

*A Puzzle about Meaning and Communication**

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Introduction

According to a view implicit in much of twentieth-century philosophy of language, linguistic communication conforms to the following model: a speaker has a thought—say, a belief that Fichte was a philosopher—which she would like to convey to her audience. This thought has a certain proposition as its content, a proposition which we might specify using the ‘that’-clause ‘that Fichte was a philosopher’. If the speaker knows that her audience is a competent speaker of a shared language such as English, she can choose some form of words which makes manifest to her audience the proposition she intends to communicate. Perhaps she utters ‘Uncle Johann was a philosopher’, or ‘He [pointing to a painting of Fichte] was a philosopher’. The speaker’s audience recognizes her communicative intentions, and communication is successful, only if her audience thereby entertains a thought whose content is the proposition the speaker meant by her utterance. Let’s call this *the standard view*.

Stated at this level of generality one might be tempted to think that some version of the standard view is obviously true—perhaps hardly worth stating. I believe that this temptation ought to be resisted: communication rarely, if ever, works in the way characterized by the standard view. In this paper, my primary aim is to make some headway towards establishing this rather sweeping claim by discussing some cases in which the standard view apparently fails, focusing on the phenomena of quantifier domain restriction and non-sentential assertion, illustrated by (1) and (2), respectively:

- (1) Every student wrote an essay on Fichte! (Uttered to describe an advanced anthropology course gone awry.)

- (2) A German Idealist. (Uttered while nodding in the direction of a very oddly dressed man at a party.)

I argue that these and other context-sensitive constructions pose a puzzle for the standard view. Roughly put, the puzzle is this: while it seems clear in such cases that the speaker meant *something*, and it is likely that her audience understood her, there is no *proposition* that she meant, or could have meant. I claim that the problem posed by these constructions calls into question the most basic assumptions of the standard view: namely, (i) that what a speaker means must be one or more propositions, and (ii) that understanding a speaker's utterance (minimally) requires entertaining what she meant.

In Section One, I spell out the standard view and suggest several ways in which it might be elaborated and refined. In Section Two, I discuss cases such as (1) and (2) above and present the puzzle they pose for the standard view. In Section Three, I survey and reject various possible responses on behalf of the proponent of the standard view. In Section Four, I suggest that we give up the assumption that *what* a speaker means must be a proposition, and offer a sketch of what speaker-meaning might be, if not a relation between a speaker, her utterance, and some one or more propositions. I conclude by discussing some of the potential implications the suggested account of speaker-meaning has for issues concerning attributions of meaning and belief.

The term 'proposition' is used in many different ways in the literature, so I should say something at the outset regarding how that term is to be provisionally understood here. Consider (3):

- (3) Chet believes that Fichte was a philosopher.

If (3) is true, Chet believes something that is designated, or at least partially characterized, by the 'that'-clause 'that Fichte was a philosopher'.¹ I use the term 'proposition' to apply to the entity thus designated or partially characterized and, in consequence, follow standard practice in holding that propositions are the objects of belief and certain other of our cognitive attitudes. Although there is considerable debate regarding the nature of propositions, it is typically assumed, and will be assumed here, that propositions *determine truth-conditions*.

This initial characterization leaves it open whether propositions just *are* truth-conditions (for example, sets of possible worlds) or more fine-grained, perhaps structured, entities that *have* truth-conditions.² To say propositions are "structured" is to claim that they are complex entities, having certain constituents, arranged in certain ways, and these constituents and their arrangement determine the proposition's truth-conditions. Theorists may disagree both about what these constituents are and the nature of their arrangement. For some such theorists – so-called Neo-Russellians – a proposition must be

composed solely from the various objects, properties, and relations an agent's belief is about.³ For other theorists of a more Fregean persuasion, propositions are composed of an agent's concepts, or modes of presentation, of the objects, properties, and relations her belief concerns. For the immediate time being, these debates among friends of propositions will not concern us. In Sections Three and Four, we will have opportunity to discuss special issues that arise for proponents of the standard view of meaning and communication who claim the contents of our speech acts are fine-grained structured propositions.⁴

Section One – The Standard View

At the core of the standard view are two basic assumptions, *Content* and *Success*:

Content: What a speaker means, or intends to communicate, (at least in cases of indicative speech) must be a proposition.

Success: Understanding a speaker's utterance U requires (minimally) entertaining what she meant by U.

Suppose, for example, that Chet utters (4) to Mary after an awkward silence on their first date:

(4) I once played ping pong in Dendang.

In uttering (4) Chet may have intended to communicate a number of things. According to *Content*, what Chet may have intended to communicate, i.e. what he *meant*, is a proposition. For example, he may have meant that (i) *he has played ping pong in Dendang*, or (ii) *he has been to Indonesia*, or (iii) *he is a professional ping pong player*, or numerous other propositions. According to *Success*, Mary will have understood Chet's utterance only if she comes to entertain the proposition, or propositions, that Chet meant in uttering (4).⁵

Proponents of the standard view ('standard theorists') might disagree regarding any number of different issues concerning this notion of speaker meaning appealed to in *Success* and *Content*. They might, for example, disagree regarding whether speaker meaning can be analyzed in non-semantic notions. They may even disagree over whether speaker meaning can even be given a non-circular analysis in semantic terms. Standard theorists will, however, agree on certain basic features of speaker meaning. For example, they will agree that a speaker means something by her utterance in virtue of *doing* something.⁶ In those cases that will be of interest to us, this "doing" consists in uttering a sentence (or perhaps a fragment of a sentence) with certain intentions.

Standard theorists will agree on much else as well regarding the nature of the intentions a speaker must have in order to perform an act of speaker meaning. For simplicity, let's limit ourselves to those cases in which a speaker produces an utterance in the indicative mood with a particular audience in mind, such as Chet's utterance of (4). In these simple cases, the standard theorist will hold that a speaker's meaning something by uttering U requires that she utter U intending to produce a certain response R in her audience. Moreover, the standard theorist maintains that the speaker must intend for her audience A to recognize that she so intends to produce R in A, at least in part, on the basis of the fact that she uttered what she did. These necessary conditions for speaker meaning, in these basic cases, will be familiar to many readers from the work of Grice, Schiffer, and others:

- (M) A speaker S *means something* by uttering U only if, for some audience A, and some response R, S utters U intending (i) to produce R in A, and (ii) that A recognize her intention (i), at least in part, on the basis of the fact that she uttered U.⁷

In producing an utterance a speaker will almost invariably mean something, her utterance providing her audience with partial evidence regarding what this something is. If *Success* above is correct, a speaker's utterance will be understood only if her audience recognizes what she meant by her utterance. If *Content* is correct, what this something is (at least in the basic case of indicative speech) is a proposition.

But what is required for a speaker to mean some particular proposition? The standard theorist will suggest that this is to be fleshed out in terms of the type of response she intends to produce in her audience. In particular, she will hold that speaker meaning a proposition P requires that the speaker intend for her audience to *entertain P*:

- (M*) A speaker *means the proposition P* by uttering U only if, for some audience A, she produces U intending that (i) A come to entertain P on the basis of her utterance, (ii) A recognize her intention (i), at least in part, on the basis of the fact that she uttered U.⁸

A standard theorist might find need to make further additions to (M) and (M*). For example, there will invariably be some particular feature ϕ of the speaker's utterance that she relies upon to make her communicative intentions manifest. The theorist might want to elaborate this point by explicitly requiring that, in some sense to be explained, the speaker must intend that it be mutually obvious to her and her audience that her utterance has the relevant feature ϕ (for example, ϕ might be the property of being a conventional device, in a shared language, for meaning that p):

- (M**) A speaker *means the proposition P* by uttering U only if, for some audience A, and feature ϕ , she produces U intending (i) that A is to entertain P, (ii) that it is mutually obvious between her and A that U is ϕ , and (iii) that A come to recognize her intention (i), at least in part, on the basis of her recognition that U is ϕ .

The standard theorist might hope that her appeal to *mutual knowledge* in (M**) will insure that in genuine cases of speaker meaning the speaker will not have any “sneaky” intentions to deceive her audience regarding what exactly she intends to communicate. However, the sorts of cases that might motivate seeking these further additions to (M) and (M*) will not concern us here.

The standard theorist who puts forward the foregoing “M-constraints” will find some initial motivation for her view via consideration of certain folk ascriptions involving the verb ‘mean’ such as ‘Chet meant that he played ping pong in Dendang by uttering (4)’. If the surface syntax of such ascriptions is a good indication of their logical form, we have *prima facie* reason for thinking that ‘means’ here expresses a three-place relation between a speaker, her utterance, and something specified, or partially characterized by, the ‘that’-clause ‘that he has played ping pong in Dendang’. If we couple this observation with the orthodox assumption that ‘that’-clauses designate propositions, we have good motivation for accepting the standard theorist’s thesis *Content*. Moreover, the proffered M-constraints have some intuitive appeal as glosses on what is required for a meaning-ascription such as the one at hand to be correct.

Let’s illustrate the general idea behind the M-constraints with regard to Chet’s utterance of (4). Chet may have meant many things by uttering what he did, but let’s assume his primary intention was to communicate to Mary the proposition that he has played ping pong in Dendang. Given this goal, Chet selects, and utters, a particular form of words, ‘I once played ping pong in Dendang’. He utters this sentence on the assumption that given her competence as an English speaker, it will provide Mary with evidence regarding what he intends to communicate, namely, the proposition that he has played ping pong in Dendang. In order for Chet to have meant this proposition it must be reasonable for him to assume that Mary is in a position to “work out” what he meant on the basis of his utterance and other contextually relevant non-linguistic information – such as the fact that it is he, Chet, that is the person that is speaking to her (rather, say, than her mother or George W. Bush). Chet intends for Mary to entertain the proposition that he has played ping pong in Dendang, and he intends for her to recognize this intention at least in part on the basis of his utterance.

