conditionals, do not convey desire-like attitudes by conventional implicature but by *conversational* implicature.⁴⁷ By restricting the contexts in which the implicature is triggered, and by using conversational implicature for non-basic assertions, Copp's view is closer to a GCI view than a conventional implicature view.

Second, in earlier work, Copp takes attitude expression to be cancellable, thus deviating from a standard understanding of conventional implicature.⁴⁸ In later works, he distinguishes cancellability from what he calls 'chancellability'. He suggests that with utterances like D1*–5*, the attitude expression, though not cancellable, is '*chancellable*', which he glosses as the claim that it would not be *reasonable* to *interpret* the speaker of D1*–5* as *intending* to convey that they care about morality, given their denial. Copp however retains the claim that these utterances involve a misuse of the term (so they are infelicitous) and suggests this means that attitude expression is not strictly *cancellable*. His view is interesting in being a conventional implicature story, which initially allowed a conventional implicature to be cancelled before evolving into a view combining orthodox non-cancellability with a new, less demanding, property of chancellability. One upshot is that, as Copp suggests,⁴⁹ the apparent disagreement between him and Finlay may be merely apparent.

5. A Simpler Pragmatic Story

Out of presupposition, conventional implicature and generalised conversational implicature, the latter is the most plausible form for a pragmatic hybrid theory of moral language to take. One question for such a hybrid view though is *why* sentences like D1 standardly convey that the speaker cares about morality. Finlay and Strandberg each provide proposals.⁵⁰ Strandberg's rests on the following claims:

B1 . Moral discourse generally has the mutually accepted purpose of influencing behaviour.

B2. People who think that some action (type) is wrong generally want such actions not to be performed.⁵¹

Strandberg argues that moral utterances will convey desire-like attitudes via GCI for two reasons. First, a speaker who lacks such attitudes would violate the maxim of *relevance*. This is because, given (B1), ‘she would not have uttered the sentence unless she wants that such actions are not carried out’.⁵² Second, we can assume that the connection mentioned in B2 holds, unless the speaker signals otherwise and thus the speaker of D1 would violate the maxim of *quantity* if they *were* to report that they cared about morality, and so from their not doing so we should infer that they *do* care about morality.

However, one might deliver the same results whilst incurring even fewer commitments with an even more minimal non-GCI view (though the difference between the two views would be small). I claimed above that moral discourse in everyday contexts has these background assumptions:

(i) That most people care about morality at least somewhat.

(ii) Someone’s engaging in utterances about what is required, permitted, prohibited by some standard makes it reasonable to infer that they care about (conformity to) that standard.

One option for a pragmatic hybrid view is to adopt a more minimal type of pragmatic view where moral utterances express desire-like attitudes simply in virtue of the fact that the default background assumption of moral conversations contains both (i) and (iii):

(iii) People’s moral utterances voice their moral judgements accurately, at least for the most part.

Call this kind of view a ‘simple pragmatic story’ (SPS). Such a view has at least three advantages over a GCI view.⁵³ First, it leaves fewer hostages to fortune in not being committed to a particular pragmatic theory such as implicature (and the Gricean theory Strandberg endorses).

Second, GCI are carried by utterances deploying expression types. Whilst moral terms are commonly deployed to make moral utterances, there are a large number of other locutions used to make moral utterances in at least some contexts. These include ‘I wouldn’t do that (if I were you)’, ‘I’d be disappointed if you did that!’, ‘how would you feel if *he* did that?’, ‘what if everyone did that?’, ‘Would X do that?’. The fact that recognisably moral utterances sometimes do not deploy specifically moral terms is a weakness of a GCI view given that the view claims that it is the use of expression types that triggers the implicature. Whilst one might think that this fact shows merely that the GCI view needs a longer list of GCI triggers than simply the paradigmatic moral terms considered so far, the longer this list of expressions becomes, and the more it includes expressions which only sometimes express moral attitudes, the less explanatory the GCI view appears. Dropping the commitment to GCI allows for greater flexibility in explaining moral utterances, which do not deploy typical moral vocabulary.

Third, SPS can use the same resources to explain attitude expression in conversational and non-conversational contexts (where an implicature story will not apply). These latter contexts are cases including eavesdropping on someone thinking aloud about some moral question, reading their diary, noticing their facial expression or any method of learning their moral views. Here, there is no conversation so no possibility of a GCI explanation of how we learn of the desire-like attitudes of the speaker. Thus, the GCI view offers one explanation, which applies to conversations and a separate one for these other cases. SPS, by contrast, treats these cases and conversations alike. In all these cases, one gets evidence of someone’s moral views, views typically connected to the attitude of caring about morality.

There is, then, the question of whether we should go further than a minimal pragmatic story and adopt the GCI view. Though this is important and interesting in its own right, and there are

of course moves which the GCI theorist can make, I will close by explaining why this dispute does not matter much to the pragmatic hybrid project.

