

# *Value and Implicature*

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Moral assertions characteristically express conative attitudes such as approval. Language can express in many different ways, however, and accommodating this expressive function in a satisfactory theory of moral semantics has proven difficult. The simplest approach to this problem is subjectivism: moral assertions are descriptions of speakers' attitudes. Subjectivism implausibly makes the truth-conditions of moral assertions depend on speakers' attitudes and notoriously has difficulty accommodating moral disagreements. An improvement, therefore, is expressivism: moral assertions have a semantic function of expressing conative attitudes *non-truth-conditionally*. Expressivism has its own problems – particularly explaining away strong evidence that moral assertions have truth values – and the solutions on offer have not been found persuasive by most philosophers. This paper investigates a possibly distinct view, *implicature* theory, inspired by Paul Grice's work in the philosophy of language.

The notion of implicature is that of information or *content* that is communicated by a speech act over and above the content that determines the utterance's truth-conditions. What makes implicature theory so promising is that it accommodates all three of the following intuitions: (1) moral assertions have truth values; (2) they characteristically express speakers' attitudes; (3) speakers' attitudes don't enter the truth-conditions of their moral utterances. Implicature theory has ambiguous significance for expressivism, however, as implicature is commonly thought to come in two varieties: *conventional* implicature, which is carried semantically (by the conventions for meaning socially infused in the words themselves), and *conversational* implicature, which is rather carried pragmatically (by the manner and context of

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utterance – in this case, by rules of conversational etiquette.)<sup>1</sup> Conventional implicature theories of the attitudinal content of moral assertions (henceforth ‘convention theories’) have recently been offered by Stephen J. Barker (2000) and David Copp (2001). Some convention theories are arguably compatible with expressivism, and may provide solutions to many of its problems: Barker offers his account as a defense of expressivism against Frank Jackson’s and Philip Pettit’s charge (1998) that expressivism cannot be maintained as a distinct option from subjectivism, and Copp labels his position ‘realist-expressivism’.<sup>2</sup> If the correct view is rather a conversational implicature theory (henceforth ‘conversation theory’), however, expressivism is false: on conversation theories, although moral assertions characteristically express speaker’s attitude, this is not among their semantic functions.<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I argue that conversation theories – and one in particular (which I have proposed in Finlay 2004) – enjoy certain theoretical advantages over convention theories and by extension any other theory that similarly explains attitudinal content by appeal to linguistic conventions. In section 1, I examine Barker’s (and, I’ll argue, Jamie Dreier’s) *indexical* theory of the regular semantic content that determines a moral utterance’s truth-conditions (henceforth ‘asserted content’), and in section 2 observe a technical difficulty for Barker’s claim that it supports a convention theory. I then

<sup>1</sup> Conversational etiquette is summarized in Grice’s *co-operative 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’ (1989: 26).

<sup>2</sup> Classically expressivism is taken as consisting of two key claims, the other (besides that moral judgements express without reporting attitudes) being that moral judgements do not have truth-conditions. These claims are separable, however, and I shall follow Copp in using ‘expressivism’ to allow the possibility of both antirealist and realist versions.

<sup>3</sup> Copp 1995 suggests that a conversation theory may be the correct view but does not provide any such theory. See also Putnam 1981: 209-10, MacIntyre 1984: 13.

argue (section 3) that the indexical theory is implausible, and that the *relational* theory favoured by Copp and myself gives a superior account of the asserted content of moral utterances. Section 4 argues that Copp’s case for a convention theory is undermined by the fact that this relational theory has the resources to provide attitudinal content as a conversational implicature, rendering the alleged conventional implicature redundant. Furthermore (I argue in section 5), attitudinal content displays the typical characteristics of conversational and not of conventional implicature – particularly ‘cancellability’. I conclude my case in section 6, observing that conversation theories appeal to the uncontroversial phenomenon of conversational implicature, while there are significant reasons for doubting the existence of conventionally based implicature, and particular reasons for skepticism toward the implicatures alleged by the convention theory.

### 1. Barker’s indexical theory

Any implicature theory of moral speech acts must also allow for an asserted content (or ‘explicature’, in the terminology favoured by Barker):<sup>4</sup> implicature is content parasitic upon what is said together with either pragmatic or further semantic features of speech acts. Barker thus gives a ‘dual content’ analysis (following Stevenson 1944, Hare 1952, and Edwards 1955), as follows:

If *U* asserts the sentence ‘*T* is good’, then *U* denotes a property *F* by ‘good’ and:

- (i) *U* expresses-as-explicature the content that *T* is *F*;
- (ii) *U* expresses-as-implicature the content that *U* is committed to approval of *F*-things;

<sup>4</sup> I avoid this terminology on the scruple, owed to Kent Bach, that not everything a speaker asserts is explicit.

- (iii) *U* conveys that she believes the contents in (i) and (ii);
- (iv) *U* conveys that she approves of *T*.

In what follows I focus on (i) and (ii), which Barker identifies as the components of the locutionary act, rather than (iii) and (iv), identified as illocutionary. Serious problems arise for Barker from his account of the asserted content.

What is the property *F*? Barker acknowledges that ‘there are complexities in the general dynamics of content fixation’ (2000: 277). A century of failed attempts attests to the difficulty of identifying a single property as the denotation of ‘good’, and so Barker (like Stevenson, Hare, and Edwards) suggests that the identify of *F* differs from utterance to utterance. ‘There is no constraint upon what *F* is,’ he states, ‘beyond its fitting into someone’s moral perspective and its being a natural property’ (2000: 272).

How then is *F* fixed? It cannot be by the conventional meaning of ‘good’ alone, as that permits practically any content whatsoever. This isn’t to say that the conventional meaning of ‘good’ plays no role in fixing its denotation: use of the pronoun ‘*I*’ can denote anyone, because the denotation is fixed by a conventional meaning that directs an audience to look to the identity of the speaker. Here meaning combines with context to yield a denotation. So how about ‘good’? Barker gives the following criteria:

‘good’ – as uttered by *U* – denotes *F* such that:

- (a) *U* is committed to (moral) approval of *F*-things.
- (b) This *F*-attitude is shared by or uncontroversial for audience/interpreter.

As stated, however, these criteria can either underdetermine or overdetermine the identity of *F*. The underdetermination

problem is the less serious: it is simply that there can be – indeed, there usually is – more than one property that satisfies *F*(a) and *F*(b). The solution is surely to broaden the input of context. The property of goodness is determined, at least in part, by the kind of object under consideration (as can be seen by attending to Peter Geach’s observation of the attributive character of ‘good’, and to the Aristotelian *ergon* argument). I introduce the notion of an *evaluative situation S*, incorporating the circumstances in which the evaluative assertion is made. We can then say that ‘good’ – as uttered by *U* in *S* – denotes *F* such that

- (a') *U* is committed to (moral) approval of *F*-things in *S*.
- (b') This *F*-attitude in *S* is shared by or uncontroversial for audience/interpreter.