In uttering (4) Chet might have meant numerous other things in addition to the proposition that he has played ping pong in Dendang. For example, he might have also meant the proposition that he has been to Indonesia by

uttering (4). There are important differences between these two propositions meant, however. Even if the latter proposition is something Chet meant, we should have little temptation to claim that this is something that he *said*, or *stated*, by his utterance. Rather, the standard theorist will suggest that he has been to Indonesia is something that Chet *implied*, or *suggested*, by his utterance. A standard theorist might attempt to characterize this important distinction by requiring that what a speaker ‘says’ by her utterance be some proposition that she intended to communicate but which is, as Grice puts it, closely related to ‘the elements of [the sentence uttered], their order, and their syntactic character.’⁹ In a sense to be explained, the proposition that he, Chet, played ping pong in Dendang, somehow “fits” the context-invariant meaning of the sentence he uttered in a way that the proposition that he has been to Indonesia does not.

Associated with the sentence-type of which (4) is a token is a *context-invariant meaning*, or *character*, which constrains what a competent speaker can reasonably expect to say in uttering it.¹⁰ To a first approximation, the character of (4) is such that a speaker S uttering it can only use this sentence to say some (object-dependent) proposition regarding S to the effect that at some time prior to the utterance S played ping pong in Dendang. That is, the character of (4) determines what *type* of proposition a speaker using it can say. Though you and I would intuitively be saying different things if we were to sincerely utter (4)—I would be saying that *I* once played ping pong in Dendang, whereas you would be saying that *you* once played ping pong in Dendang—we would be expressing propositions of the same type.

The standard theorist will hold that in those cases where S utters *u* intending to communicate some proposition P, and P is compatible with the character of *u*, *S said that P* in uttering *u*. Though ‘saying’ is fundamentally something a speaker does in producing an utterance, the proponent of the standard view will often speak of *what is said* by an utterance, or alternatively of *what is expressed* by an utterance. Talk of what an utterance says (or expresses) should be taken as shorthand for what a speaker says in producing the utterance.

On the standard view, there is a constitutive connection between what a speaker means and what she says: if S says P in uttering *u*, then at least one of the propositions that S means by uttering *u* must be P. A proposition expressed by an utterance is a proposition the speaker means in uttering it – a proposition meant which is consonant with, or compatible with, the linguistic meaning of the sentence-type of which the utterance is a token.¹¹ For our present concerns, we can leave it vague exactly what such ‘consonance’ might consist in.

In our case of Chet’s utterance of (4), the standard theorist would likely want to claim that Chet *said* that he has played ping pong in Dendang, and in so doing *suggested*, or *implied*, that he has been to Indonesia, that he is no stranger to exotic places, etc.¹² Quite generally, a speaker’s audience will

be in a position to arrive at what the speaker suggested by her utterance on the basis of entertaining what she said (or, at least, made as if to say) by her utterance. In our case, if Mary knows certain non-linguistic facts, such as that Dendang is in Indonesia, she will be in a position to work out what Chet suggested on the basis of what he said in uttering (4).

This family of concepts forms the standard theorist's basic set of tools:

- (i) What a speaker *means* by her utterance.
- (ii) What a speaker *says*, or *expresses*, by her utterance.
- (iii) What a speaker *suggests*, or *implies*, by her utterance.
- (iv) The *context-invariant meaning*, or *character*, of a linguistic expression.

In terms of these interrelated notions she might plausibly extend her account beyond the simple case of indicative speech to questions, commands, and so on.¹³ How the account might be so extended is beyond the scope of this paper. The proponent of the standard view may see fit to modify or elaborate on these notions in various ways even for the simple cases that we have been discussing. For example, the theorist might qualify her view by allowing that in some cases a speaker's utterance will express multiple propositions; or that in some cases it is indeterminate what exactly a speaker meant in uttering what she did, and hence indeterminate what she said.

The foregoing is a sketch of a *standard view* of meaning and communication. Different theorists might carve up the terrain slightly differently; or they might prefer different labels for some of the basic notions of the theory. In particular, theorists oftentimes use the locutions 'what is said' and 'what is expressed' in highly proprietary ways. For example, some theorists prefer the label 'what is asserted', 'what is explicated', or 'the intuitive proposition expressed' for what we have been calling 'what is said', reserving application of this latter locution to some more minimal bit of machinery, one which they claim to play some important role in the communicative exchange. But these appear to be verbal issues and need not detain us at present.¹⁴

In what follows we will be concerned with problems that arise for any version of the standard view. Any version of the standard view will hold onto the two theses with which we began this section, *Content* and *Success*; what a speaker means is one or more propositions, and understanding consists in one's audience recognizing what was meant. However initially plausible, we cannot reasonably maintain both of these theses, or so I will argue.

Section Two – Some Problem Cases for the Standard View

While preparing for their first party at their new off campus apartment, Chet and Tim go out to buy provisions for the night. After a long and heartfelt discussion, Chet convinces Tim that "sophisticated" partygoers, like the charming ladies next door, do not like to drink beer from a

keg – ‘especially if it is domestic, bro’. To cater to the sophisticates that they hope will show up later that night, they decide to go to a local corner store to pick up several cases of imported bottled beer which they will serve from a giant ice-filled plastic bucket, decorated in a pirate motif, which is to be located in their back yard.

An hour before the party is to begin, Tim asks Chet ‘Are we ready to rage?’ ‘So bro’, Chet responds, ‘We are totally ready. The living room totally looks like a pirate ship. The strobe lights are up. Every beer is in the bucket. I just need to find an eye patch to wear with this pirate hat.’ Consider (5):

(5) Every beer is in the bucket.¹⁵

Most people, even philosophers and linguists for that matter, agree on at least two things regarding this case. First, in uttering (5) Chet could have said something true despite the fact that (a) there are numerous bottles of beer nowhere near Chet and Tim’s apartment, and (b) there is more than one plastic bucket in the world. Secondly it should be agreed that, it is possible, and in this case probable, that Tim perfectly well understood Chet’s utterance – that is, that Tim recognized Chet’s communicative intentions in uttering (5).

How might the standard theorist characterize this case of seemingly successful communication? Her account will begin with a discussion of context-sensitive constructions more generally. She will claim that what is expressed by an utterance U is (typically) not wholly determined by the character of the sentence of which U is a token. That is, in most cases, the character of a sentence S will *underdetermine* what utterances of it might be used to express. Chet’s utterance of (5) is such a case. The syntactic configuration and character of the lexical components of the sentence Chet uttered will constrain, but *not* fully determine, what he said. The speaker’s audience, Tim, must rely on the partial evidence provided by the character of the sentence uttered, and other contextually relevant information, to work out what Chet meant.

The situation regarding (5) isn’t so different than that of (6):

(6) That painting is by Barnett Newman.¹⁶

In order to understand (6) one’s audience must rely on her linguistic competence and contextual clues to figure out what the speaker is referring to by her use of both ‘that painting’ and ‘Barnett Newman’. Similarly with respect to a case such as (7):

(7) Christopher is tall.

According to the standard theorist what is literally expressed by the speaker’s utterance of (7) will depend upon the relevant comparison class she intends

for you to entertain (for example, “for a sixteen year old”, “for an NBA player”, etc.).

The character of the sentence-type ‘Every beer is in the bucket’ underdetermines the utterance’s truth-conditions (much less anything we might identify as its propositional content). If both ‘every beer’ and ‘the bucket’ are given their standard quantificational analyses, we could do worse than to think of the character of (5) as a *propositional radical*, or *blueprint* of the form (TEMP):¹⁷

(TEMP) [The y: Bucket(y) & __ y] ([Every x: Beer(x) & __ x] (x is in y))

Here we can think of the character of (5), i.e. (TEMP), as requiring that the speaker mean a proposition that can be “constructed from” the frame it provides, if she is to be speaking literally. The context-invariant meaning of (5) constrains, but does not determine, what is expressed. In particular the character of the sentence leaves open how the two quantifiers in (5) are to be restricted. In order to understand the utterance Chet’s audience must infer how he intends these slots to be filled. According to the standard view, the gaps in the structure provided by (TEMP) must, in effect, be “completed” in the context of utterance – here, presumably, by Chet’s communicative intentions.

There has been a tremendous amount of work in recent years on the phenomena of quantifier-domain restriction, focusing primarily on the issue of what the “logical form” of such sentences might be. One issue is whether the quantifiers in such sentences contain a hidden variable whose value is a contextually provided domain-restriction. Of course, this raises the question where this variable might be hiding: with the determiner ‘every’, with the noun-phrase which it takes as argument, or elsewhere? Given our concerns here, we can safely abstract from these important issues. In what follows, we can remain agnostic regarding the outcome of these debates.¹⁸

The puzzle that Chet’s utterance of (5) poses for the standard view is this: in uttering (5) it is plausible that Chet meant something, and communication is successful, but there is no proposition that he meant, or could have meant. Let me explain.

