Context-Dependency and (Mis)communication[*]

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"Remember that part of the ordinary meaning of any idiom of quantification consists of susceptibility to restrictions; and that restrictions come and go with the pragmatic wind."

(David Lewis, *Plurality of Worlds*, 1986: 164)

Christopher Gauker (1997) uses data and intuitions involving the context-dependency of quantifiers to argue that there is something fundamentally wrong with what he calls the *expressive theory of linguistic communication*. In this note, I plan to ascertain what exactly the expressive theory consists of and which aspect(s) of it Gauker's argument is intended to refute. I will argue that Gauker's argument in fact by itself fails to achieve its purpose. I will suggest that there may be independent reasons to doubt the particular aspect of the expressive theory that Gauker wanted to refute. Nevertheless, modified versions of the expressive theory are readily available, which will be immune to arguments from context-dependency.

1. What Is the Expressive Theory?

The definition of the target of Gauker's article remains somewhat unclear. What is expressive theory of linguistic communication? We find the following characterizations: "[L]inguistic communication is basically a matter of a speaker's choosing words that will convey the propositional content of his or her thought to hearers" (p. 2). "[T]he primary function of language is to enable speakers to convey propositions to hearers" (p. 5). "[W]hen a speaker intends to convey a proposition there is a mental representation that *underlies* this intention and that *bears* the proposition to be conveyed" (p. 8). "[A] speaker's intention to convey a proposition is what determines the speaker's choice of words" (p. 20).

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[*] FIRST DRAFT!

From these characterizations and further remarks in the article, one can isolate the following tenets which define the expressive theory, as understood by Gauker:

(i)   Speakers and hearers have thoughts.

(ii) Thoughts have (perhaps context-dependent) propositional content.

(iii) Sentences have (context-dependent) propositional content.

(iii) In communication, speakers choose their sentences so as to optimally convey the propositional content of their thoughts to hearers.

Gauker documents the impressive array of theoreticians who hold these tenets to be true. He canvasses variants and modifications, concerning issues such as whether thoughts essentially involve mental representations, whether utterances (sentences produced in a context) have propositional content by themselves or only derivatively, and so on.

Into this picture of the expressive theory Gauker now introduces a particular case of context-dependency: quantificational statements which are interpreted relative to a "domain of discourse". Gauker assumes that the expressive theory is committed to the following claim:

(C)   Whenever the context determines a unique domain of discourse for an utterance, the domain has to coincide with the domain the speaker has in mind.

His argument is intended to demonstrate that this claim cannot be maintained, and that hence the expressive theory is mistaken. [Note that Gauker does not himself present his project in quite this way. He doesn't isolate (C) as the claim under dispute. But I think this is the correct reconstruction of what his argument is really about.]

Towards the end of this note, I will dispute the assumption that the expressive theory is in fact committed to (C). But now I wish to show that Gauker's argument against (C) does not go through. First, some words on context-dependency and quantifier domains.

2. Domains of Discourse

Relating to you the experiences of last night when some of us went out for pizza, I say:

(1)   Everyone had a great time.

No doubt that (1) is not meant as the extravagant claim that everyone in the whole world had a great time. Instead, I intended to generalize over the group that went out last night.

Recent work on various kinds of quantificational constructions has appealed massively to context-dependency. Not only quantifiers like *every* and *most* have been argued to be dependent on a contextually restricted domain. Modal constructions, conditional constructions, constructions involving adverbs of quantification have also been analyzed as being contextually restricted.[1]

I will frame my discussion within the boundaries of a rather orthodox approach to context-dependency. While Gauker is much more circumspect in these matters, I trust that my net of assumptions does not distort the points under discussion.

I assume that a compositional semantics for natural language together with a contextually determined assignment of values to certain parameters of interpretation and to free variables yield a proposition as the denotation of a sentence uttered in a context.[2]

I will work with the following semantic rule:

(2)   The sentence (1) when uttered in a context c will express a proposition only if the context c determines a unique domain of discourse D.