As I started by pointing out, a common starting point for ‘going hybrid’ is the thought that moral discourse combines belief and desire-like aspects, or is both descriptive and expressive. Finding a plausible connection between moral *judgements* and motivation is a major challenge here. In Smith’s words, we need ‘to explain how deliberation on the basis of our values can be practical in its issue to *just the extent that it is*.⁵⁴ My focus here has been pragmatic approaches to the claim that moral *utterances* express desire-like attitudes. The views left standing – GCI and a more minimal pragmatic stories such as SPS – will likely rely on there being a general defeasible connection between moral *judgement* and motivation. The views differ only with respect to moral *utterances*. This difference, though interesting, does not affect the story they give about moral *judgements* and motivation. Whilst there is interesting work to do on determining which is the best model for a pragmatic hybrid view, each has available to it the same resources to explain the link between moral *judgements* and motivation, such as there is.⁵⁵

Short Biographies

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Notes

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¹ ‘Ascribe’ is not meant as a success term here, given the possibility of an error-theoretic hybrid theory.

² I generally use ‘convey’ rather than ‘express’ to avoid confusion.

³ Drawing the semantic/pragmatic distinction is fraught with difficulties, and it would be unwise for me to offer a suggestion here. Any attempt to draw the distinction here needs to be sensitive to the fact that: (i) some kinds of presupposition are truth-conditionally relevant, (ii) some kinds of implicatures are *conventional* aspects of terms and (iii) some implicatures clearly arise before semantic processing is complete. Hopefully, the examples given herein are sufficient to make it uncontroversial that there is *some* intuitive distinction here, however difficult it is to draw. For further discussion, see Boisvert (forthcoming) and Bach (2013).

⁴ Boisvert (forthcoming) deals with the *semantic* forms of (ii).

⁵ Bar-On and Chrisman (2009) is an exception, given that their view is arguably a pragmatic, non-implicature, hybrid.

⁶ Some pragmatic mechanisms such as ‘conventions of usage’ accounts, I leave out.

⁷ For excellent introductory overviews, see Potts (2007), Dekker (2012), Beaver and Geurts (2011), Davis (2010).

⁸ See (e.g.) Bach (1999).

⁹ See (e.g.) Karttunen and Peters (1979).

¹⁰ Barker (2000), Copp (2001), Finlay (2004), Strandberg (2012).

¹¹ Barker (2000: 272) ‘There is no constraint upon what F is beyond its fitting into someone’s moral perspective and its being a natural property’. Note that this leaves open whether F can be a moral property.

¹² In Copp’s theory, this is treated as a natural property, though there will be non-naturalist counterparts. Note that Copp thinks that this property *just is* the property of being wrong so one could individuate less finely and treat his and Strandberg’s view as endorsing the same view of literal content in ‘wrong’ utterances.

¹³ Strandberg normally glosses this attitude as that of *wanting* that the action *type not* be performed.

¹⁴ To repeat, I use this particular attitude only for methodological reasons. One should substitute whatever one deems to be the most plausible candidate desire-like attitude.

¹⁵ One reason to worry about this is that it seems *easier* to find synonyms for thick terms than for thin terms, which might reflect differences in the kind of pragmatic mechanism utilised. Thin terms and thick terms thus look potentially different with respect to *detachability* (explained below). For discussion, see Roberts (2013) and Väyrynen (2013: ch 5).

¹⁶ The ‘semantic’ in semantic presupposition – used interchangeably with ‘lexical’ and ‘conventional’ – marks the fact that the presuppositions are part of the conventional meaning of specific words or constructions (‘presupposition triggers’). This is the reason to think that moral attitude expression is more likely to be a form of semantic presupposition, given a specific set of moral terms and constructions reliably express desire-like attitudes. However, a traditional understanding of semantic presupposition gives bad results. This traditional view is that a presupposition must be true for the asserted content to have a truth *value* (e.g. P presupposes Q if and only if whenever P is true or false, Q is true.) Whilst, there is some plausibility in thinking *P1* lacks a truth value, given its failed presupposition, it is implausible that *D1* lacks a truth value merely if the speaker does not care about morality.

¹⁷ Thus, semantic presupposition theorists would reject my initial characterisation of presupposition at the beginning of the section, which was framed in terms of a speaker’s act of presupposing.

¹⁸ Stalnaker (1991: 473).

¹⁹ See, for example, Strawson (1950), Stalnaker (1991).

²⁰ Someone may be happy to straightforwardly negate *D1* in certain contexts, namely those in which it is already established that they reject the presupposition. Similarly, one’s willingness to straightforwardly reject ‘Jill is a witch’ will vary between contexts, depending on whether the existence of witches is being taken seriously.

²¹ Complicating possibility: what if the presupposition is that everyone (or everyone involved in the conversation) cares about morality? This seems more plausible for thick terms than for thin terms though.