Recall the core claims of the standard view, *Content* and *Success*:

Content: What a speaker means, or intends to communicate (at least in cases of indicative speech) must be a proposition.

Success: Understanding a speaker’s utterance U requires (minimally) entertaining what she meant by U.

Together these two theses entail the following claim we will call *Lemma*:

Lemma: If a speaker means a proposition *p* by her utterance U then her audience must entertain *p* if she is to understand U.

Now the standard theorist might allow that a speaker might mean or say many propositions by uttering what she does. If *Lemma* is correct, any such proposition the speaker means or says by uttering U will be such that the speaker's audience must entertain *it* in order to understand the utterance. The problem is that in a case such as (5) there simply is no proposition that has the property that *Lemma* requires. That is, there is no proposition such that Tim must entertain *it*, in order to understand Chet's utterance. (In assessing this claim it is important to recall that 'means' is understood in the sense relevant to the M-constraints from Section One.)

If Chet meant some proposition of the form (TEMP) in uttering (5) what might it be? Even though the case is somewhat under-described it is clear that there are many equally good, yet non-equivalent, *candidates* for what Chet said in uttering (5). For example, the following possibilities spring to mind:

- Every beer *we bought at the bodega* is in the bucket *in the backyard*.
- Every beer *we will serve at the party* is in the bucket *decorated in pirate motif*.
- Every beer *for our guests* is in the bucket *filled with ice*.
- Every beer *at the apartment* is in the bucket *next to the hot tub*

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As well as combinations of the foregoing:

- Every beer *we bought at the bodega* is in the bucket *next to the hot tub*.
- Every beer *at the apartment* is in the bucket *in the backyard*

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No doubt there are numerous other possibilities as well. In most real-life examples in which you and your audience have even a small stock of mutual knowledge there will be many candidates.

Let's label these candidates ' $P_1 \dots P_6$ '. Though the exact nature of these candidates will depend upon the standard theorist's favored metaphysics of propositions, it is clear that *whatever* the candidate propositions are in this case, they will have different *truth-conditions*.

According to the standard view, if the communicative exchange between Chet and Tim is successful, Tim will have to have recognized what proposition, or propositions, Chet meant in uttering what he did. But none of the foregoing candidates (or any other plausible candidate) satisfy the standard theorist's *Lemma*. Suppose the standard theorist claims that, say, Chet meant

P_2 by uttering (5). This would be false. According to *Lemma*, if Chet meant P_2 then Tim would have to entertain it, if he is to understand the utterance. But it seems clear that Tim may understand Chet's utterance even if he fails to entertain P_2 (so long as he entertains some *other* of the candidates, say, P_3). Identical considerations apply to each of the candidates.¹⁹

And these considerations will not be lost upon the speaker. If a speaker is to mean a proposition P by an utterance U , it is required that she believe it reasonable to expect that her audience can "work out" that she means that proposition. Given the speaker's knowledge of the character of the sentence uttered, she will not, and cannot reasonably, have this expectation. Even if the speaker uttering (5) in some sense "has in mind" one of these propositions - for example, *every beer at the apartment is in the bucket next to the hot tub* - she cannot mean it. She has no reason to think that her audience will recognize her as having meant just this proposition.

Perhaps in certain very unusual cases there might be one most salient candidate proposition associated with an utterance involving a restricted quantifier, but this would be an anomaly. Typically, a speaker will not recognize herself as having meant any one such proposition in the course of making her utterance; nor will the hearer take the speaker to have meant any one such proposition. The former point is helpfully illustrated by considering how Chet might respond if asked to be more explicit regarding what he intended to communicate by (5). Suppose Chet utters (5) to Tim, and Tim consequently responds with a dumbfounded look and asks 'Huh? What beer?', (or, 'What bucket?'). In response, Chet might volunteer *any* one (or more) of the various candidates above. The fact that the speaker might, as it were, "fall back" on any one, or more, of the foregoing candidates, suggests that no single such candidate, or set of candidates, perfectly capture his communicative intentions in uttering (5). Chet's communicative intentions, such as they are, exhibit a certain kind of *generality* and *indifference* that precludes us from identifying any one of the candidate propositions as *the one he meant*. Insofar as the proposition expressed by an utterance u determines u 's truth-conditions, we are in no better a position with regard to identifying *the* truth-conditions of Chet's utterance.

Consider another somewhat more dramatic case in which the same phenomenon seems to arise. Suppose that after graduating Chet and Tim get jobs working as short order chefs at a restaurant in their college town. While at work, Tim spots an oddly dressed man in the dining room curiously sniffing a plate of chicken fried steak that Chet had just prepared. Tim rushes over to Chet, taps him on his shoulder, nods in the direction of the man, and utters (8):

(8) A health inspector.

Chet and Tim then quickly leave for a smoke break from which they never return.²⁰

In uttering (8) Tim presumably meant something, and Chet quite plausibly understood him, but what proposition could he have meant? Again there will be many candidates. For example:

He is a health inspector.

The man we are looking at is a health inspector.

That customer sniffing his plate is a health inspector.

The guy who is frowning at his chicken fried steak is a health inspector.

The guy with the strange moustache is a health inspector.

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In the context of utterance there will be presumably be even more candidates. Did Tim mean any of the candidates? No. To suggest that one of the candidates was meant (in the sense relevant to linguistic communication) is to suggest that Chet would have to entertain it if he is to have understood Tim's utterance. No one of the candidates has this property. Chet could have understood Tim's utterance by getting *any* one or more of the candidates. There is no one proposition that he must entertain in order to understand the utterance. Hence, there is no proposition he meant.

One feature common to these two cases – quantifier-domain restriction, and non-sentential assertion – is that the character of the lexical material uttered constrains what the speaker can reasonably expect to communicate to her audience, but falls far short of constraining the options down to some one proposition, or set of propositions. It is plausible that this feature of the examples that is problematic for the standard theorist is exhibited to some degree by all sorts of other constructions.²¹

Before moving on to consider how a proponent of the standard view might respond, it is worth noting, that this problem of multiple candidates is even more dramatic yet for the standard theorist who inclines towards a Fregean-inspired view of the contents of our speech acts. If we accept a Fregean conception of propositional content, there is a serious worry this multiplicity of candidate problem will arise for virtually any utterance whatsoever. Consider a variation on a case originally due to Schiffer (1978). Suppose that we are waiting to hear the famous country singer, Garth McGraw, give a graduation speech. Staggering towards the podium, Garth takes off his sunglasses and cowboy hat and begins to lecture. Looking over to you I gesture towards the guy and utter (9):

(9) He is drunk.

According to the Fregean, the semantic content of (9) will be some mode-of-presentation-involving proposition I meant. But what such mode of

presentation involving proposition might this be? As Schiffer points out, even before I utter (9) it will be mutually evident that we have knowledge of the country singer under numerous shared modes of presentation: for example, *the country singer named 'Garth McGraw', the guy stumbling to the podium, the famous guy we are waiting to hear, the only person in the gymnasium wearing a bolero tie, . . .* and so on.

If I meant some such mode-of-presentation-involving proposition by uttering (9) my audience would have to entertain it in order to understand my utterance (from Lemma). There is, however, no such mode-of-presentation-involving proposition that has this property. Suppose that on the basis of my utterance my audience were to come to entertain $\langle m_*, m \rangle$ where m_* is a mode of presentation entertainment of which requires thinking of Garth as the only person in sight wearing a cowboy hat, and m is a mode of presentation of drunkenness. Does this proposition satisfy the Lemma? No, for my audience could have just as well understood my utterance by grasping some other mode-of-presentation-involving proposition; say, $\langle m^{**}, m \rangle$ where entertaining m^{**} requires thinking of Garth as the famous guy we are waiting to hear. This point applies equally to any of the possible candidate propositions relevant in the context.

This is extremely problematic for those standard theorists who think that the full content of an agent's thought must be more fine-grained than a Russellian proposition; the more fine-grained the proposition, the more pressing the phenomenon of multiple candidates.

Section Three – Possible Responses on Behalf of the Standard Theorist

Reconsider the standard theorist's proffered constraint on meaning *something*:

- (M) A speaker S *means something* by uttering U only if, for some audience A, and some response R, S utters U intending (i) to produce R in A, and (ii) that A recognize her intention (i), at least in part, on the basis of the fact that she uttered U.

It is *prima facie* plausible that in uttering (5) the speaker meant *something* in the foregoing sense. Reconsider Tim's utterance of (8):

- (8) A health inspector (nodding towards the man sniffing his plate of food).

Tim had some *reason* for uttering what he did (in contrast, for example, to a parrot "saying" 'Polly want a cracker.'). What could this reason be other than to intentionally produce some response in his audience? Moreover, it seems clear that Tim is relying, in part, on the conventional meaning of the words uttered in the attempt to bring about this response in Chet. It seems

that Tim meant *something*. The same considerations clearly apply to Chet's utterance of (5).

What might this something meant be if the standard view is correct? In particular, how might the standard theorist respond to the problem posed by (5) and (8) in a way consonant with her acceptance of *Success* and *Content*? If her view is to be maintained she must find some one or more propositions (i) that the speaker meant, and (ii) that the audience must entertain in order to understand the speaker's utterance.