         If this "expressive presupposition" is satisfied, the proposition expressed will be that one which is true of any world w if and only if every person in D had a great time in w.

This kind of meaning description, which specifies something like a Kaplanian "character", is what we can reasonably expect of a <u>semantics</u> of natural language.[3] It

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[1]I provide some references to relevant research in the bibliography at the end of this note.

[2]These assumptions are not self-evidently true. (i) One can dispute whether semantics together with a specification of contextual parameters will in fact usually yield a proposition for an utterance in a context. There are analysts who reject this assumption and argue that what the semantics offers is a mere skeleton to be pragmatically enriched further before a proposition is derived. Such enrichment processes are called "conversational impliciture" by Bach (1994) and "explicature" by relevance theorists (Sperber and Wilson 1986; Carston 1988). I think it won't affect the arguments discussed here if I maintain the more conservative view encoded in the rule in (2). (ii) One can even dispute whether natural language has a semantics at all as distinct from a general pragmatics. Cf. Chomsky's suspicion that "It is possible that natural language has only syntax and pragmatics; it has a 'semantics' only in the sense of 'the study of how this instrument, whose formal structure and potentialities of expression are the subject of syntactic investigation, is actually put to use in a speech community', to quote the earliest formulation in generative grammar 40 years ago, influenced by Wittgenstein, Austin and others (Chomsky 1957: 102-103; Chomsky 1975a: Preface). In this view, natural language consists of internalist computations and performance systems that access them along with much other infromation and belief, carrying out their instructions in particular ways to enable us to talk and communicate, among other things. There will be no provision for what Scott Soames calls 'the central semantic fact about language, … that it is used to represent the world', because it is not assumed that language is used to represent the world, in the intended sense" (Chomsky 1995). (iii) By assuming the semantic rule in (2), I am also short-circuiting some of the discussion in Gauker's paper. The rule does not allow an utterance to express a proposition in a context where the relevant contextual parameter is not uniqely resolved, which is an assumption that Gauker does not make.

leaves an awful lot of work to be done by other theories, in particular theories of pragmatics. But that's as it should be. Research into the semantics of natural language can proceed in a state of relative agnosticism about how pragmatics will solve the problems allotted to it. What semantics does have to do is to specify exactly where in the computation of the proposition expressed by an utterance context-dependency is involved.

We can now ask many questions about how exactly context-dependency works:

• What are the kinds of context-dependency that natural language involves?
• How far does context-dependency go? Is the meaning of every expression and every construction context-dependent?
• What aspects of "the context" are accessed by context-dependent items?
• Is "the context" defined in terms of the participants' states of mind?
• Or is "the context" defined in terms of mind-independent facts?
• Is context-dependency resolved entirely by semantic rules (such as the one that assigns to the indexical *I* whoever the speaker of the utterance is)?
• Are there grammatical processes, automatic and encapsulated heuristics that the language system employs to resolve context-dependency? Or is the process penetrated by smart inferencing systems?
• Does the resolution of context-dependency (irreducibly) involve reference to the speaker's intentions?

My preference is to look at such questions as being about the way the language-related systems in the human mind operate. I do not find it very fruitful to think about these questions as questions about what the norms of language are. But here generative linguists like myself part ways with Gauker and presumably many other philosophers.

Context-dependency is a pervasive "design feature" of natural language. The expression of propositions by natural language sentences becomes more efficient by off-loading many of the necessary ingredients into the contextual environment. This unburdening will

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[3]Of course, we will need to derive (2) in a compositional manner from meaning descriptions for its constituent parts and general principles of how such meanings combine to give meanings of complex expressions. But, for the most part, this will be a routine matter, which I will ignore here.

work as long as the context can be relied on to provide the missing ingredients in a manner that is determinate enough to allow speaker and hearer to understand each other.[4]