²² Caveat: as I explain in more detail below, Copp’s view actually diverges quite significantly from an orthodox conventional implicature view.

²³ The category of conventional implicatures is controversial, given that they are supposed to fall within pragmatics and yet form part of the conventional meaning of expressions. And even those who allow for their existence might query the examples I will give – ‘but’ and slurs. Space constraints preclude establishing that conventional implicature is well motivated. However, I think this is moot. Even if conventional implicature has good credentials, generally, I doubt that it is the correct model of moral utterances. For discussion of conventional implicature, generally, see Bach (1999) and Potts (2007).

²⁴ I use these examples of conventional implicature tentatively, and in common with holders of conventional implicature views of attitude expression (for discussion, see, e.g. Whiting (2013), Williamson (2003)). I am not myself wedded to a conventional implicature view of slurs, but they have enough in common with conventional implicature to be useful for explaining it. For discussion of slurs, see Hom (2010).

²⁵ The derogatory attitude might not be conveyed if the speaker puts scare quotes around the last word (which would not be a *straightforward* negation).

²⁶ Of course, the issue of when two sentences *say the same thing* is vexed indeed. Further, Grice’s wording is sometimes ‘the same thing’ and other times ‘the same thing (or approximately the same thing)’ Grice (1989:39, 43).

²⁷ Remember, I left aside utterances using *thick* moral terms, for which detachability seems more plausible.

²⁸ Copp (2009: 188) puts it thus: ‘there is no familiar predicate that stands to “wrong” as “Italian” stands to “wop”’ See also Hay (2013).

²⁹ Copp (2001: 35–6; 2009: 194); Finlay (2005: 13–14).

³⁰ Do any languages have a term that stands to ‘morally wrong’ as ‘Italian’ stands to ‘wop’?

³¹ An alternative tack would be to accept that moral terms do not satisfy detachability but that this is an exceptional kind of conventional implicature. But this is ad hoc, absent some explanation of why these conventional implicatures lack this feature.

³² As Williamson (2003:263) puts it: ‘someone who says “Lessing was Boche, although I do not mean to imply that Germans are cruel” merely adds hypocrisy to xenophobia.’

³³ Copp (2009:187). Copp formulates the relevant claim in terms of what would be ‘semantically inappropriate’. I omit this from the main text as the ‘semantic’ would be extremely distracting. As a conventional *implicature* theorist, Copp must mean by ‘semantic’ something other than that which is connected to the truth-conditional meaning of the term.

³⁴ Assumption: the alternative term is (known to be) clearly available to both participants.

³⁵ Copp (2009), Finlay (2005).

³⁶ Grice (1989: 26).

³⁷ Potts (:14), who cites Hirschberg (1985). Potts’ original has ‘one must be assume’, which I have adjusted.

³⁸ Example from Grice (1989: 132).

³⁹ Plausibly, this is a difference in *degree* rather than kind.

⁴⁰ As suggested above, the default presumption when someone makes a moral utterance is that they care about morality.

⁴¹ Strandberg (2012).

- ⁴² The projection behaviour of conversational implicatures is, however, messy and complicated. For discussion, see Green (1998), Kadmon (2001), Levinson (2000: ch. 3), Recanati (2003).
- ⁴³ Assumption: the context is not one in which people are likely to be referring to *business* partners (for example). Experience suggests this implicature is region-dependent, weaker than it once was, and, happily, weakening over time. However, I hope it still occurs in a wide enough range of contexts to demonstrate the point.
- ⁴⁴ Should we treat it as a *Conventional* Implicature? No, the implicature is felicitously cancelled in utterances such as 'John's partner, she's Italian', 'If John's partner comes along she'll bring wine for sure'.
- ⁴⁵ Another feature: Copp (2009) calls his view a conventional Simplicature view. He differentiates them on the grounds that implicatures must be *intended* by the speaker whereas simplicatures need not. For useful discussion of the issue of whether implicatures must be intended, see Saul (2001, 2002).
- ⁴⁶ Copp (2001: 5, n.8).
- ⁴⁷ Copp (2001: 37).
- ⁴⁸ Copp (2001: 36).
- ⁴⁹ Copp (2009: 196).
- ⁵⁰ Finlay's (2004) proposal depends on his end-relational analysis of moral beliefs so is, I presume, a less typical case of a GCI view than Strandberg's.
- ⁵¹ Strandberg (2012: 19, 22).
- ⁵² Strandberg (2012: 20).
- ⁵³ For further discussion of this type of view, see Fletcher (forthcoming).
- ⁵⁴ Smith (1992: 330) his italics. Cited in Finlay (2004: 210).
- ⁵⁵ For helpful comments, many thanks to Dan Boisvert, Daniel Groll, Alex Gregory, Mike Ridge, Debbie Roberts, Mark Van Roojen, Pekka Väyrynen and Fiona Woollard. For financial support, many thanks to the British Academy.

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