For ease of exposition, we will focus on Chet's utterance of (5), and make the simplifying assumption that the only relevant candidate propositions in the context of utterance are P_1, \dots, P_6 from earlier, as well as those propositions that we can construct from these candidates by disjunction and conjunction:

- Every beer *we bought at the bodega* is in the bucket *in the backyard*.
- Every beer *we will serve at the party* is in the bucket *decorated in pirate motif*.
- Every beer *for our guests* is in the bucket *filled with ice*.
- Every beer *at the apartment* is in the bucket *next to the hot tub*.
- Every beer *we bought at the bodega* is in the bucket *next to the hot tub*.
- Every beer *at the apartment* is in the bucket *in the backyard*.

*
*
*

Let us turn to the issue of how the standard theorist might respond.

One implausible, but illustrative, suggestion she might make is that in uttering (5) Chet meant the *conjunctive proposition* $P_1 \ \& \ P_2 \ \& \ P_3 \ \& \ P_4 \ \& \ P_5 \ \& \ P_6$. That is, Chet meant a proposition whose conjuncts include each of the foregoing candidate propositions. The problem with this suggestion is that Chet has no reason to think that Tim will take him as having meant this conjunctive proposition instead of just, say P_3 , or $P_1 \ \& \ P_2 \ \& \ P_3 \ \& \ P_4$, or $P_1 \ \& \ P_4$. Chet no more meant the conjunctive proposition of the candidates than he meant any one of its conjuncts. That this is so is reflected in the fact that Chet's audience Tim need not entertain each of $P_1 \dots P_6$ in order to understand the utterance.²² The proposition $P_1 \ \& \ P_2 \ \& \ P_3 \ \& \ P_4 \ \& \ P_5 \ \& \ P_6$ is simply another candidate proposition that Chet did not mean.

Analogous problems arise for the view that Chet meant each of the propositions P_1, \dots, P_6 ; i.e., he meant that P_1 , he meant that P_2 , and so on. If *Success* is maintained, Tim would have to entertain each of the members of the set of candidates in order to understand Chet's utterance, but clearly this is no requirement for understanding (5). Moreover, it would be unreasonable for Chet to assume that Tim will recognize him as having

meant each of these six propositions, rather than, say, the first four of them.

Likewise, it is of no help to suggest that what Chet meant by his utterance is the *disjunctive proposition* $P_1 \vee P_2 \vee P_3 \vee P_4 \vee P_5 \vee P_6$. In order to entertain a disjunctive proposition a thinker must entertain each of its disjuncts. For example, we wouldn't want to claim that my three year old niece Emily entertained, or considered, *that either her name is 'Emily' or Hilbert invented the Epsilon Calculus*, solely in virtue of having entertained *that her name is 'Emily'*. If what Chet meant by uttering (5) is a disjunctive proposition which is composed of the various candidates, Tim would have to entertain each of the candidate propositions in order to understand the utterance. But again, this places the requirements for understanding Chet's utterance far too high. Moreover, the disjunctive proposition $P_1 \vee P_2 \vee P_3 \vee P_4 \vee P_5 \vee P_6$ is just one more candidate proposition among many. Why should Chet expect Tim to take him as having meant this proposition rather than some other one or more of the candidates?²³

A more general problem with each of the proposals considered so far emerges more clearly if we (momentarily) drop our simplifying assumption that there are only six candidate propositions in play. The proposals considered so far require that speakers have meaning-intentions towards *each* of the possible candidate propositions. In most real life cases, however, there will be *many* candidate propositions and more propositions yet for which it is vague whether they are candidates. Once we allow that it will oftentimes be vague whether some proposition is or is not a candidate proposition, the foregoing proposals become very strange. If it is vague what the candidates are in the first place, it seems very implausible to claim that a speaker has meaning-intentions towards *each* candidate proposition. (For now, however, let us retain our simplifying assumption that the only relevant candidates are P_1, \dots, P_6 .)²⁴

Now the standard theorist will likely find some encouragement by the mention of vagueness in our discussion. If the standard view is to be maintained, and *Content* and *Success* are upheld, the standard theorist's best response to the puzzle posed by (5) will appeal to vagueness (or indeterminacy) in one of the two following ways. Roughly put, she might claim either (a) it is *vague*, or *indeterminate* what Chet meant by uttering (5), or (b) Chet meant something *vague* by uttering (5). Let's discuss and elaborate these responses in turn.

According to the first suggestion, (a), though there is no proposition that Chet *definitely* means in the course of uttering (5), there are numerous propositions – the candidate propositions – which he *sort-of*, or *vaguely* means. That is, in uttering (5) Chet vaguely, or sort-of, means each of the candidate propositions including P_1 , P_2 , and so on. On this suggestion, it is vague whether in uttering (5) Chet meant, for example, that *every*

beer we bought at the bodega is in the bucket in the backyard, or that *every beer we will serve at the party is in the bucket decorated in pirate motif*, and so on. (It is, of course, completely determinate that he did not mean, for example, that *every beer from the smallest bodega in Cuba is in the bucket which belongs to Condoleezza Rice*.) According to this suggestion, the various candidates are borderline cases of meant propositions.²⁵

The suggestion is problematic. If candidate propositions are borderline cases of meant propositions, it is vague whether the speaker meant P_1 , it is vague whether she meant P_2 , and so on. That is, it is not *definitely* the case that, for example, the speaker meant, say P_2 and it is not *definitely* the case that she didn't mean that proposition. Given the standard theorist's understanding of what is required for meaning, however, this is clearly false – the speaker definitely did *not* mean P_1 , and the speaker definitely did *not* mean, say, P_2 . In order for the speaker to mean P_2 by her utterance she would have to believe it reasonable that her audience can work out that she intends for her to entertain that proposition. The speaker cannot reasonably have this expectation. Even if the speaker has P_2 “in mind” she cannot reasonably intend to communicate that proposition in uttering (5): the speaker knows the context, together with the character of the sentence uttered, provides the audience with insufficient evidence to divine that it is this particular proposition that he should entertain. She *definitely* did **not** mean this proposition, and as such it is not vague whether she meant that proposition (in the standard theorist's favored understanding of “means”). The same considerations will apply to any candidate proposition.²⁶

Is it an improvement to suppose that the speaker uttering (5) indeed meant something, but this “something” is a vague proposition (i.e. option (b) from three paragraphs back)? What might a “vague proposition” be? Suppose we accept the view that propositions are structured entities that have constituents—the identity and arrangement of which determine that proposition's truth-conditions. Relative to this assumption, we can say that a *vague proposition* is a proposition that has one or more *vague constituents*. For example, suppose that Chet utters (10):

(10) Tim is bald.

What might the predicate ‘bald’ contribute to what is said? On the structured propositions framework, we should say that ‘bald’ contributes a vague concept, or property, to what is expressed—that is, some concept, or property, such that it is vague as to what its basic application conditions are. (Whether we ultimately choose to speak of ‘concepts’ or ‘properties’ will depend upon our metaphysics of propositions). There are numerous admissible ways of precisifying this vague concept, or property, contributed by ‘bald’ - the truth of the vague proposition requiring that it be true on any admissible way this

vague concept or property might be made more precise. Roughly put, the idea is that Chet's utterance of (10) expresses a vague proposition, one that is associated with numerous more precise propositions of the form (10a) (where 'n*' is some specific number of hairs):

(10a) Tim has fewer than n* hairs on his head.

Chet's utterance of (10) is true if, and only if, each of the admissible 'sharpenings' of the form (10a) is true. There is considerable debate about what exactly a 'precisification' might be, and moreover what might make a precisification admissible, but we need not get into those issues here.

Many, if not most, propositions are "vague" in the sense just glossed. If Chet indeed meant some one or more propositions by uttering (5), odds are they'd be vague in this sense as well. But there is a problem with this suggestion: it is just as unclear what *vague* proposition(s) the speaker could have meant by uttering (5) as it is what *non-vague* proposition(s) he could have meant. Note that, for example, each of the candidates is vague in this sense. It is not as though what Chet meant by (5) is some proposition with vague constituents corresponding to the domain restrictions for 'Every beer' and 'the bucket'. If anything, what seems vague, or indeterminate, is what the relevant constituents of the (putative) proposition meant could be in the first place.²⁷ It is very difficult to make sense of this possibility on the assumption that propositions are structured—that is, entities whose *identity* conditions are specified in terms of their constituents and arrangement.²⁸

Though the standard theorist might devise some elaborate combination of all of the suggestions surveyed, we have reason to doubt that any such proposal will work. As far as I can see, the problems given for the relatively simple proposals above will generalize to any account that maintains both *Content* and *Success*. The **fundamental problem** with the standard theory is that even if the theorist appeals to vagueness (and indeterminacy) she cannot adequately capture the special kind of *generality* and *indifference* characteristic of the communicative intentions of a speaker uttering sentences such as (5) and (8) while retaining the two theses definitive of her view.

Consider an analogy. Suppose that I need to get a quarter for the parking meter, and I walk in to the nearest bodega and ask the clerk if he has change for a one dollar bill. It might be clear that I'd prefer not to get back, say one quarter and seventy five pennies, or one quarter, two dimes, and fifty five pennies. But what exactly do I want? Would I be happy if the clerk handed me, say, two quarters and five dimes? Sure, but it would be misleading to suggest that that particular combination of coins is *what* I want, for I'd be just as happy with three quarters, a nickel, and two dimes, or any numerous other combinations of coins. It is not as though, for example, the combination of two quarters and five dimes, is what I *vaguely, or sort-of, want*; nor is it, in any sense, some *vague, or indeterminate, object* of my want. There simply is

no way to adequately specify what it is I want solely in terms of this, that, or the other, particular combination of coins that would satisfy me. What I want is some combination of coins, containing at least one quarter, but I am *indifferent* regarding exactly which such combination from a range of possibilities I get. Because of the generality and indifference of my desire there are **multiple** and **equally acceptable** ways in which I might be satisfied.