What then of the task left for pragmatics? It needs to establish how "<u>the</u> context of an utterance" is identified and how such a context determines a (unique) domain of discourse. For some context-dependent items, matters are rather straightforward. The first person singular pronoun gets as its value whoever is the speaker in a context of utterance. And who the speaker is seems like a very easy thing to figure out.[5]

In other cases, matters are much more complicated. Such cases include pronouns, demonstrative phrases, and the implicit domain of quantification associated with quantificational expressions. There are well-established areas of empirical research, both within discourse analysis and within psycholinguistics, on how language users identify the referents of anaphoric referential items such as pronouns.[6] One would hope that such research may be relevant to the understanding of how domains of discourse are identified in practice. At the very least, one can see that this question is amenable to empirical study.

Some of the more conceptual issues about how context-dependency is resolved are:

(i)   Is "the context" a mind-independent construct/entity? Or is it defined in terms of the contents of the minds of speakers and hearers?

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[4]It is intriguing that the one other complex "language" that we know of - the language of DNA - also employs context-dependency quite pervasively. Just as natural language sentences carry presuppositions (they will have meaning only in certain kinds of contexts), a gene will only be active in a cell that contains the right combination of regulatory proteins. "While cells of many tissues make one or more of the regulatory proteins needed to activate a liver-specific gene, only liver cells contain all the proteins necessary to signal that translation should occur from these genes" (Pollack 1994: 76). And, just as natural language sentences can express different propositions in different contexts, the same gene can give rise to different kinds of proteins depending on the context. After a gene has been activated by the right combination of regulatory proteins, an RNA transcript of the gene is produced. The transcript is then edited into one of a variety of possible kinds of messenger RNA by a set of RNA-protein complexes called sNRPs ("snurps", small nuclear ribonucleo-proteins), which again differ according to cell-type. "The gene for the muscle protein tropomyosin provides a panoply of proteins to different cells of the body. Tropomyosins regulate the speed and strength of muscle contraction. … The ability to make a particular set of splices in the transcripts of genes like tropomyosin allows us to make different kinds of muscle cells in different parts of the body. By alternative splicing in different tissues, any one of at least seven messenger RNAs is made in one or another tissue, generating different versions of tropomyosin" (Pollack 1994: 78/79).
[5]As discussed by Angelika Kratzer in her dissertation (Kratzer 1978), matters are not quite as straightforward. Consider for example an inscription on a gravestone: *I had a good life*. It would seem that it is the deceased lying beneath the stone who counts as the speaker (not the mason who actually produced the inscription, nor the widow who formulated and ordered the inscription). And it is arguable that what counts as the time of utterance is whatever time the inscription is read by a visitor to the cemetery.
[6]I provide some pointers to the literature in the bibliography.

(ii)   In the explanation of linguistic communication, is it necessary to refer to "what the context really is like" or does it suffice to the participants' assumption about what the context is like?

In his paper "What is a Context of Utterance?", Gauker (forthcoming) addresses these issues. What is at stake in the paper we are discussing here, is a more specific question:

(iii)   In the pragmatic resolution of context-dependency, is there essential use of the speaker's intentions towards how his utterance should be interpreted?

As pointed out above, Gauker assumes that the expressive theory is committed to a particular answer to this question:

(C)   Whenever the context determines a unique domain of discourse for an utterance, the domain has to coincide with the domain the speaker has in mind.

Note that the issue is not whether at any time in the hearer's interpretation of a speaker's utterance there will be inferences about what the speaker had in mind. Gauker does not have to dispute that such inferences occur. Instead, he assumes, as I did above, that there is a stage of interpretation whose result is the proposition expressed by an utterance (sentence in a context). The question is whether on the way to this (early, semantic) stage the speaker's intentions play an important role in interpretation. Later inferences involving speaker's intentions may well be common without the early stage being affected by them.