Let us then understand *F*(a) as *F*(a'), and *F*(b) as *F*(b'). Although it may still be reasonable to doubt that the underdetermination problem is solved, I now turn to the overdetermination problem. Criteria *F*(a) and *F*(b) can yield incompatible results: a speaker can be committed to approval of some property without such approval being shared by or uncontroversial for the audience/interpreter, and *vice versa*. Were we to read *F*(a) and *F*(b) as jointly necessary and sufficient conditions for fixing *F*, we would have to conclude that where the criteria have no mutual satisfiers, ‘good’ cannot have a denotation. This would not be a plausible theory of ‘good’, however, and certainly not a theory friendly to expressivism, which takes moral disagreements to be at root disagreements of *attitude*. In any case, it is not what Barker intends: he claims the result is ‘a certain interpretative instability rather than failure of any determinate interpretation at all’ (2000: 277). But there is then a puzzle regarding the status of the criteria.

Perhaps F(a) and F(b) are meant to be disjunctive, individually sufficient criteria for fixing F? By 'good' a speaker could then denote either the properties of which he approves in S or those of which his audience approves in S, as Barker indeed seems to suggest (2000: 277-8). The 'interpretative instability' would thereby arise out of these two possible uses of 'good'. But the disjunctive interpretation cannot stand. First, it is clear that we are only meant to choose between F(a) and F(b) in cases at the margins of the meaningful use of 'good', whereas in normal cases, F(a) and F(b) will be jointly satisfied. 'In privileging F(a) to fix F...we interpret [the utterance] as signalling the uncontentiousness of approval,' Barker claims, 'since F-attitudes are meant to be shared' (2000: 277). Second, if F(b) independently provides a meaning of 'good', expressivism and the convention theory are both false: it is possible for a speaker to declare something to be good without expressing his approval of it. The disjunctive interpretation is therefore incompatible with the significance Barker claims for the theory. Third, Barker identifies a difference in source or status for the two criteria. F(a) is identified as semantic ('the *character* of the word "good"') while F(b) is identified as pragmatic (arising from the 'presuppositional aspect of implicature' [2000: 277], about which I shall say more later).

Focusing on the semantic criterion, Barker's convention theory assigns as the conventional meaning of 'good' *the property F such that F satisfies F(a)*. This is read *de re* (2000: 277n); hence the meaning of 'good' is simply F, and the asserted content of 'T is good' is simply *T is F*.<sup>5</sup> On Barker's theory, therefore, 'good' is like an indexical.<sup>6</sup> It is helpful to

<sup>5</sup> This is in keeping with the expressivist precedents of Stevenson, Hare, and Edwards, and also with Mackie's analysis, where F is fixed as the property for which T earns U's approval.

<sup>6</sup> This is the significance of Barker's ascribing 'good' a semantic 'character' – David Kaplan's term for the content-determining rule that constitutes the conventional meaning of indexicals (see also Dreier 1990: 8).

appreciate that Barker's proposal turns out to be (for my purposes) equivalent to the theory Jamie Dreier advances under the label 'speaker relativism'. For clarity, however, I will call this Dreier/Barker view the *speaker's attitude indexical theory*, or the indexical theory for short. Dreier writes,

Moral terms have a two-level semantics of the kind David Kaplan proposes for indexicals. Indexicals have as their primary meaning, according to Kaplan, not a content, but a character, a rule for determining the content given a context [1990: 8]

which rule, in this case, is 'a function of the affective attitudes of the speaker in the context' (1990: 9). Hence 'on a given occasion of use, "good" has a content equivalent to a certain descriptive, naturalistic predicate' (1990: 18). Dreier's concern, however, is not with the expression of attitudinal content but with the 'internalism' condition on the proper use of moral language, which requires that a speaker making a moral assertion have a corresponding conative attitude.

Before we can be confident that I am not misrepresenting Barker's proposal, I must address the loose end of F(b). (I have an ulterior motive here too: F(b) will emerge to be significant for the conversation theory). It is a pragmatic presupposition, Barker claims, of U's using 'good' to denote F, that U's audience shares or finds uncontroversial the F-attitude: 'F-attitudes are meant to be shared'. What we assert in conversation usually assumes a body of information as already understood by our audience, hence as unnecessary to assert, and the conversational appropriateness of our speech acts usually depends upon the correctness of this assumption: this is 'pragmatic presupposition'. This phenomenon does double duty: it sets conditions on acceptable use of language, and it also thereby plays an important role in determining the implicature content of our speech acts

(because an audience is licensed, by conversational maxims, to infer from our speech acts our intention to communicate any conditions for their appropriate performance that are not already contextually presupposed). For this reason, Barker treats F(a) and F(b) as both criteria and content for appropriate utterances of 'T is good'. Also for this reason, Dreier's internalism constraint on moral assertion will guarantee attitudinal expression: if sincere moral assertions require the possession of motivational attitudes, then audiences are licensed to infer from our moral assertions that we possess those attitudes.

Given the semantics for 'good' at which we have arrived, why need it be the case that 'F-attitudes are meant to be shared'? Why can't a speaker with linguistic propriety call something 'good' in virtue of its possessing a property of which he, but not his audience, approves – as expressivists maintain that we do? Two explanations for F(b) come to mind. First, Barker seems to be drawing a parallel between his implicature theory and his explication of the general phenomenon of conventional implicature, for which he uses the following example:

(1) Even Granny is drunk.

The use of the word 'even' here allegedly presupposes (and contributes the implicature content) that

1(a) Granny is less likely than others to be drunk

and that

1(b) the belief that 1(a) is shared by or uncontroversial for the audience.

While 1(a) is required by the conventional meaning of 'even',

1(b) is required by the fact that the speaker neglects to assert that 1(a). In uttering (1) without asserting that 1(a), *U* presupposes that the audience already accepts that 1(a) – i.e., *U* presupposes that 1(b) is true. 1(b) is thus a pragmatic presupposition of conversationally appropriate utterance of (1) (and is itself thereby communicated by the speech act).

There is, on the surface, a parallel with Barker's implicature theory. In uttering 'T is good', it is required of *U* that F(a): *U* is committed to approval of F-things in *S*. In uttering 'T is good' without asserting that F(a), *U* (arguably) presupposes that his attitude towards F-things is uncontroversial and so need not be reported. Is F(b) therefore analogously a pragmatic presupposition of *U*'s utterance? It is not. There is an important ambiguity in the claim that *U*'s F-attitude is uncontroversial: it could be either the attitude itself or the fact that the attitude is held (by *U*) that is uncontroversial. For the *attitude* itself to be uncontroversial is for it to be shared by the audience and speaker. While it is clear that Barker means by F(b) the former (indeed, he writes '*shared by or uncontroversial*'),<sup>7</sup> only the latter is pragmatically presupposed by *U*'s utterance. Whereas use of 'even' presupposes as uncontroversial a certain probability scale, use of 'good' (given that F(a) provides its meaning) presupposes as uncontroversial *at most*<sup>8</sup> that *U* is committed to approval of F-things.<sup>9</sup> And this can be true even where the F-attitude is not shared.

While the first explanation for criterion F(b) fails, a second suggests itself. Where F(a) is not asserted by the

<sup>7</sup> I take it to be obvious that the 'or' here signifies clarification, not disjunction, as when I say, 'a diaper, or nappy'.

<sup>8</sup> Compare the use of 'I': while it often pragmatically presupposes the identity of the speaker (what 'I' contributes to the truth-conditions) to be uncontroversial, this is hardly always so.