The standard theorist who holds onto *Content* and *Success* is a little like a theorist who feels puzzled over the difficulty in adequately specifying the content of my desire for change by citing this, that, or the other, particular combination of coins. We can no more specify what Chet meant by uttering (5) in terms of this, that, or the other, proposition than we can adequately specify my desire for change in terms of some one particular combination of coins. Chet's communicative intention in uttering (5) exhibits a type of generality and indifference which allows for there to be **multiple**, and **equally correct**, ways in which his audience might understand his utterance.²⁹

Section Four- Is Speaker-Meaning a Propositional Attitude ?

At the core of the standard view are the two theses, *Content* and *Success*. I have argued that however initially plausible they might seem, cases such as (5) and (8) raise doubts about these claims. The central question we now face is whether we should we give up *Content*, or *Success*, or both. I would now like to sketch a potential answer to this question. As best I can see, any account that respects the generality and indifference characteristic of the speaker's communicative intentions must give up *Content* and then modify *Success* accordingly.

In order that we might move forward, let's momentarily take a step back. Recall that in Section Two, the standard theorist suggested that the character of a sentence is a constraint on what a speaker can use that sentence to express. A picturesque way of thinking of such a constraint is as a *propositional template*—that is, a *partial structure* which is determined by the lexical meanings of the uttered sentence's constituents in tandem with their syntactic arrangement. On this way of proceeding we might think of the character of the sentence-type Chet uttered in (5) as the propositional template (TEMP):

(TEMP) [The y: Bucket(y) & __ y] ([Every x: Beer(x) & __ x] (x is in y))

Roughly put, the character of 'Every beer is in the bucket' is a proposition-type - a property which is instantiated by those propositions that can be "constructed" from it. For example, each of the candidate propositions we have mentioned might be said to instantiate the proposition-type displayed in (TEMP), as well as more far-flung and contextually irrelevant propositions such as that *every beer from the smallest bodega in Cuba is in the bucket which belongs to Condoleezza Rice*.

The standard theorist holds that in the communicative exchange involving (5) both speaker and hearer will, in some sense, know that (TEMP) is the character of (5). Given this mutual knowledge, Chet can utter (5) and thereby mean a proposition (or propositions) with the expectation that Tim will be able to work out which one(s) he meant. Again, this meant proposition is (putatively) arrived at on the basis of (TEMP) and knowledge of other information relevant to the context of utterance. We have seen that this simple picture doesn't work. There is no proposition Chet meant in uttering (5), nor is there any one proposition that Tim must entertain in order to understand the utterance. Speaker-meaning cannot be plausibly taken to be a relation between a speaker, her utterance, and a proposition.

What then might speaker-meaning be? As a first step towards answering this question, we might claim that Chet produces (5) with the intention that Tim will recognize him as having uttered a sentence whose character is the proposition-type displayed in (TEMP), and, in part, on the basis of this, come to construct *some one, or more, propositions* that fit the template. But, of course, this first pass will not suffice - not just any such proposition that fits (TEMP) will do. Chet will have certain vague preferences regarding how he is to be understood which rule out the proposition involving Cuba and Condoleezza, but which lets in, say, the proposition that *every beer for our guests is in the bucket filled with ice*. Chet would feel that he has been understood if Tim entertains the latter, but not the former, proposition on the basis of his utterance.

Let us say that a *restricted proposition-type* is a propositional template plus contextually relevant constraints on how that template is to be completed, allowing that the speaker need not have any very clear such restriction in mind. Insofar as we can identify any *object* of Chet's communicative intentions, it is this restricted proposition-type; that is, the partial structure (TEMP) which is the character of the sentence uttered together with a potentially vague range of restrictions on how that structure is to be completed.³⁰ So long as Tim constructs some one, or more, propositions of the form given by (TEMP) within a (vague, contextually-restricted) range of propositions, he will have understood Chet's utterance. In the communicative exchange it is as though Chet hands over to Tim an incomplete sketch of how he hopes to be understood, and relies on Tim to fill in the details in *some or other* suitable way. It is not unreasonable for Chet to have this assumption.³¹

There are several things to note about the foregoing sketch of the communicative exchange involving (5). First off, there simply is no proposition that Chet means, nor is there any one proposition that Tim must entertain in order to understand the utterance. The object of Chet's communicative intentions is not a proposition, but rather a property of propositions. *Content* is thereby rejected. Chet's utterance is, in some sense, "associated" with many non-truth conditionally equivalent propositions - namely, those propositions that are of the intended (restricted) type.³²

But what of *Success*? Recall that we have been assuming that propositions are the fundamental objects of our belief, as well as certain of our other cognitive attitudes, such as *entertaining*. If what we mean by our utterances are not propositions, but rather properties thereof, it is clear that we cannot straightforwardly require the audience to *entertain* what is meant. *Success* must also be revised.³³

Given our revised understanding of speaker-meaning, however, we can capture what was worthwhile about the *Success* principle in other terms: *understanding a speaker's utterance requires entertaining some one or more propositions which are of the restricted proposition-type the speaker meant*. In the case of the utterance of (5), Tim need not entertain the restricted proposition-type that Chet means; rather, what is required is that Tim entertain one or more of the candidates of that type on the basis of Chet's utterance.³⁴

Relaxing the requirements for successful communication in the way suggested brings to light one of the principal advantages of the current proposal. As we have seen, the standard view does not do justice to the generality and indifference characteristic of the speaker's communicative intentions. The current suggestion fares much better on this score. If (i) what is meant is a restricted proposition-type and (ii) what is required for understanding is entertaining some one or more propositions of that type, *rather than some one specific proposition*, then we can capture the fact that an utterance might be understood in non-equivalent, yet equally correct ways.

How a theorist might fill in the details of this sketch will turn upon her views regarding the metaphysics of propositional contents of our beliefs. For example, a theorist who claims Russellian propositions are the objects of belief should hold that what we mean by our utterances are properties thereof. She might represent this property meant as a pair of the potentially-gappy character of the sentence uttered plus constraints on the objects, properties, and relations that are suitable fillers of this partial structure. A theorist of a more Fregean persuasion can hold that what we mean are properties of Fregean propositions.³⁵ Though the sketch of meaning and communication on offer should be liberating to theorists of either stripe, it is especially so for the Fregean. Let me explain.³⁶

Consider Frege's well-known problems with regard to indexicals, such as 'I'. In "The Thought", Frege writes:

Now everyone is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. So, when Dr. Lauben thinks that he has been wounded, he will probably take as a basis this primitive way in which he is presented to himself. And only Dr. Lauben can grasp thoughts determined in this way. But now he may want to communicate with others. He cannot communicate a thought which he alone can grasp. ('The Thought', p. 25–26)

What then is Dr. Lauben doing when he utters (11)?

(11) I have been wounded.

In response to this question, Frege famously suggested that, if Dr. Lauben utters (11) “he must use the ‘I’ in a sense which can be grasped by others, perhaps in the sense of ‘he who is speaking to you at this moment’, by doing which he makes the associated conditions of his utterance serve for the expression of his thought’ (ibid.). As Perry (1977) and others have pointed out, this suggestion is hardly plausible.

According to John McDowell (1998) communicative exchanges involving indexicals are not a problem for the Fregean conception of indexical thoughts, but rather a problem for overly simplistic ‘thought-sharing’ conceptions of linguistic communication. He writes:

Frege’s troubles about “I” cannot be blamed simply on the idea of special and primitive senses; they result, rather, from the assumption—which is what denied the special and primitive senses any role in communication— that communication must involve a sharing of thoughts between communicator and audience. That assumption is quite natural, and Frege seems to take it for granted. But there is no obvious reason why he could not have held, instead, that in linguistic interchange of the appropriate kind, mutual understanding – which is what successful communication achieves – requires not shared thoughts but different thoughts that, however, stand and are mutually known to stand in a suitable relation of correspondence. (Ibid. p. 222)

I concur. Supposing that the speaker does have “in mind” some particular proposition, all that successful communication need require is that one’s audience come to entertain some *suitably related proposition*.³⁷

Contrary to McDowell’s suggestion, it is not, however, entirely clear that Frege took for granted the suspect ‘thought-sharing’ model of communication. Frege himself *may* have been tempted to give up the thought-sharing model for utterances involving proper names. In a famous footnote in “On Sense and Reference” Frege writes:

In the case of actual proper names such as ‘Aristotle’ opinions as to the sense may differ. It might, for instance, be taken to be the following: the pupil of Plato, the teacher of Alexander the Great. Anybody who does this will attach another sense to the sentence “Aristotle was born in Stagira’ than will a man who takes as the sense of the name: the teacher of Alexander the Great was born in Stagira. So long as the reference remains the same, such variations of sense may be tolerated, although they are to be avoided in the theoretical structure of a demonstrative science and ought not to occur in a perfect language.

Alas, ours is not a perfect language, and variations in sense can, and presumably must, be “tolerated” *for the purposes of communication*. While Fregean

propositions are the contents of our thoughts, this footnote gives at least some indication that Frege may not have reckoned them to be the contents of our speech acts, at least in utterances involving proper names.