One kind of example where one might think that intention-based inferences naturally occur are cases where the usual pragmatic procedures for resolving context-dependency do not succeed, where bare bones semantics plus pragmatic resolution of context-dependency fail to supply the hearer with a determinate proposition for the speaker's utterance. In such cases, it seems reasonable to assume that the hearer who is engaged in an attempt to make sense of the communicative act of the speaker will try to infer what the speaker wanted to convey.[7]

Consider for example the following scenario: you and I are walking in the park. Two men are approaching us. You say: "He is sick". There are two variants: (i) One of the men is

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[7]I sketch this situation in terms that may belong to the expressive theory. Nevertheless, since Gauker does not attack the possibility of inferences about thoughts in a late stage pragmatic rescue operation, we can safely talk in these terms.

moving very erratically and seems to be in a lot of distress. The other is behaving solicitously. Here, it seems the context-dependent reference of *he* is rather easily resolved to be towards the man who appears to be in distress.[8] (ii) There is no apparent difference between the two men. Here, it seems there will be no result from combining semantics with pragmatic resolution of context-dependency. I, as the hearer, will remain in the dark about what you, the speaker, meant to say, unless I start trying to make inferences about what you might plausibly have had in mind.

The issue addressed in Gauker's paper more specifically concerns cases where reasonable pragmatic procedures for the resolution of context-dependency do yield a result but where the result is at odds with what the speaker had in mind. In such cases, are the speaker's intentions relevant or not? Gauker assumes that the expressive theory is committed to the claim that the speaker's intentions are always relevant.

3. Gauker's Example

Gauker's central example is one where the determination of the domain of discourse goes seriously awry:

> Suzy is sitting on the floor in her bedroom playing with glass marbles. All of the marbles in Suzy's room belong to Suzy, and some of them are red. Suddenly Tommy comes into Suzy's room and declares in a loud voice "All of the red ones are mine!". As a matter of fact, when Tommy says "All of the red ones are mine!" he is thinking of the marbles in his own room, and it is the thought that all of the red marbles in his room are his that leads him to speak as he does. Tommy is very proud of his possessions and on this occasion is exulting in his possession of red marbles. But there is no way Suzy could know that. She would naturally expect that he was talking about the marbles there on the floor in plain view of both of them. So of course she retorts "No, they're not!"

Now, what is the interpretation of Tommy's utterance? According to the semantic rule in (2), the sentence he uttered expresses a proposition only if the context of utterance determines a unique domain of discourse D. If so, it will express the proposition which is true in any world w if and only if all of the red marbles in D belong to Tommy in w.

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[8]Such cases present a problem for certain facile formulations about how context-dependency is resolved. It is sometimes said that free pronouns refer to the most <u>salient</u> suitable entity. But that ignores the substantial questions of what makes entity salient. In this case, the salient entity is the one that most likely makes the proposition expressed true. In his survey article on context-dependency, Zimmermann (1991) cites an example attributed to Irene Heim that raises the same problem: *I broke my leg*. Which leg is more salient so as to satisfy the uniqueness condition associated with the singular NP *my leg*? It is just the leg that the speaker broke.

The context of utterance as Tommy takes it to be determines a unique domain of utterance D_1 (the things in his room) and thus helps in producing a proposition which is in fact true in the actual world. The context of utterance as Suzy takes it to be determines a unique domain of utterance D_2 (the things in her room, which are in plain view of both of them) and thus helps in producing a proposition which is in fact false in the actual world.

Clearly, Tommy and Suzy misunderstand each other. Clearly, this misunderstanding is Tommy's fault. But what is the "correct" interpretation of Tommy's utterance? Did he or did he not make an objectively true claim?

One could stop the debate at this point already. Perhaps, there is no sense to asking such questions. What reasons do we have for even asking these questions? Isn't it hopelessly speculative to wonder what the "objectively correct context" is? One could certainly think that these questions need not be asked to <u>explain</u> communication.[9] But perhaps, there are other kinds of concerns that would depend on an answer to these questions. Imagine that we are involved in a legal dispute. Did Tommy make an invalid claim to ownership or not? Lawyers at least may find such questions important.