<sup>9</sup> This contrast is complicated by Barker's description of the probability scale for 'even' as 'subjective'. I consider this a mistake: a person uttering (1) is not presupposing merely that he himself rates probabilities accordingly but that this is the way probabilities actually stand.

speaker, his speech act pragmatically presupposes F(a) as uncontroversial for his audience. If the audience then has no independent clues as to the property that *U* is committed to approval of in *S*, the default assumption is that it is the property that they are all committed to approval of in *S*. F(b) therefore serves not, as Barker seems to suggest, as a constraint on what a speaker can use 'good' to denote but as a default indicator to an audience as to the speaker's intended denotation. I conclude that Barker overstates the importance of F(b) in claiming that F-attitudes are meant to be shared. Recognizing F(a) as the sole semantic criterion for determining F, we can designate the property denoted by 'good' as

the property F such that F-things are what *U* is committed to approval of in *S*.

Barker's view, then, combines the indexical theory of the semantics of 'good' with the claim that this carries attitudinal content as conventional implicature. Now I want to make trouble for this combination of indexical and convention theories.

## 2. Does the indexical theory support the convention theory?

It is helpful to begin by observing an obvious but misguided objection to the indexical theory. Having identified the meaning of 'good' in Barker's theory as 'the property F such that *U* is committed to approval of F-things in *S*', one might think that we have here a *subjectivist* theory, on which *U*'s utterance incorporates a description of *U*'s attitudes in its asserted content. The attitudinal content is then asserted and not implicature content. This objection fails because of the nature of indexicals. The conventional meaning of an indexical contributes asserted content *de re* and not *de dicto*. There is a separation, on the indexical theory, between the

meaning and the content of the use of 'good'. In *U*'s use the meaning is 'the property F such that *U* is committed to approval of F-things in *S*', while its content is simply F. The asserted content of *U*'s utterance, then, is simply

T has F

from which nothing nontrivial about *U*'s attitudes follows. The indexical theory is thus not properly a form of subjectivism, and Barker may appear justified in supplementing it with a convention theory: by virtue of its conventional meaning, the use of 'good' would indeed communicate speaker's attitude, and not by way of asserted content.

However, there is a problem here. The denotation-determining function for any use of 'good', on the indexical theory, is provided by F(a), as we saw. Now note that F(a) is precisely the content that Barker's convention theory assigns as conventional implicature to *U*'s utterance. This means that the asserted content is determined by the implicature, which is very strange. To suggest that what *U* asserts might sometimes depend upon the implicature (what *U* communicates by the asserting of it) is to turn the dependency as normally conceived on its head. Contrast a dual content analysis of a word like 'sadist', on which to assert 'A is a sadist' is to (a) express as asserted content that A has the property C, namely of taking pleasure in causing others pain, and (b) express as implicature that the speaker is committed to disapproval of C-things. Here the property in question, C, is contributed to the implicature by the asserted content. This is a problem, because the notion of implicature is commonly elucidated as content the falsity of which is 'compatible with the truth of the utterance' (Bach 1999: 331). On the indexical theory it is impossible for 'good' to have a denotation without F(a) being true. This entails that it is impossible for *U*'s

utterance to have any asserted content without  $F(a)$  being true, and therefore that  $U$ 's utterance cannot be true without  $F(a)$  being true.

There is some question, therefore, whether  $F(a)$  is genuinely conventional implicature, and therefore also some question whether the indexical theory really supports the convention theory. Ultimately, however, this is a mere technicality. First, the elucidation of conventional implicature can be challenged: observe that while 'T is good' cannot be uttered to state a truth when  $F(a)$  doesn't obtain, the asserted content (T has F) can still be true, as its truth-conditions are independent of  $F(a)$ 's truth. Copp has suggested (in correspondence) that this enables us to offer a competing elucidation of conventional implicature as content the falsity of which is compatible with the truth of the asserted content, which rescues  $F(a)$ 's claim to be conventional implicature. I don't believe this suggestion should be accepted: such 'implicature' has an influence on the utterance's truth conditions, which runs afoul of the basic rationale for the concept. But second, even if this proposal is rejected there is no problem here for the indexical theory as an account of asserted content, or for the claim that it allows us to explain how moral utterances can conventionally express attitudinal content without asserting it. At most this objection evinces that not all convention-based but nonasserted content is implicature content. I shall move on to a more substantive objection to the indexical theory.

### 3. Defragmenting goodness

While ascribing moral utterances truth-conditional semantic content, and ascribing natural properties as the denotations of 'good', Barker and Dreier adhere to classic expressivism in maintaining that there is nothing particularly moral or normative about that content or property. Exactly the same

proposition could be asserted without using moral terms or sentences at all, as the moral content does not enter the truth-conditions. Copp thus observes that on Barker's view, in making a moral utterance a person 'expresses an ordinary empirical belief', and there is 'no room in his account for the existence of robust *moral* properties' (2001: 40n). Copp finds this 'quite implausible', and I concur. Given the prevalence of doubt about moral properties, however, I cannot rest my argument here on shared intuitions.

The indexical strategy requires that the properties denoted by 'good' be dramatically context- and speaker-relative, a characteristic feature of indexicals (like 'I' and 'here'). While I don't deny that the denotation of 'good' is context relative, so that it is possible for one speaker to say 'T is good' and another in a different context to say 'T is not good' without contradicting the first, the indexical theory makes the truth-conditions of moral utterances relative to a degree that isn't true to the phenomena – particularly of moral disagreement.

The weakness in the indexical theory can be seen when we examine the case where another speaker  $W$  agrees with  $U$  that T has F but doesn't share  $U$ 's F-attitude, and further doesn't believe T to have any of the properties of which  $W$  herself approves. Consider this nonmoral illustration: T is a knife, S is the context of seeking an instrument for effectively cutting steak, F is the property of being serrated. On the indexical theory,  $W$  should consider  $U$ , in asserting 'T is good', to have spoken the truth:  $U$ 's 'good' here means 'serrated' and  $W$  does believe that T is serrated. This is counter-intuitive: surely  $W$  believes it to be simply false that T is good in S, no matter who says it.

Barker will reply that this objection overlooks the indexical character of 'good', which permits two different forms of moral or evaluative disagreement: *explicature-based* (where  $W$

shares *U*'s F-attitude but disagrees that T has F) and *implicature-based* (where *W* doesn't share *U*'s F-attitude). He will say that I am mistaking *W*'s implicature-based negation of *U*'s utterance for explicature-based negation: of course *W* cannot say, 'Yes, T is good,' since 'good' from her mouth has a different denotation, but this doesn't mean that she considers *U*'s assertion to be false.

Consider the analogy with the personal pronoun. If *U* were to assert, 'I am "*U*"', the asserted content would be that *U* is "*U*" and the implicature content would be that the speaker is "*U*". *W* couldn't properly respond, 'Yes, I am "*U*"', even though she knows *U* to have spoken truly, because 'I' means something different from her mouth. So far the cases are parallel, but I think that Barker is wrong: *W*'s disagreement is explicature-based, and the personal pronoun analogy helps to demonstrate this. Barker thinks that it is quite appropriate for (indeed, in the moral case, morally incumbent upon) *W* to object *metalinguistically* to *U*'s judgement, because she ought to negate *U*'s implicature. He would have her reply, 'T is not good. Being good does not consist in having F.' Observe the failure of the analog: 'I am not "*U*". Being me does not consist in being "*U*".' While *W* can't agree with *U*'s statement of identity by echoing it, she has no grounds at all for objecting to its implicature.