Perhaps both Frege (at least in the case of names) and McDowell would give up the thesis we dubbed *Success*. Neither theorist, however, offers very much by way of how we should understand the speaker's communicative intentions. What does the speaker mean such that it is possible for her audience to understand her by entertaining something suitably similar to the thought she has in mind? It is a non-starter to suppose that the content of the speaker's intentions are that *her audience entertain a thought suitably similar to her thought p*. Recognition of that intention would require one's audience to do something that Frege's account of indexical thoughts says cannot be done – namely, it requires for them to entertain the content of your private un-shareable thought.

The sketch of meaning and communication currently on offer suggests the beginnings of an answer. Consider Frege's suggestion regarding proper names. A Fregean proposition might have any number of properties. It might have the property of being Chet's favorite proposition, or the property of being controversial amongst Republicans, and so on. A Fregean proposition might also, of course, have the complex property of being about a certain guy, Aristotle, and true only if he was born in Stagira. Call this property Ψ . In our terms, we might recast Frege's suggestion regarding proper names as follows: in uttering "Aristotle was born in Stagira" the speaker does not mean any particular proposition; rather what she is putting forward is Ψ . So long as her audience comes to entertain a suitably similar Fregean thought – namely, one that is Ψ - on the basis of her utterance, understanding can be achieved.³⁸

What then might speaker-meaning be, if not a relation between speaker, her utterance, and a proposition? According to the foregoing suggestion what the speaker means is *a property of propositions*; her utterance understood only if her audience comes to suitably entertain some one or more propositions that have the property in question. In certain instances there may be but one proposition that has the relevant property. If we settle on a fine-grained, structured conception of the contents of thought, this will not, however, typically be the case.

In light of the problems facing the standard view of meaning and communication, I submit that some picture along the foregoing lines points in the right direction. Restricted proposition-types at least seem to be the right *kind* of thing to be the object of the speaker's communicative intentions. No doubt, filling in the details of the sketch provided will require considerable work. In particular, a story is needed to show how a speaker's linguistic dispositions (including, but not limited to, dispositions regarding what propositions the speaker would "fall back" on) at a particular context of utterance determine the intended proposition-type. The details of such a

story are likely to be complex and will no doubt require us to countenance considerable indeterminacy and vagueness.³⁹ But as far as I can see there is no reason, in principle, for supposing that such a story cannot be given.

Conclusion

I would like to conclude by briefly discussing a potential upshot of the foregoing discussion for issues regarding attributions of meaning and belief. In Section One I suggested that one central motivation for accepting the standard view concerns ascriptions of meaning such as (12), as well as reports of what is said as in (13):

- (12) By uttering ‘He lives there’, Chet meant that George W. Bush lives in Washington.
 (13) Chet said that George W. Bush lives in Washington.

If the surface syntax of these constructions is to be our guide in assessing their logical form, both ‘means’ and ‘says’ express relations between agents and the semantic value (in the context) of ‘that George W. Bush lives in Washington’. Coupling this observation with the orthodox view that the semantic value of a ‘that’-clause is a proposition, we arrive at the problematic view that *meaning* and *saying* are propositional attitudes.

Once we appreciate the distinctive way in which the standard view of meaning and communication fails, there is some pressure to give up the orthodox view regarding the semantics of ‘that’-clauses. If the foregoing arguments against the standard view are correct, *meaning* and (derivatively) *saying* are not propositional attitudes, but rather relations between speakers and properties of propositions. *Insofar* as we can successfully report the full content of what, for example, Chet said by an attribution such as (12), the semantic-value of the ‘that’-clause must itself be some (restricted) proposition-type Ψ .⁴⁰ In this case, Ψ might be a property that is instantiated by all and only those propositions that (i) are true only if Bush lives in Washington, and (ii) which involve thinking of Bush as the US president.⁴¹

But what then of belief reports such as (14)?

- (14) Chet believes that George W. Bush lives in Washington.

In light of the obvious similarities between attributions such as (12)–(14) how can it plausibly, or for that matter coherently, be maintained that while *meaning* and *saying* are not propositional attitudes, *believing* fundamentally is a relation between an agent and a proposition?

One possible answer is that while believing is a relation to propositions, the similarity between, for example, (13) and (14), is that in both reports the semantic value of the ‘that’-clause is a proposition-type, say Ψ . The crucial

difference between *saying* and *believing* would then consist in the fact that, while (13) is true just in case Chet said Ψ , (14) is true if, and only if, Chet believes some proposition *of* the type Ψ . On this suggestion, the fundamental objects of our beliefs are **not** the contents of our speech acts.

There is independent motivation for such a view of belief reports. When we reflect on the role that beliefs play in our folk psychological practice of explaining and predicting behavior, we find considerable pressure for thinking that the propositional contents of those states are extremely fine-grained, perhaps Fregean, propositions. In typical cases, however, belief attributors do not have detailed knowledge of the modes of presentation under which the relevant agent thinks of the objects and properties that her belief concerns. In such cases, the best a belief attributor can do is to gesture towards the *type* of propositional content that is the object of the relevant mental state. In a case such as (14), the relevant ‘that’-clause serves to *indirectly* and *partially* characterize Chet’s belief.^{42,43}

Giving up the orthodox treatment of attributions of meaning and belief might seem like a radical suggestion. However, if the foregoing discussion is on the right track this is an option that we cannot ignore.

Notes

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¹ The full import of this qualification ‘or at least partially characterized by’ will become manifest in the conclusion.

² This is in contrast to the “possible-worlds conception” of propositional content favored, for example, by Robert Stalnaker (1976) and (1984). For an excellent discussion of the problems facing the view that propositions are, or are to be explicated in terms of, sets of possible worlds, see Soames (1987). See Schiffer (2003) for arguments against any conception of structured propositions, as well as a positive account of the metaphysics of propositions according to which propositions are both unstructured and extremely fine-grained. I do not believe the

considerations Schiffer gives against structured propositions to be decisive, but here is not the place to pursue the matter.

³ See, for example, Braun (1998), Soames (1987), Salmon (1986) and (1989).

⁴ I would like to thank an anonymous reviewer at *Nous* for helpful discussion of these issues regarding the metaphysics of propositions.

⁵ For the standard theorist, *speaker meaning* is a fundamentally a relation between a speaker, her utterance, and a proposition. Of course, the standard theorist will hold that in making an utterance a speaker might stand in the speaker-meaning-relation to distinct propositions. In what follows, I will sometimes speak of the proposition, or *propositions*, that the speaker meant by her utterance. This shorthand way of talking should not, however, be taken as implying that for the standard theorist the speaker-meaning-relation relates speakers and sets of propositions, or that speaker-meaning is a multigrade relation.

⁶ ‘Talking’ is, as Grice nicely puts it, ‘a special case of purposive, indeed rational behavior’ Grice (1989) p. 28. Dummett (1996) forcefully echoes the sentiment: ‘Any adequate philosophical account of language must describe it as a rational activity on the part of creatures to whom can be ascribed *intention* and *purpose*. The use of language is, indeed, the primary manifestation of our rationality: it is the rational activity *par excellence*’ (p. 104).

⁷ See, for example, Grice’s papers on the topic of speaker meaning in Grice (1989), as well as Schiffer (1972) and (1982). A proponent of the standard view might also take inspiration from Wayne Davis’s more recent *Meaning, Expression, and Thought*. According to Davis’s “Neo-Gricean” account speaker meaning is indeed to be understood in terms of intention, but not in terms of the speaker’s essentially audience-directed intentions. On Davis’s account, a speaker means something by her utterance U just in case she produces U intending to give an indication of certain of her mental states. In the body of the paper, we will assume that the standard theorist sticks with something like the Grice-inspired (M)-constraint. The problems we will encounter for the standard view apply equally to a view according to which speaker meaning is to be cashed out in Davis’s favored Neo-Gricean terms, rather than in terms of (M) or (M*).

⁸ “Entertaining a proposition P” in no sense requires one to believe P. It will suffice for our purposes to understand ‘entertaining’ roughly on a par with ‘considering’. In Grice’s own favored account of speaker meaning that P the intended response was taken to be that one’s audience believe that P. See Neale (1992) for a discussion of the advantages of weakening the intended attitude in P from *believing* to *entertaining*.

⁹ See Grice (1989) p. 87, as well as his discussion of our ‘intuitive understanding of the meaning of ‘say’’, on p. 22–24. See also Schiffer’s discussion of ‘saying’ in Chapter Four of Schiffer (1972).

¹⁰ The term ‘character’ is, of course, borrowed from Kaplan’s work on demonstratives. See Kaplan (1989). For now, I use his term for the context-invariant meaning of a sentence-type, whatever that turns out to be. I do not here intend to commit myself (or the standard theorist) to any of Kaplan’s specific views on the nature of character and contexts (or his formal representations thereof).

¹¹ On this Gricean characterization of ‘what is said’, S said that p by u entails that S meant that p by u (See Grice’s discussion in ‘Utterer’s Meaning and Intention’). As Grice was well aware, this suggestion does not map perfectly onto the use of the verb ‘say’ in ordinary parlance. For example, in cases of ironic speech we might happily volunteer that the speaker ‘said something she didn’t mean’. Grice characterizes the cases as ones in which the speaker ‘made as if to say’ p with the intentions of implying, or suggesting, some other proposition q (for example, Chet made as if to say that Tim is a fine friend by his utterance, intending to get across that Tim is a not to be trusted petty thief.). It is extremely doubtful that any theoretically interesting notion of ‘what is said’ will arise from attempting to accommodate all uses of ‘says’ in ordinary parlance. See Carston (2002) p. 218, n. 49, for helpful discussion on this point.