Perhaps, we can immunify the discussion from such worries. The question we are really concerned with here is what the pragmatic procedures for resolving context-dependency are like. The way to answer that general question may be to answer the question of what result these procedures would yield if the hearer in the Tommy-Suzy Scenario were in possession of all even potentially relevant facts, including having access to all of Tommy's thoughts. So, we are asking what proposition Tommy's utterance expressed with respect to such an ideal context.

Gauker surveys three possible solutions: (i) the straight defense of Suzy, according to which the proposition that Tommy's utterance expressed was the same as the one that Suzy took it to express, (ii) the straight defense of Tommy, according to which the proposition that Tommy's utterance expressed was the same as the one that he intended it to express, and (iii) the neutral solution, according to which there is no unique domain of discourse determined in this case.

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[9]I for one am tempted to opt out of the debate at this point. I have severe doubts that the question of what the "correct" interpretation or the "real" context is has any scientific status. Clearly, we can imagine circumstances where we care as moral beings about such questions. But what can we learn from them about the way the language system in the brain works?

Now, the claim that Gauker wants to refute is that the domain of discourse, when there is one, has to coincide with what the speaker has in mind. The straight defense of Suzy is incompatible with this claim. Therefore, the claim can only be maintained if either the straight defense of Tommy or some version of the neutral solution can be maintained. Gauker proceeds to argue that there are insurmountable problems with both of them.

4. The Way to the Neutral Solution

The straight defense of Tommy is rather difficult to maintain. It is unreasonable to say that the correct interpretation of a speaker's utterance is such that the speaker's thoughts automatically override the contextual clues that are objectively available to a rational hearer.[10] I follow Gauker in rejecting the straight defense of Tommy.

A more reasonable pragmatic principle for how contextual parameters are resolved within the confines of the claim in (C) would be the following. What resolves context-dependency is a combination of (i) explicit constraints imposed by the linguistic expressions that give rise to the context-dependency (*he* is restricted to refer to males, etc.), (ii) the speaker's intention, and (iii) mutually agreed upon procedures for recovering the speaker's intention from contextual clues. That is, "the context" is a construct based on an interplay of speaker's intentions and hearer's inferences.

One could argue that the inferential ingredient is just a contingent necessity. If we had a limited kind of telepathic ability and could divine the speaker's intention in just those cases where now we need contextual clues, the rest of the language system would be unaffected. Of course, if we had unlimited telepathic ability, there would be little use for language at all.

Let us then say that what is needed for the context to determine a domain of discourse for an utterance is at least that there is a (near) match between (i) the speaker's intended domain and (ii) the domain that the speaker can reasonably expect the hearer to reasonably expect the speaker to intend. The latter domain is the one that a rational hearer would arrive at after inferencing (but without telepathic access to the speaker's mind).

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[10]This point is discussed by Bach (1987a,b, 1992a,b), who writes "You do not say something and then, as though by an inner decree (an intention), determine what you are using it to refer to. You do not have something 'in mind' and hope that your audience is a good mind reader. rather, you decide to refer to something and try to select an expression whose utterance will enable your audience, under the circumstances, to identify what you are referring to" (Bach 1992b: 299).

Note two properties: (i) there's more to context-dependency than the speaker's intention (this is forced by the absence of direct telepathy), but (ii) asymmetry is preserved. What is crucial is that the speaker's intentions and the hearer's attempts at reading the speaker's mind are involved. The hearer's thoughts are only relevant as far as they are directed towards recovering the speaker's thoughts.

From this perspective, the neutral solution is inescapable. The context of utterance in the Tommy-Suzy Scenario is defective, it does not determine a unique domain of utterance. That is precisely why there is miscommunication. There is no (near) match between Tommy's intended domain and what he can reasonably expect Suzy to reasonably expect him to intend as a domain. What he is mistaken about is his expectation that Suzy can figure out that he is trying to talk about the marbles in his room.