The failure of the analogy will be due, in Barker's view, to the further presupposition for the use of 'good', without equivalent for the use of 'I', that the speaker and audience share the same F-attitude – i.e., the presupposition that F(b). (The equivalent for 'I' would be that speaker and audience share the same identity). But of course, I have argued that F(b) cannot be a condition for the proper use of 'good' on the indexical theory. If I am right about that, then it would be quite improper for *W* to disagree with *U*'s value judgement at all, since its asserted content is simply that T is F (which *W*

accepts), and its implicature is simply F(a) – i.e., that *U* is committed to approval of F-things in S (which *W* has no reason to challenge). It is clearly absurd, however, to hold that *W* may not appropriately disagree with *U*'s utterance. On the other hand, if I am wrong to reject F(b) as a condition for the proper use of 'good', then it is an abuse of language for *U* to address his evaluative utterance to *W* when F(b) does not hold true and *W* doesn't share his F-attitude. And this is unacceptably restrictive on the proper use of 'good'; surely *U* is entitled to declare T good, even when he knows *W* does not approve of the properties for which he approves of T. Expressivists will insist on it.

To twist the knife (as it were) in the plausibility of the indexical theory, consider the case where as before *W* doesn't share *U*'s F-attitude, but now *W* approves of property G (say, sharpness) and believes that T has G but not F, while *U* does not approve of G and believes that T does not have G. *U* and *W* would therefore both, for themselves, judge T to be 'good'. And yet each should consider the other's utterance to be false. They should not *agree* that T is 'good', although they would both privately make that judgement. This is not an incoherent hypothesis, but it does significantly fail as a plausible account of the semantics of 'good' and the dynamics of moral and normative discourse. It is natural to say rather that *U* and *W* agree that T is good but disagree over what makes it good. It appears, therefore, that the indexical theory errs in confusing the property (or properties) of being good with the properties that make good.

There is reason, therefore, to seek a theory that can identify a single property F (or perhaps a family of properties) as the denotation of 'good', distinct from the various good-making properties. Although many philosophers still consider G. E. Moore's open question argument to prove the futility of this project, Copp, myself, and others maintain that



it can be accomplished by a *standard-relational property theory* (relational theory, for short).<sup>10</sup> The generic features of this theory are: (1) moral/normative properties, including the property denoted by 'good', are relational properties; (2) these relations hold between some set of standards and the objects, actions, states of affairs, etc. that have the property; (3) they consist in those objects' etc. in some sense either meeting or failing to meet those standards; (4) at least some people some of the time are motivated in accordance with those standards. This basic model allows for many variations: Copp (following Gibbard) conceives of the relevant standards as imperatival social norms (whereupon 'meeting' consists in being permitted by, failing to meet consists in being prohibited by), whereas others (including Ziff, Mackie, and myself) prefer to identify them with ends, goals, or purposes, as provided by motivational states such as desire (so that 'meeting' consists in furthering or satisfying, failing to meet consists in obstructing or failing to satisfy). For present purposes, however, this is an internecine dispute. A difficult question, which I cannot satisfactorily answer here, concerns what on a relational account makes an evaluation 'moral'. A partial answer is that a value judgement counts as moral only if the standard to which it is relativized counts as moral; I say more on p. 15. Copp thus suggests that to say that T is morally wrong is to say that it is prohibited by a

<sup>10</sup> Others include Paul Ziff (1960), John Mackie (1977), and, despite his antirealist intentions, Allan Gibbard (1990). Dreier fails to distinguish his indexical theory clearly from the relational theory: he writes, 'The character of 'good'...is a function from contexts to the *property of being highly rated* by the moral system of the speaker in the context' (1990: 19); 'if [a speaker] understands the meaning of "good," then she knows that when she uses the word she describes [T] as meeting certain standards' (1990: 20); 'the content of "x is good" is of the form "x is approved by moral system M"' (21). There can nonetheless be no doubt that Dreier rather intends the indexical theory: it is necessary for his claim that in coming to believe a moral sentence, a person is coming to believe something in a new way, rather than acquiring a new belief (hence, on p. 20, he identifies the denotation of a particular use of 'good' with the relevant 'good-making characteristics').

relevantly justified moral standard, where moral standards, in his view, are distinguished by their social function.

To illustrate the relational theory's advantages over the indexical theory, consider what each has to say about *U*'s and *W*'s disagreement about the steak-cutting value of knives. The indexical theory identifies a knife's goodness, relative to each speaker, as the natural properties for which they approve of it – serration versus sharpness. The relational theory recognizes that there is a common standard *U* and *W* share with regard to the knife – its facility for effective cutting of steak – and identifies goodness for both *U* and *W* as the property of furthering this facility. Serration and sharpness then are the natural properties which *U* and *W* respectively believe to be good-making properties, and on the basis of this difference they do on the relational theory genuinely agree or disagree over a common matter: whether the knife possesses a particular property, its goodness. The relational theory like the indexical theory does allow 'good' to have different denotations, but only provided a difference in basic standards or ends (a good knife for cutting steak, after all, is not a good knife for spreading butter). In the moral case, therefore, while genuine moral disagreements between members of different societies with radically different moral standards might be hard to come by, they will be commonplace within a society and between societies with common standards.

#### 4. Attitudinal content on the relational theory

The relational theory needs to provide an account of how moral assertion carries attitudinal content, as the meaning it attributes to 'good' does not directly invoke speakers' attitudes. The answer will have to do with the speakers' relation to the relevant standards. If a speaker is suitably motivated in accordance with those standards (he 'endorses',

'subscribes to', or has 'internalized' them)<sup>11</sup> then he will consequently approve of things insofar as he believes them to conform with those standards, and disapprove of things insofar as he believes them not so to conform. (Approving of T, on this view, is not simply a brute psychological reaction to T, but has an underlying explanation in terms of a relational characteristic perceived in T). But how does the meaning of 'good' secure this connection to speakers' motivation?

Copp's initial suggestion (1995) was that moral assertions carried attitudinal content by *conversational* implicature. By the time he comes to work out the details (2001), although still recognizing a conversational implicature, he places the emphasis on conventional implicature. His convention theory, however, is designed to be independent of his relational theory of asserted content.

He writes,

[I]t would serve the goals of moral discourse if a convention were to develop such that a person asserting a basic moral belief by using moral terms would thereby implicate that she subscribes to a relevant moral standard. If such a convention were to develop, then the connection of moral discourse to action-guiding states of mind would be encoded in the meanings of the terms we use. [2001: 34-5]

I will now argue that this is a mistake, as (1) on the relational theory, conventional implicature is redundant because attitudinal content is already expressed conversationally; (2) conversation theories are preferable to convention theories, as they are a better fit with the phenomena (especially the feature of 'cancellability'); (3) there are difficulties with the very idea of conventional implicature, and with these alleged conventions in particular. I concede, however, one

significant advantage to Copp's convention theory: unlike the conversation theory championed here it doesn't depend upon any particular theory of the asserted content of value judgements, having the flexibility to work with virtually any such theory, and therefore could win by default if Copp and I are both mistaken in holding relational views of that content.