¹² As Stephen Neale suggests, we might also want to make a distinction between (i) what the speaker implied by uttering sentence S, and (ii) what the speaker implied by saying what she

said, if we are to ‘get at the heart of Grice’s distinction between conventional and conversational implicature, and to solve problems concerning the former’ Neale (2004) p. 78 fn. 15.

¹³ Roughly put, different types of speech acts, like *commanding*, might be explicated in terms of (a) the type of response that the speaker intends her audience to have, and (b) the reasons the hearer is intended to have the response the speaker intends. For example, consider commanding. A plausible first pass at necessary conditions might be the following: S commanded A to Φ by uttering U only if S uttered U to A intending that A is to Φ , and intending that A’s recognition of her (S’s) authority is the reason for A to Φ . See Strawson (1964) and Schiffer (1972) for an attempt to explicate illocutionary acts along the foregoing lines. See Bach and Harnish (1979) for a discussion of these issues, and a positive account that seeks to refine the Strawson-Schiffer suggestion.

¹⁴ See Stanley’s 2005 review of Recanati’s *Literal Meaning*, and Carston (2007) for two very helpful attempts to sort through the terminological quagmire that attends the recent literature concerning the semantics/pragmatics distinction, and the attendant notion of ‘what is said’.

¹⁵ Some speakers would more naturally be inclined to utter ‘All the beer is in the bucket’ in this case; others might prefer ‘Every bottle of beer is in the bucket’. As will become clear momentarily, these examples would do just as well for illustrating the problems with the standard view.

¹⁶ In recent years, complex demonstratives, such as ‘That painting’, have been the source of much controversy. Numerous theorists have argued that such constructions are not referring expressions and should be analyzed as quantifiers (King (1999) and (2001)). See, for example, King (1999) and (2001) and Lepore and Ludwig (2000). I believe these and other quantificational views to be problematic. See Paul Elbourne’s (2008) ‘Demonstratives as Individual Concepts’ for an account I believe to be more plausible. On Elbourne’s account complex demonstratives are analyzed along the lines of the well-known Frege/Strawson presuppositional account of definite descriptions. The point of the example in the text, however, does not turn on which of these views one accepts. Even those theorists who believe that complex demonstratives are to be analyzed in quantificational terms will (or, at least, should) accept that the speaker who is uttering (6) intends to refer to some particular object by her use of the expression, and that there is a “gap” between the character of the expression uttered and the intended referent that must be bridged by context.

¹⁷ I here assume the familiar Russellian account of the definite descriptions such as ‘the bucket’ in (5). For a classic statement and defense of the view see Neale (1990). Also see the papers in Bezuidenhout and Reimer (eds.) (2004), and Neale (ed.) (2005) for recent discussion, both pro and con, the Russellian account. See, for e.g., Bach (2001) and Neale (2004) for a discussion of *propositional radicals/blueprints*.

¹⁸ See Jason Stanley’s ‘Nominal Restriction’ for a discussion of the context-sensitivity of both quantificational constructions and comparative adjectives (e.g., ‘tall’ in (7)). Stanley gives interesting arguments in favor of thinking that we must postulate hidden variables in the logical forms of both kinds of constructions. See Recanati (2004) and Neale (2004) for critical discussion of Stanley’s suggestion. But to reiterate, nothing in what follows will turn on these debates regarding the logical form of these constructions.

¹⁹ There is a history to the kind of objection we are here considering. In Schiffer (1981) an analogous “multiplicity of candidates” objection is offered as a problem for views according to which the propositional contribution of singular terms is an individual concept (more anon). Wettstein (1981) offers similar considerations against the Russellian quantificational analysis of definite descriptions, such as ‘the bucket’. Stanley and Szabo (2000) appeal to Wettstein’s considerations in arguing against a view they sub the “syntactic ellipsis” account of quantifier domain restriction. In his (1995) Schiffer applies similar considerations to the semantics of pronouns, descriptions, and belief reports; see also Clapp (1995) for similar arguments against so-called Hidden-Indexical theories of belief reports. Clapp (2002) generalizes these considerations and offers something akin to this problem of a “multiplicity of candidates” for any semantic

account that postulates ‘unarticulated constituents’. With the possible exception of Clapp, each of these theorists seem to regard these worries regarding multiple candidates as refuting this, or that, particular semantic proposal (e.g., the Russellian account of definite descriptions), but this is wrong. The problem is not with the semantic proposals they were arguing against, but rather with the standard view of meaning-intentions and communication.

²⁰ There has been a fair amount of recent debate regarding non-sentential assertion, focusing primarily on how we should think of the logical form of such constructions. In particular, there has been considerable debate regarding whether, as Peter Ludlow puts it, ‘apparent cases of non-sentential speech are, based on linguistic evidence, more plausibly analyzed as being sentential in form’ Ludlow (2005). Jason Stanley (2000), as well as Ludlow (*ibid.*) suggest that many, if not most, cases are in fact “sentential”. See Stainton (2004) for compelling considerations against this suggestion. Whether or not (8) is, or is not, in fact “sentential” at some suitably abstract syntactic level of analysis will not, however, matter for our concerns in what follows. Even if (8) is somehow sentential at the level of logical form there will still be many candidates for what one might mean, or say, by uttering it.

²¹ I believe something like the foregoing problems arise for virtually any construction where there is strong temptation to postulate “unarticulated constituents”.

²² It is difficult to pin down sufficient conditions for understanding the speaker’s utterance. To a first approximation, we might claim that it suffices for understanding the utterance that (i) one’s audience A entertain any one, or more, of the candidates on the basis of the utterance, and (ii) A is thereby *disposed* to accept some number of the other salient candidates. Though this suggestion is, at best a rough first pass, it will hopefully serve our needs in what is to follow.

²³ In Buchanan and Ostertag (2005), we argued for a version of the disjunctive account on which, in the such cases, the speaker has ‘the general intention that either A comes to entertain p_1 , or that A comes to entertain p_2, \dots etc’ (p. 903). Though I think our suggestion in that paper is a promising first start, it is problematic for many reasons (some of which will be clear in what follows). Among other things, the suggestion implausibly requires the speaker to have meaning-intentions towards *each* candidate. This requirement is too demanding.

²⁴ This seems like as good a point as any to consider another proposal one might suggest on behalf of the standard theorist; namely, that the proposition meant/expressed in this case is, roughly, *all those beers are in that bucket*. This suggestion does not strike me as helpful. It is unclear whether the proposal here offered is to be understood as (i) an object/plurality-*independent* proposition, or a (ii) an object/plurality-*dependent* proposition where both ‘every beer’ and ‘the bucket’ are understood purely referentially. If understood along the lines of (i) the problem of multiple candidates still arises. Is it that *all those beers we just bought are in that bucket out back*, or that *all those beers we will serve later are in that bucket next to the hot tub*, or so on? If the proposal is to be taken along the lines of (ii) several problems emerge. First, note that this candidate does not have the property required by *Lemma*. That is, there is no requirement that the hearer entertain that object/plurality-dependent proposition in order to understand Chet’s utterance, for presumably, in this case Tim can understand the utterance via entertaining some object/plurality-*independent* proposition, say P_6 . Secondly, if ‘those beers’ is claimed to be a rigid referring expression picking out some collection, or plurality, of beers in the actual world, this proposal would fail to capture the intuitive possible worlds truth-conditions of the utterance. Whatever it is that Chet’s utterance expressed would still be true in a possible world in which different and/or fewer beers were purchased at the bodega. Third, whatever the merits of this suggestion in the case of (5), the suggestion cannot generalize to other non-borderline cases of attributively-used quantifier expressions in which neither speaker nor hearer is in any position to even entertain a relevant object/plurality-dependent proposition.

²⁵ Something like this view was sketched in Blackburn (1988) as part of a defense of the Russellian analysis of definite descriptions. Schiffer (1995) floats a similar suggestion on behalf of the proponent of the Russellian theory of descriptions, as well as the Hidden-Indexical theory of belief reports (both of which he rejects).

²⁶ In the text I assume that the proponent of this suggestion, qua standard theorist, accepts that speaker-meaning is governed by the (M)-constraints – cases such as (5) being vague, or indeterminate, instances of the obtaining of that relation. This suggestion fails for the reasons given above. [A version of this argument is given, in the context of a discussion concerning definite descriptions, in Buchanan and Ostertag (2005).] An additional problem with this suggestion is that, supposing it is vague whether the speaker uttering (5) means, say, P_2 , one might expect that it should also be vague whether the audience understood the utterance if she comes to entertain P_2 . This is also incorrect.

Perhaps a theorist sympathetic to the standard view will suggest that what she believes is vague/indeterminate is the speaker-meaning-relation itself – that is, it is vague, or indeterminate, what the speaker-meaning-relation in the first place. The proponent of this suggestion could then hold that the utterance of (5) is true just in case any way of precisifying the vague speaker-meaning-relation will have the speaker coming out as having meant the at least one of the relevant candidates. Insofar as the proponent of this line gives up the foregoing constraints on speaker-meaning, she is no longer a standard theorist. But be that as it may, in order to assess this suggestion we would first need to be told exactly what this “vague-speaker-meaning-relation” is such that on any precisification it would emerge that the speaker managed to uniquely mean one of the candidate propositions.