From this perspective then, we should say that the actual context here does not determine a domain of utterance for Tommy's utterance. Then, by the semantic rule in (2), Tommy's utterance did not express a proposition.

5. Gauker's Attack on the Neutral Solution

Gauker tries to argue that the diagnosis that I just reached cannot be maintained. First, he points out that his scenario may well play out in a way that Suzy and Tommy realize the fact that there was miscommunication and come to a productive resolution.

> At first Tommy and Suzy might argue back and forth as if there were some genuine issue of fact. After Suzy says "No, they're not!", Tommy, still thinking of his own marbles, may insist "Yes they are, Mom gave them to me". Suzy may reply "Dad got me those marbles and Mom doesn't even know I have them". And so on. After carrying on in this way for a while, it may become apparent to them that they are getting nowhere, and each may realize that the other is displaying uncharacteristic obstinacy. At this point, it might occur to them that the problem between lies not in the facts but in their language. Pointing to the marbles on the floor, Tommy might say "I'm not talking about *those* marbles; I'm talking about the marbles in *my* room", or Suzy might ask "Which marbles are you talking about?".

So, there is a way that Suzy and Tommy can extricate themselves from their sorry state of miscommunication. Gauker then suggests that an analysis that would deny that Tommy's initial utterance expressed a determinate proposition does not allow us to understand the process by which they resolve their disagreement.

To simplify matters, we are asked to consider a scenario in which Suzy explicitly accuses Tommy of a falsehood by declaring "What you said is false!". Gauker argues that if

Tommy's utterance failed to express a proposition, then Suzy's objection also must fail to express a proposition since the phrase *what you said* will fail to refer. He then claims that if neither of their utterances express propositions, it is impossible to understand how they could come to recognize their miscommunication for what it is.

In response, I will first explore whether we could maintain that even though Tommy's utterance fails to express a proposition in the objective context, Suzy's response does express a proposition. But then, I will suggest that Gauker has not sufficiently supported his claim that we cannot understand the conversation between Tommy and Suzy if in the objective context neither of Tommy's and Suzy's utterances express a proposition.

6. First Response

If we really needed to maintain that Suzy's utterance expressed a proposition, we could try to say that the semantics of *what you said* is not that of a referring expression (for which failure of reference would lead to no proposition being expressed) but that of a definite description under either a Russellian analysis or a presuppositional analysis.[11]

The result would be that Suzy's utterance does in fact express a proposition. It is either the one in (3a) or the one in (3b):

(3)   a.   Suzy's utterance expresses the proposition that is true in a world w if and only if (i) Tommy's utterance expressed a unique proposition in w and (ii) that proposition is false in w.

b.   Suzy's utterance expresses the proposition that only yields a truth-value for worlds w in which Tommy's utterance expressed a unique proposition, and if so, the proposition will be true in w if and only if Tommy's proposition is false in w.

Under the Russellian analysis of Suzy's claim, her claim will be false: what Tommy said wasn't false, since he failed to say anything. Under the presuppositional analysis, her claim will express a proposition that suffers from a truth-value gap in the actual world.

The motivation for considering these possibilities is Gauker's claim that we cannot understand the development of the conversation between Tommy and Suzy unless Suzy's utterance at least expresses a proposition. Since I will dispute that claim, I do not wish to

[11]For the latter to work, we have to distinguish "expressive presuppositions" (whose satisfaction is required for an utterance to express a proposition) from the proposition triggered by a definite description. The latter could either be a "semantic presupposition" (whose satisfaction is required for the proposition an utterance expresses to have a truth-value) or a "pragmatic presupposition" (whose satisfaction is required for the utterance in question to be felicitous or appropriate). The distinction between these kinds of presuppositions is lucidly discussed by Soames (1989). For concreteness, I will assume a semantic presupposition in (3b).

spend much energy on defending the response considered here. One possible counter-attack against it should however be mentioned.[12] Gauker might reply that it is implausible that Suzy's utterance expresses a general proposition rather than some singular proposition about the proposition Tommy's utterance expressed. (And since according to the neutral solution, Tommy's utterance failed to express a proposition, there couldn't be a singular proposition about such a proposition).