I distinguish two ways Copp provides for conversationally implicated attitudinal content (2001: 31-3), both concerning the normal social role of moral values. First, he writes that 'the reason that the currency of a moral code can serve the needs of society is that it involves a widespread subscription to the code within the society's population,' hence 'the point of moral discourse depends...on our tending to have...moral beliefs that are accompanied by subscription to corresponding standards' (2001: 32). Typically, therefore, people's moral beliefs are accompanied by moral subscription, which is 'the expected state of mind of a person who expresses a basic moral belief'; and so 'a person who makes a moral assertion conversationally implicates that she subscribes to a corresponding moral standard.' The second ground consists in the typical purpose of moral conversation: it is, Copp suggests, concerned with *what to do* (the 'context of decision'). Offered in this context, moral assertions will be assumed to be speakers' contributions to arriving at a practical decision, and so there will be a presumption that speakers actually subscribe to the standards implicit in their moral assertions. Both of these mechanisms sound most plausible, and I shall simply grant them.

Why does Copp not think that conversational implicature, so grounded, is sufficient to explain the attitudinal content of moral assertions? The answer is, I think, complex. He suggests first (2001: 34-5) that given the goals of moral

<sup>11</sup> 'Subscribes' is Copp's terminology; 'internalizes' is Gibbard's.

discourse and the nature of linguistic conventions, it 'would not be surprising' if attitudinal content was part of the meaning of moral language (its 'colouring', following Frege). This can be seen as an argument that it is only to be expected, morality and language being what they are, that the convention theory is true. I shall criticize this claim in section 6. Next, he expresses belief 'that moral terms *do* have such coloring.' 'It would be misleading, other things being equal,' he writes, 'for Bob to say to Alice "Cursing is morally wrong" if he does not subscribe to a standard that prohibits cursing. If Alice understands the point of moral discourse, she will take him to subscribe to such a standard' (2001: 35). Although this observation is offered here in support of the convention theory, it differs in no significant way from his earlier statement of the case for conversational implicature! (Indeed, with its *ceteris paribus* clause and focus on the point of moral discourse, it is more suited to supporting conversational implicature. It is significant here that Copp's arguments are aimed principally against subjectivist and nondescriptivist theories rather than conversation theories, and hence that my critique blindsides him.) The important claim, then, is what follows:

I do not think that a person needs to have a sophisticated understanding of the pragmatics of moral discourse in order to understand that a person who asserts a basic moral belief in moral terms is implicating subscription to a corresponding moral standard. It seems to me that it is only necessary to understand what is said. If this is correct, then perhaps there are linguistic conventions governing the use of moral terms such that they are standardly used to express subscription to norms. [2001: 35]

A conversation theory isn't sufficient, therefore, because it

forges too *subtle* a link between moral assertion and expression of attitudinal content. Talk of a 'sophisticated understanding' of pragmatics is ambiguous, however. In one sense only a small number of philosophers and linguists have a sophisticated understanding of pragmatics. It is surely true that grasping attitudinal content does not require this level of theoretical expertise. But in another sense (the 'know-how' sense, if you like) every competent speaker has a sophisticated understanding of pragmatics and is adept at detecting conversational implicatures. More argument is needed, therefore, to discount the conversational option. A better point is perhaps that conversation theories forge too *contingent* a link between moral assertion and attitudinal expression. The pragmatic conditions observed above are not sufficiently entrenched to accommodate the closeness of the connection between moral assertion and speaker's attitude. Many people grow to adulthood in our society without moral education making a suitable impression on them. Moral matters are often discussed in conversational contexts that are not directly targeted at decision. Yet, Copp suggests, to grasp a speaker as expressing subscription to a moral standard, 'it is only necessary to understand what is said': we do not need to further presuppose the obtaining of those conditions. The implicature of speaker's attitude must therefore be a matter of semantics, not pragmatics – supporting convention over conversation theories.

I agree that the forms of conversational implicature Copp outlines are insufficient to explain the closeness of the connection between moral assertion and speaker's attitude. But as I have argued elsewhere (Finlay 2004), there is another, far more ubiquitous conversational feature of moral assertions that Copp overlooks and that can accommodate the facts to which he appeals. It is true, as Copp says, that in most contexts a person who makes a moral assertion com-

municates thereby – merely by her choice of words – her subscription to the relevant moral standard. But this also is something that conversation theories can explain. One way in which conversational implicatures can arise is by a speaker’s omitting from her utterance words that are necessary components of the complete thought asserted. This, I propose, is typically the case with moral assertion: speakers are omitting constituents from their speech acts in a significant way.

What is being left out? Copp’s relational theory makes this easy to answer: what is omitted is *specification of the relevant moral standard*.<sup>12</sup> The relational theory allows that different moral utterances can invoke different moral standards. Hence it is an important part of the full sense of what *U* means to express by his utterance that he is judging *T* relative to standard *M*. This phenomenon is more easily observed in the nonmoral case. When *U* asserts that the knife is good, he is really asserting that the knife is good *relative to the standard of effective steak-cutting*. An omission like this is conversationally licensed only in a context where the audience can be expected to presuppose or automatically fill in the missing content; *U*’s omission is justified by the context in which the end of effective steak cutting is presupposed.

Audiences are licensed, by Grice’s ‘maxim of quality’, to understand as conversationally implicated any information required in the context in order for a speaker’s utterance to make an intelligible contribution to the conversation. An evaluative utterance that is incomplete in the way described above will therefore conversationally implicate that the

<sup>12</sup> Copp’s examples have the qualifier *morally* good, which to a degree counts as specification of the relevant standard. (Observe that moral judgements are more frequently made without even this qualifier, and the implicature of speaker’s attitude is even stronger in such cases.) But on relational theories there is more than one moral standard; hence speaking as if there were only one strongly suggests (conversationally) that the speaker himself subscribes to the relevant one.

speaker possesses some attitude, just in case her possessing that attitude is (part of) the context that her audience must presuppose in order to be able to identify the omitted standard-relativization. There are various kinds of context in which an audience can identify the implicit standard; many of these are contexts in which the speaker herself subscribes to that standard and hence will approve of that which she judges to conform with it. (Consider analogously ‘I choose the one on the left,’ uttered in the context of a shell game. I submit that the default presumption is that the speaker means *her* left.<sup>13</sup> The general principle here is that the default, when a speech act omits important relativizing information, is that speech acts are relativized to speakers’ perspectives.)

In the nonmoral case, this presupposition is easily defeated. But in moral cases, it has an additional ground. One reason why the relevant standard can be left (as if) contextually presupposed is rhetorical. By neglecting to be explicit about the relativization of one’s utterance, a speaker signifies, as Barker notes, that the relativization is uncontroversial. Moral standards are characteristic in part for their social status: they are standards to which our subscription and conformity is *socially demanded*. This social demand or ‘expectation’ can be expressed by speaking as if subscription to the relevant standard were shared even when it isn’t. (Indeed, for rhetorical purposes it is not even necessary that the audience be able to identify the standard in question, but merely that the speaker subscribes and demands conformity to it.) Hence, in most contexts, a speaker by uttering an unrelativized moral sentence conversationally implicates that she subscribes to that standard (and that she expects everyone else to, as well) – merely by her omission. A nonmoral analogy might be helpful: consider a parent who locates his

<sup>13</sup> In this case, however, the self-reference is part of the asserted content rather than implicature.

long-lost teenage runaway and tells her to 'Come home.' Whose home does he mean? Not 'my home', or 'your home', I think, but 'our home'. Whether or not the parent's home is any longer also his daughter's home is a matter of contention between them, but by speaking as if it were not, the parent conversationally implicates that he wants her living with him and that he demands that she accedes.