²⁷ It is of no help to suppose that the vague proposition is simply *every contextually relevant beer is in the fridge*. Any initial temptation to take this suggestion seriously is likely due to treating “contextually relevant” as a mere place-holder for some or other particular completion. If this suspicion is right, the suggestion is just a re-labeling of the problem.

²⁸ It is equally difficult to see how a standard theorist who believes propositions are unstructured entities, say, sets of possible worlds, fares any better here. The phenomena we are discussing is simply not to be explained by analogy with vagueness. Suppose that what the speaker meant by uttering (5) is a vague proposition for which the candidates are (something like) precisifications. *Content* and *Success* require that if the speaker indeed meant a vague proposition p , then her audience must entertain p , if communication is to take place – nothing less vague than p would do. Here, however, entertainment of a candidate – i.e. a putative precisification – would suffice for understanding (here I am speaking loosely; see footnote 24). Compare this to (10). If, on the basis of his utterance, Chet’s audience were to entertain some precisification, say, *Tim has less than 7,233 hairs on his head*, Chet would likely feel bewildered, rather than understood. In paradigmatic cases involving vague expressions, grasp of a precisification is neither necessary nor sufficient for understanding. Candidates simply are not precisifications, be they structured propositions or sets of possible worlds.

²⁹ Additionally, the speaker’s communicative intentions, such as they are, preclude us from being able to identify *the* truth-conditions of her utterance as well.

³⁰ The positive suggestion here finds its precedent in Sperber and Wilson’s seminal work *Relevance* (Sperber and Wilson 1986). According to Sperber and Wilson, a communicator’s “informative intention” is “to make manifest, or more manifest . . . a set of assumptions **I**.” Significantly, they allow that the communicator’s having this intention does *not* require her to “have a representation of *each assumption in the set*” (p. 58; *italics mine*). As will be clear in what follows, I think this suggestion contains an important insight, one that, regrettably, has received little or no attention in the vast literature spawned by the publication of *Relevance*.

³¹ Perhaps an analogy might be helpful. In some ways, the context-invariant meaning of a sentence is not so different from a musical score. One might think of a musical score as laying down the conditions that a musical performance must meet if it is to be an instance of the work the composer intended. Of course, these specified conditions will, and perhaps must, be less than fully specific in many respects. A musician performing the score will have to ‘fill in’ certain of the details left unspecified in the score. It is precisely because a musical score is underspecified in this way that allows there to be multiple, yet equally correct ways of performing the work. The composer relies on the musicians who are to perform the piece to fill in the details in

some or other suitable way. As in our case involving Chet and Tim, it need not be that composer or performer represents to themselves these additional constraints over and above the explicit conditions in the score. It is not, however, implausible to think that both composer/performer, as well as speaker/hearer, are guided by these further constraints.

³² In terms of these “associated” propositions, we might then characterize *sufficient* conditions for the truth of the utterance – the utterance being true if all the propositions of the intended type are true (and, correspondingly, false, if they are all false). It would, however, be a mistake to seek to move from these sufficient conditions to any further claim regarding *the truth-conditions* of the utterance (for example, by supervaluating over the candidates). In those cases in which some of the candidates are true and others false, it seems to me that we are sometimes prepared to count the utterance as nonetheless true, other times, false; and sometimes we just feel pulled in both directions. It seems most reasonable to stop with the point that oftentimes – even in cases of perfectly successful communication – our utterances are “associated” with many propositions, not all of which are identical in truth-value.

³³ The foregoing point is that propositions are the *fundamental* objects of our cognitive attitudes. This is not to say that it is in principle impossible for the speaker or hearer to bear any interesting cognitive relations to properties of propositions. If need be we can define such (derivative) relations to proposition-types in terms of propositional attitudes agents have to propositions of those types (e.g., we might claim that a hearer entertains* a restricted type Ψ , in virtue of entertaining a proposition of type Ψ).

³⁴ If this suggestion is correct, we must also weaken the conditions on what is required for a speaker to recognize an intended response R if we are to hold onto any semblance of the Gricean gloss (M) on *meaning something*.

³⁵ There are different options for how a theorist of a more Fregean persuasion might fill in the details here. Suppose we stick with the foregoing suggestion on which we represent what is meant as an ordered pair of a potentially “gappy” sentence meaning, and a set of constraints on how that template can be admissibly ‘filled’ out in the context of utterance. The Frege-inspired theorist might then claim that these constraints come in two varieties. One type of constraint concerns the admissible properties, objects, and relations that might be suitable fillers; the second type of constrain then concerns how the hearer is intended to think of those objects, properties, and relations.

³⁶ The discussion to follow, including the choice of citations, is highly influenced by an unpublished manuscript by Stephen Schiffer entitled ‘Frege’s Third Puzzle’, as well as conversations with him on these topics. The positive view that Schiffer arrives at on the basis of these considerations is radically different from the one offered here. I hope to discuss Schiffer’s positive proposal in future work.

³⁷ In an important recent paper, ‘Do Demonstratives Have Senses?’, Richard Heck argues for a similar line regarding communicative exchanges involving demonstratives. Also see Bezuidenhout’s helpful discussion of communication involving singular terms in her 1997 piece in *Nous*.

³⁸ A more promising proposal would require that the relevant property meant would also offer some constraints on how the audience is to think of the referent.

³⁹ Given the facts concerning the speaker’s linguistic dispositions, we have every reason to expect indeterminacy regarding what is meant on the current suggestion. That is, we should expect that it will sometimes be indeterminate exactly which restricted proposition type the speaker intended.

This being so, one might naturally wonder whether the arguments given against the standard theorist’s appeal to indeterminacy apply here as well. Won’t the same problems arise once again at the level of restricted-types? Note that in arguing against the standard view, I claimed the following: take any candidate proposition you like, the speaker definitely did not mean it, and hence it is not indeterminate whether the speaker meant it. It is my hope that analogous considerations are not as worrisome for the current suggestion. Since restricted-types are to be

individuated in such a way as to respect the speaker's "fall-back" dispositions, they can (I hope) "absorb" whatever generality and indifference there might be in the speaker's communicative intentions. Hence, we might expect that insofar as there are "candidate" restricted-types, say, T_1, \dots, T_n relevant in the context, it will not determinately be the case the speaker did not mean, say T_2 . Given the generality built into such restricted-types, and what is required for one's audience to "grasp" them, indeterminacy at the level of what is meant will rarely, if ever, be manifest in normal communicative exchanges.

Should, however, my optimism on this front ultimately turn out to be misguided, I am confident that it will not be because the standard view is correct. Like standard theorists, I start with the assumption that in, for example, uttering (5) the speaker meant *something* – some *entity* – and the hearer "got it". Given the facts concerning such cases, I have a difficult time seeing what this entity could be if not something very much like a restricted proposition-type. Should this suggestion fail, however, I'd be inclined to give up this common assumption I share with the standard theorist – namely, that communication is a matter of **entity-sharing** of any kind. As of the time of publication, however, I have not been able to develop to my own satisfaction a workable version of this radical non-standard suggestion. [On this last point, I'd like to thank Lenny Clapp and Laura Duhau for helpful discussion.]

⁴⁰ The qualification 'insofar as we can report the *full* content' of what the speaker meant/said should be taken seriously. The suggestion regarding attributions of meaning and belief that follows is premised on the assumption that we can, at least sometimes, fully report what a speaker means. Defending this assumption is far from trivial, since one might alternatively hold that true attributions of meaning (typically) serve to *partially* characterize the *full* content of the speech act.

⁴¹ The suggestion in the text regarding attributions of *saying* will have to be spelled out in a way that respects the context-sensitivity and indeterminacy of our folk attributions of "what is said". Any plausible elaboration of this suggestion here must allow that we can oftentimes adequately report what a speaker said by her utterance by citing any number of different (restricted) proposition-types that are suitably related to the intended-type that is the semantic content of her utterance.

⁴² The view suggested in the text regarding belief reports has precedent in important work by, among others, Bach (1997) and (2000), Forbes (1987) and (1990), Recanati (1993) and (2004), and Graff Fara (2003), and Nelson (2002) [Nelson (2002) does not argue for a partial-characterization account, but rather shows that the possibility of such an account of belief reports undermines some of the traditional worries against descriptivist accounts of proper names.] Bach, for example, argues that we cannot account for referential opacity of belief constructions on the assumption that 'that'-clauses "specify" the contents of belief. He suggests that we must give up the assumption that 'that'-clauses refer to propositions which are the objects of our thoughts. Rather, we should hold that 'that'-clauses are partial *descriptors* of the contents of thought.

⁴³ However well motivated, any such partial characterization view will have to explain (putatively) valid inferences such as:

Chet believes that Fichte was a philosopher.

Tim believes that Fichte was a philosopher.

Therefore, Chet and Tim believe the same thing.

A plausible response in this case is to suggest that 'sameness' here amounts to sameness of type. Compare, 'Chet is wearing a blue oxford button down shirt. Tim is wearing a blue oxford button down shirt. [Hence,] Those guys are wearing the same shirt.' A proponent of the view I have here suggested regarding the asymmetry of saying and believing will have to bit a fancy footwork with 'mixed' inferences such as:

Chet said that Fichte was a philosopher.

Tim believes what Chet said.

Therefore, Tim believes that Fichte was a philosopher.

I claim that a proponent of the view here sketched has the resources to capture the seeming validity of such 'mixed' arguments, though full discussion will have to given another day.

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