If this were the last stand of the expressive theory, one could surely reply that we have here a divergence between sentence meaning and speaker meaning.[13] While one may concede that Suzy intended to convey a singular proposition, it is conceivable that one could maintain that the only proposition her utterance itself can express (by the rules of the language, which include some kind of Russellian semantics for definite descriptions) is of the general kind described in (3).[14]

7. Second Response

Whatever we may think of the previous proposal about the semantics of Suzy's response, it seems that we don't actually need it. Let's stipulate that the rescue attempt in the previous section failed: Suzy's utterance fails to express a proposition in the actual world. Why can't the analysis of what happens in Tommy and Suzy's discourse run entirely on what's going on in their respective heads and in the possible worlds that answer to their thoughts? Why would we need to agree with Gauker that "since Tommy and Suzy's discourse subsequent to Tommy's initial utterance is productive, perhaps the utterance that make up their discourse ought to be interpretable as expressing propositions"? Such a pronouncement would receive some support if a story were produced in which it is crucial not just that Tommy and Suzy for a while take each other to have made determinate claims, but that they actually have done so. No such story is given.[15]

Gauker concedes that it is not the case that "we cannot explain in any way the course of events that results in Tommy and Suzy's ceasing to argue. No doubt we would be able to

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[12]This is the reply sketched by Gauker in an email exchange.

[13]See Kripke (1979).

[14]If the expressivist was really in a corner, she might also try out an approach where Suzy's utterance expresses a proposition in the actual context in thesame manner that perhaps utterances about fictional entities express propositions.I will not pursue this avenue, since I am entirely unconvinced that the expressivist is indeed in any kind of corner here.

[15]I am puzzled by the hedge signalled by the word "perhaps" in Gauker's statement. It is absolutely crucial to his rejection of the neutral solution that we do need the context to supply a determinate domain of discourse for Tommy's utterance. If there is any doubt that we need this to be the case, as I think there is, Gauker's argument falters.

explain it, and would even be able to explain it in terms of each party's thoughts and intentions. What we cannot do if we adopt a neutral solution is explain it as a process in which a sequence of utterances each expresses a unique proposition."

What is the nature of the kind of <u>understanding</u> that is important here beyond the possibility of <u>explanation</u>? I fail to see any argument for this in Gauker's paper.[16]

As far as I can see, there is no need to assume that Tommy's initial utterance actually expressed a proposition, nor that Suzy's denial did. Thus, the neutral solution has not been refuted. Thus, the claim in (C) has not been refuted. Thus, by Gauker's assumptions, the expressive theory has not been refuted.

8. A Concession

While Gauker does not succeed in using the Tommy-Suzy Scenario as an argument against the claim in (C), we may have independent reasons to doubt that (C) can be maintained.

So, can an expressivist live without (C)? Circumstantial evidence can be seen in the fact that there seem to be people who purport to hold an expressive theory while explicitly denying (C). Wettstein (1984) suggests that context-dependency is resolved (or in his terms, the gap between meaning and reference is bridged) "by the cues that the competent and attentive addressee will reasonably take the speaker to be exploiting. My account, although it denies that intentions determine reference, does not deny the importance of speakers' intentions. Indeed, the *point* of the institutionalized conventions I have been discussing is to facilitate communication concerning the items speakers have in mind and about which they intend to inform others, ask questions, and so on. In the most usual,