This account of the conversational implicature of a moral assertion undermines Copp's rationale for a convention theory. On the relational theory that we both accept, a conversational feature of moral assertion provides the same attitudinal content without requiring additional linguistic conventions, thereby rendering such conventions superfluous.

### 5. Detachability and Cancellability of Attitudinal Content

Relational theories thus have the resources to explain how a speaker's choice of words itself implicates attitudinal content, *conversationally*. Given the choice between convention theories and this relational conversation theory, the conversation theory is to be preferred, as it is a better match to the data. Copp appears to claim the reverse. 'To test whether the term "morally wrong" has colouring of this kind,' he writes, 'we can apply our four tests for colouring...Frege's truth test, Grice's test of detachability, my test of cancellability, and the misuse test' (2001: 35). It is implicated here that if 'morally good' passes all four tests – and Copp claims it does – then it must have colouring/conventional implicature. But he introduces these tests in order to distinguish colouring/implicature from *asserted content* ('core meaning' [2001: 16-9]), not conversational implicature, and does not address (except obliquely in a footnote) whether any of them serves also to distinguish colouring from conversational implicature. It is a mistake, therefore, to take a positive result as evidence for a convention theory over a conversation the-

ory. I shall now argue that conversation theories fare better on these tests than convention theories.

We can dispose of two of these tests quickly. The 'truth test' tells us that some proposition  $p$  is implicature of some utterance only if that utterance would be true even though  $p$  were false. The 'misuse test' tells us that  $p$  is implicature of some utterance only if that utterance would nonetheless be inappropriate were  $p$  false because it would communicate that  $p$ . These two tests jointly provide a generic test for implicature of either variety and therefore cannot decide the issue between them. The relevant tests concern detachability and cancellability: in Grice's view these are the distinguishing features of conventional and conversational implicature respectively.

Implicature content or *implicata* is 'detachable' iff the same asserted content can be expressed in the same context without the implicature, merely by substituting a different but coextensive term for the word carrying the implicature. Whether or not they actually carry implicatures, pejoratives provide fine illustrations: use of words like 'faggot' and 'nigger' expresses attitudes of contempt, but (arguably) exactly the same asserted content can be expressed without such contempt, by using noncoloured words like 'homosexual' and 'African-American'. As Copp observes (in a footnote), Grice views detachability as the distinguishing characteristic of conventional implicatures. Here if anywhere, then, can a case be made that convention theories are preferable to conversation theories.

Is the attitudinal content of moral assertions detachable? It may seem implausible that we can find different but coextensive 'noncoloured' terms to substitute for moral terms, but Copp writes, 'It seems to me that inverted commas or "scare-quotes" can be used to decolor terms that are standardly colored' (2001: 35). The asserted content of any moral

utterance, in other words, can be expressed without implicature of attitude by substituting for any moral term that same term in inverted commas. This seems correct but also somewhat glib: it strains the sense of ‘different but coextensive terms’. Arguably a term in inverted commas is not a different term but the same term used in a different way. What then is the inverted commas manner of use? Copp suggests that the inverted commas function to detach (and cancel!) implicatures. But if we examine the phenomenon of inverted commas more generally, we arrive at a different result. If I talk about someone’s ‘friends’, ‘earnings’, or ‘virtues’ (for example) in inverted commas, what I am signifying is that I do not consider them genuinely to be friends, earnings, or virtues. Inverted commas seem, in these cases at least, to indicate two things: first, that others (whom I am ‘quoting’) refer to these people, objects, properties, etc. in this way, and second, that I myself would not refer to them thus, because I don’t believe that these words properly denote them. Inverted commas function primarily to disavow asserted rather than implicature content.

If this is also the nature of moral assertions made in inverted commas (as seems likely), then Copp’s solution fails: ‘morally good’ in inverted commas is used to express (1) that certain others would call these things ‘morally good’, but that (2) the speaker does not consider them morally good. Moral assertions in inverted commas are therefore to be expected in at least two sorts of circumstance: first, where a speaker reacts to the moral assertions of others whom she considers mistaken; and second, where a speaker is a radical moral skeptic (as a number of people are), who believes that there is no such thing as moral goodness. Copp has thus failed to show that implicatures of attitude are detachable,<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Copp objects in correspondence that this mischaracterizes the upshot of my argument, which is rather that he is right about the detaching function of inverted commas, but that the test then fails to distinguish conventional from con-

and hence has failed to show that there is reason to doubt they are conversational.<sup>15</sup>

Copp does not need this inverted commas strategy, however, if he abandons his goal of advancing a convention theory that can stand alone, independent of his relational theory. For the relational theory provides different but coextensive terms to substitute for those used in (elliptical) moral utterances, which do not carry the attitudinal implicature: to say ‘T is (morally) good’ is to say that T conforms to some moral standard M. This fails to support the convention theory, however, because conversational implicatures carried by ellipsis or the omission of components of asserted content, unlike conversational implicatures in general, are in fact detachable. Because these implicatures arise from the way ‘one puts what one says’ (Bach 1999: 330), they do not arise if the same assertion is put differently – i.e. if different words are used. The detachability of attitudinal implicatures on Copp’s relational theory therefore provides no evidence that they are conventional rather than conversational.

Implicature is ‘cancellable’, in Grice’s sense, iff the same sentence can be uttered, without linguistic impropriety, without expressing that content. An implicature is *explicitly* cancellable iff a speaker can (without abusing the meaning of his words) legitimately deny that he means to express that content; it is *contextually* cancellable iff there are contexts of use in which the utterance of that sentence wouldn’t even seem to suggest that content. To me it seems clear that the

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conversational implicatures. I disagree: on the technical definition of detachability given above, since the inverted-commas strategy fails to furnish a *different but co-extensive term*, it fails to accommodate detachability.

<sup>15</sup> If successful the inverted-commas strategy would equally enable conversational implicatures to appear detachable. If I say, ‘At least 100 people died in the disaster,’ I conversationally implicate (by my imprecision) that I don’t know the exact number of dead. If I say ‘“At least 100” people died in the disaster,’ I don’t necessarily implicate the same ignorance – because I am borrowing someone else’s choice of words.

attitudinal content of moral assertions is cancellable in both these ways: here we encounter the figure of the amoralist, familiar in this literature, who sincerely makes assertions about the moral value of things but doesn't subscribe to those moral standards herself and doesn't express approval (etc.) by her moral speech acts. Attitudinal content can be cancelled explicitly, if she merely explains that she is an amoralist, or that she is contemptuous or indifferent towards morality. It is contextually cancelled if her audience already knows of her amorality (particularly if they themselves are amoralists, rendering amorality contextually uncontroversial).

This cancellability is a serious problem for subjectivism: moral assertions don't seem to be rendered false or linguistically inappropriate by the speaker's attitudes. It seems not much less of a problem for convention theorists and expressivists (including Copp, Barker, Dreier, and Gibbard), who also tie attitudinal content to moral judgements directly by linguistic conventions. The significance of claiming that there is a linguistic convention that speakers uttering moral sentences thereby express certain attitudes is, in this context, that to utter a moral sentence when one does not possess or mean to express such attitudes is to *misuse* moral language, in a way inconsistent with its very meaning. Cancellability is however contingent upon the conversational context, which is why Grice views it as a distinguishing feature of *conversational* implicature.