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[16]In his "What is a Context of Utterance?", Gauker tries to argue that we need "external norms" to understand language. He replies to a possible objection (that we can understand language in internalist terms) by drawing an analogy with moral norms: "This objection is symptomatic of a doubt about external norms in general. Equally, one might say, there are no external *moral* norms. Instead of holding people responsible formaking sure that their property is clear of hazards (an external norm) we might require them only to inspect their property and clear away anything they might reasonably infer might present a hazard (an internal norm). Here I can only answer that I think this attempt to eliminate all external norms in favor of exclusively internal norms is bound to fail. Carried to extremes it implies that no one is responsible for the actual effects of his or her actions but only for his or her intentions, however benighted those intentions may be." One could reject this argument because there is no reason to drag moral considerations into the analysis of natural language. But even on internal grounds, his argument fails. It is perfectly possible to assign responsibility for the miscommunication in theTommy-Suzy Scenario to Tommy while maintaining that his utterance failed to express a proposition. It is clearly his fault that his intentions did not match the facts about the context that made it so that Suzy wouldn't take him to be talking about the marbles in his room. He just did not choosehis words wisely.

everyday cases, moreover, people refer to the items they intend, the items they have in mind in the primary sense, and in such cases the referent is just the intended referent. It is in the unusual cases involving misidentification in which reference and intended reference can diverge".

I cannot rehearse what conclusive arguments against (C) will look like. But it appears that even if (C) is rejected, one can still hold on to the other tenets of the expressive theory. Note that what we are considering here is not necessarily the variant on the expressive theory discussed and rejected by Gauker in his section 4 (pp. 10-13). We are not considering an approach that would say that there are semantic rules that determine the domain of discourse when given a context. The concession is that it is objective features of the context (excluding the speaker's intentions) that are exploited by the pragmatic procedures that resolves context-dependency.[17]

If pressed to spell out my own view of the matters under discussion here, it might run like this: There is a system of (mostly subconscious) knowledge of language running in people's brains. When confronted with a linguistic expression in a particular situation, this system will assign an initial ("semantic") interpretation to the expression. Semantics is the discipline that yields a description of this procedure that issues "meaning (character) rules" such as the following: "If the context is such-and-such, then the expression has the following denotation". Semantic research itself can be relatively self-contained because of the conditional form of these rules. Exactly which features of the context this interpretation procedure is sensitive to is an empirical question studied by pragmatics/psycholinguistics. We know that brains don't have telepathic access to other brains, so presumably the procedure is not directly sensitive to the intentions of the brain that produced the linguistic expression. Does the procedure try to make guesses at the intentions of the producer's brain? Again, an empirical question. My suspicion is that at the initial stage the answer is no: there is no use of such guesses. Instead, what are used are perceptual features of the surrounding situation, the history of the conversation, syntactic and intonational features of the expression, and so on. At some later point, the semantic interpretation of the expression is passed on to smart systems, which in the interest of communication with the producer of the expression will try to reconstruct what made the producer produce the expression. Here, guesses about intentions are presumably

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[17]Gauker himself defends such an objective mind-independent view of "the context" in his paper "What is a Context of Utterance?". The question I put to him is why an expressivist couldn't simply adopt his theory of the context.

crucial. So, here is a picture of language and communication that treats the semantic context-dependent interpretation of an expression as independent of the speaker's intention but does assume that when we try to communicate we eventually are engaged in trying to read each other's minds and using the expressions that we produce as evidence about each other's state of mind. This is a picture of a possible view that would be compatible with a view of context as mind-independent and with an expressive theory of communication.

Since this concession seems easily available to the expressivist, Gauker's argument fails to undermine the expressive theory. Nowhere in his paper does he spell out how it is exactly that a theory that sees linguistic communication as a matter of a speaker choosing words to convey the content of his or her thoughts to the hearer is committed to the assumption that the determination of the content of linguistic expressions in a context has to be sensitive to the speaker's state of mind. I can't see any logical connection here.

Unless this is a slippery slope. Maybe for any reference to thought processes in communication, there is an argument that such reference is not needed. Then maybe we should never refer to thoughts when we theorize about communication. But that is a far stronger conclusion than any that we can safely draw from Gauker's example.

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