The problem is well known, and various strategies have been proposed in response. Copp seems to offer two distinct (and not entirely compatible) answers. First, he rejects the cancellability of attitudinal implicatures in Grice's conversational sense, appealing to an intuition that the amoralist *does* misuse moral words. To accommodate the amoralist's use, he suggests that it exhibits a weaker sort of cancellability

that *is* an indicator of conventional implicature (hence *his* cancellability test.) While cancelling conventional implicature constitutes a misuse of a word, this misuse 'would not be self-contradictory, and it would be fully intelligible as an assertion,' he writes, because despite the linguistic oddity the word can still be used for its 'core meaning' or contribution to asserted content (2001: 18). This is to insist that the amoralist's use of moral language is indeed a semantically inappropriate choice of words, a violation of the rules of language, although a violation with a communicative point.

Does the amoralist misuse moral language? Here we have a clash of intuitions: to me, but not to some others, it seems clear that we can appropriately utter moral judgements without attitudinal expression. Rather than simply insisting on my intuitions over those to which Copp and other expressivists appeal, I suggest that the combination of relational and conversation theories can explain both intuitions. It enables us to give two different accounts of what we might mean by qualifying an evaluative judgement as 'moral'. We might mean either (i) that it is a judgement concerning a particular moral kind of value, or (ii) that it is a judgement of value made in a particular moral kind of way (the rhetorically demanding way described above). It seems to me that the notion of a moral judgement is ambiguous in precisely this way, and it is indeed true that the amoralist does not make moral judgements in the second sense. Although this is to recognize some truth in Copp's intuition, it undermines the convention theory that the intuition is adduced to support: in the second sense, being a 'moral judgement' is a conversational and not a conventional feature.

Copp's second answer is to restrict the supposed conventions with qualifications. A speaker's use of moral terms without attitudinal content is a misuse, 'other things being

equal' (2001: 30, 35, 36). The conventions, then, are context-dependent: 'in most contexts, the amoralist would misuse the term "morally wrong"' (2001: 36). He seems to want to allow, then, that there are contexts in which the amoralist does not misuse the term. This however threatens to undermine the case for the convention theory – context-dependency is a tell-tale sign of *conversational* implicatures – and for the claim that to grasp attitudinal content we need only understand *what is said*. We can't simply object that conventions can't be context-dependent, however. Copp suggests that conventions can be sensitive to the occurrence of a term in a sentence, such as when moral terms are 'embedded in larger constructions' (2001: 18). But this can't explain the amoralist, who is not distinguished from other speakers by the sentential constructions of his utterances. Indeed, the amoralist seems able to use moral terms legitimately, cancelling attitudinal implicatures, in every context that the moral subscriber can (except that of being a moral subscriber).

It may be that the only contexts Copp has in mind in which the amoralist would not misuse moral terms are contexts in which she puts them in inverted commas: he does suggest that inverted commas can function both to detach *and* to cancel implicatures.<sup>16</sup> As I've said, it seems to me false that the amoralist does use moral terms only in this indirect way. If I am correct that inverted commas function primarily to disown asserted content, then it is the moral skeptic (who does not believe in moral truths) rather than the amoralist (who is indifferent to them) who uses moral language in this way.

Dreier confronts the problem differently. He judges the inverted-commas strategy implausible, and suggests that

<sup>16</sup> Observe that inverted commas cannot properly be invoked to accommodate both detachability (which requires use of *different* terms) and cancellability (which requires use of the same terms in different contexts).

'the failure of internalism is parasitic on a background of its successes' (1990: 11). The amoralist is only possible because of the normal case, in which speakers make moral utterances indexed to the moral system to which they themselves subscribe. The amoralist's utterance is made possible by the social normality of subscription to a particular moral code: the amoralist can make moral assertions indexed to the moral system that has currency in his society, even when he does not himself subscribe. This however presents a difficulty for Dreier's 'speaker relativism' and the claim that moral judgements express speakers' attitudes: moral terms don't have to be indexed to the speaker, merely to the speaker's society.

Dreier resists 'speaker's group relativism', observing the unwelcome consequence that it doesn't allow us to express moral disagreement with our society's moral system. Instead, he argues that 'speaker relativism' can accommodate the amoralist, as it 'can allow that what a person's moral system is may depend on factors extrinsic to that person' (1990: 21). In being relative to the speaker's society, moral terms thereby are relative to the speaker. But moral terms would *not* then necessarily be relative to speaker's attitudes or moral subscriptions, which is to abandon the *speaker's attitude* indexical theory. Dreier confesses that he does not know exactly how the indexing of moral terms works (1990: 25), and he writes, '[I]t seems to me that, given a context of use, we determine the content of the moral term by looking for the most suitable candidate for a moral system in that context' (1990: 23). Whereas he 'started by allowing the speaker's actual motivational states to determine completely the relevant moral system,' consideration of the amoralist forces him towards a more contextual approach. Dreier thus recognizes that the cancellability problem refutes the claim that linguistic conventions bind moral terms to speaker's at-



titudes, but he is unsure what ought to be proposed in its place other than that it must be sensitive to context. It seems that the conversation theory provides a satisfactory answer.

## 6. Why not conventions?

The last issue I will address concerns the suggestion I attributed to Copp, that conventions binding moral terms to speakers' attitudes are only to be expected. There are two points here: the first concerns the 'very idea' of conventional implicature in general; the second has to do with the way in which the dynamics of moral judgement might shape linguistic conventions. My arguments in this section are considerably more speculative and less decisive than I consider the previous arguments to be.

Potentially the most devastating objection to convention theories is Kent Bach's claim (1999) that there is no such phenomenon as conventional implicature: all alleged instances of it can be explained away as instances of other features of language. I am inclined to agree, although I have neither the ability nor the space to argue the case here. The mere cloud of reasonable suspicion hanging over conventional implicature, however, is yet another reason to prefer the conversation theory over convention theories, and so I will briefly indicate why we should take these concerns seriously, by demonstrating how Barker's own explication of conventional implicature fails to establish its existence. He writes:

(1) Even Granny is drunk

In uttering (1) the speaker U is reporting that Granny is drunk and *implicates* through 'even' that: a) for U there is a subjective probability scale in which (Granny is drunk) has lower probability than (N is drunk) for any N in some contextually determined class; (b) others are drunk. [2000: 269]

Consider (1) uttered in the circumstance that Granny is an alcoholic, currently intoxicated, and the relevant comparison class consists entirely of moderate drinkers. If the word 'even' contributes 1(a) to the asserted content, then (1) is false. But although (1) is unassertable for anyone who holds the right probability scale, Barker claims, it is not false. Why? Because 'one cannot say'

(2) It is false that even Granny is drunk.

Therefore, because it is false that it is false that even Granny is drunk, it must be true that even Granny is drunk, despite being unassertable. And the unassertability without falsity of (1) is evidence of conventional implicature.

This argument is too hasty. The only grounds Barker gives for thinking that (2) is false (hence that (1) is true) is that (2) is something that 'one cannot say'. This is merely to say that (2) is unassertable – and it is a crucial claim of the argument that unassertability does not entail falsity! So for all Barker has proven, it could be (2), not (1), that is true but not assertable: on this alternate view, (2) has as asserted content that it is not the case that

[(1\*) Granny is drunk] and 1(a) and 1(b).

1(a) could thus be part of the asserted content of (1), and so Barker's case for conventional implicature fails. This may appear to be mere sleight of hand. Truth-without-assertability has been moved from one statement to its negation but has not been eliminated. Isn't it enough, in order to provide evidence for conventional implicature, to demonstrate the gap between truth and assertability? No – because of the (less dubious) conversational variety of implicature. While the alleged truth without assertability of (1) supports conventional implicature due to the role of 'even' (which al-

legedly contributes to the content by semantic conventions that do not contribute to the utterance's truth-conditions), the proposed truth without assertability of (2) does not support conventional implicature, as all its semantically-determined content is present and accounted for in the truth-conditions. The misleading character of asserting (2) would then derive from the complexity rather than the paucity of the truth-conditions, the result being that the audience has no verbal clues as to which conjunct of the content is being negated, and is likely to assume, incorrectly, that it is the primary content (1\*).

There is a question mark, therefore, hanging over the existence of conventional implicature. But Copp is not daunted by this: as I have observed, he thinks that it is simply to be expected that such conventions would arise for moral terms. I shall end by criticizing the view of linguistic conventions on which this opinion seems to be based, and tentatively suggesting that it would rather be surprising if such conventions existed. Why might such conventions be thought to arise naturally? I can discern, in Copp's account, hints of two different models of how linguistic conventions develop. First, he writes that 'it would serve the goals of moral discourse if a convention were to develop...' (2001: 34). This suggests a model of linguistic conventions as social rules for the social good, similar in kind to rules of morality and etiquette. Second, he writes (quoting Frege), 'conventions can develop to govern uses of a term when "it has constantly been used in cases of the same kind"' (2001: 35). This suggests a model of linguistic conventions as social norms, in the (less normative) sense of what is *normal* or customary. I do not believe either model adequately captures the nature of linguistic conventions.

On the normality model, which seems primary in Copp's account, the regular connection of moral assertions with (ubiquitous) moral subscription leads (by a form of association) to such subscription getting bound up in the very

meaning of those terms.<sup>17</sup> It is thereby suggested that moral terms are coloured in the way that pejoratives are widely thought to be: constant use of a word accompanied by a contemptuous attitude results in that contempt permeating the word itself (like 'nigger'). I doubt that normal association by itself determines semantic conventions, which are in part *limitations* on how a word can be meaningfully and intelligibly used. Language has a natural dynamic towards facilitating rather than restricting what can be expressed, however, so that words are tools by nature suited to new, unforeseen, and extended contexts. The applicability of a word does not, therefore, get restricted merely by disuse, as the facility of a muscle might be restricted by lack of exercise. (The word 'house', for example, isn't semantically limited to denoting only buildings found on earth, even though we may never have used the word to denote an extra-terrestrial object. The fact that in some communities the name 'Satan' is never used except with disfavour has not resulted in such disfavour becoming a condition on linguistically proper use of the name.) Rather, the applicability of words is restricted only by the need to be able to discriminate more finely between differing information speakers find themselves needing to convey. Suppose analogously that the word 'brave' denotes a trait generally beneficial to society, hence its use is normally accompanied by approval.<sup>18</sup> There would be no

<sup>17</sup> I don't believe that amoralist utterances are as rare as this mechanism would require. The true amoralist who is always utterly indifferent (at best) toward morality may perhaps be, but moral speech acts unaccompanied by approval are commonplace.

<sup>18</sup> This account of 'brave' is controversial. On one alternative interpretation, bravery is a trait that can only be perceived from particular affective perspectives, and its extension looks shapeless independent of those affects. This is not a semantic thesis, however, and doesn't block those without the requisite affects from using the word. On another interpretation, the intention to approve is integral to the semantics of 'brave'. (See Plato's *Protagoras* 350B: certain attributions of courage are rejected on the grounds that 'if [such acts were courageous] courage would be something to be ashamed of.') But in this case attitude partly determines the term's extension, hence its contribution to asserted content. Thus neither alternative undermines my claim that further conventional implicatures of attitude are superfluous.

point in the development of a convention that limits proper use of 'brave' only to those who approve of that trait. If someone wanted, oddly, to express disapproval of bravery, his use would be unusual but still in accordance with the word's meaning. Likewise, the fact that ascription of moral goodness is normally accompanied by moral subscription and approval is certainly grounds to expect that someone using moral terms also subscribes to those moral standards, but it is not thereby any reason to think that the term would be semantically restricted in that way – indeed, it is reason to think it would not be.

Turning to the social-rules model, it must be observed that linguistic conventions are significantly different from moral conventions. It is not, as in the moral case, that non-conformity is frowned upon or socially discouraged but rather that nonconformity is *not understood*. The social goals that determine semantics are goals of communication, and a use of language is a misuse, semantically, iff it is a use that is not fully intelligible: a use that raises the questions, given what one signifies by use of this word, what could the speaker have been intending to convey by it and why did the speaker select it? Copp's contention that the amoralist misuses moral terms therefore has to be read as the claim that the amoralist's choice of words is puzzling to competent interpreters: why this sentence rather than another? (Consider here the case of 'even': if *U* doesn't mean to contrast Granny's tendency towards alcohol favourably with that of others, for what purpose does he use the word 'even'?) As we've seen, however, Copp claims that the amoralist's utterance is both a misuse of moral language and yet 'fully intelligible as an assertion' (2001: 18). He defends this possibility by the observation that a speaker's misuse of a word can be fully intelligible if the audience can recognize that 'she does not know or cannot think' of the appropriate word. Of course, we are supposing the amoralist to be fully competent

with the language; Copp's explanation of her intelligibility is the *nonexistence* of an appropriate word for the amoralist to use.

I believe such conventions would be unsustainable. Suppose Copp's convention theory were true. How would an amoralist then go about communicating the same asserted content that we do when we utter 'T is good'? There is no concise way for her to do so, except by uttering also 'T is good.' Would competent interpreters be puzzled by this choice of words? Not at all: given what the amoralist wishes to communicate, what she says is the easiest and most natural way for her to do so. And this suggests that our supposition is false: there cannot be a linguistic convention requiring speaker's subscription to the relevant moral standard, and the convention theory must be false. The conventions it proposes would have the effect, contrary to the basic function of linguistic conventions, of *limiting* expression of information – in effect, of silencing amoralists. Consider again pejoratives, a conventional-implicature account of which I acknowledge to be not without merit. If pejoratives do indeed carry colouring conventionally, it is partly because they exist in the language as *alternatives* to other words with the same denotations. Why would a speaker call a person a 'faggot' rather than a homosexual, or a 'nigger' rather than a Black or African-American? This choice of terminology is explained by the intention to express contempt towards a group. Were these pejoratives the only efficient means we had in our language to denote their referents, they would no longer be conventionally pejorative. As we have no efficient synonyms for moral terms, I therefore believe it is at least very improbable that they are conventionally tied to moral subscription.

While I have found Copp's convention theory of the attitudinal content of moral judgement to have advantages

over the convention theory supported by the Barker/Dreier indexical theory, I conclude that it likewise fails, and that a conversational implicature theory is superior to both. As I have considered only two versions of convention theory, it may be thought that I have not yet demonstrated that this conversation theory is superior to all convention theories, and it may also be thought that with my focus on implicature I have not addressed the feasibility of other kinds of conventional account. But my arguments concerning detachability and cancellability and my concluding remarks about the nature of linguistic conventions should be equally effective against any conventional-implicature theory or other kind of convention-based theory. I believe my case provides further reason to reject the basic claim of expressivism as false: expression of speakers' attitudes is not a semantic function of moral speech acts.<sup>19</sup>

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