

# Underdeterminacy & Attitude-reports<sup>\*</sup>

*Thomas Hodgson*

## Abstract

In this paper I examine an argument that there is a serious tension between the claim that for natural languages linguistic meaning underdetermines what is said and the relational analysis of attitude-reports. I conclude that it is possible to avoid the tension by adopting a pluralism about meaning and expression.

*Keywords:* pragmatics, semantics, attitude-reports, philosophy of language

## 1 Introduction

This paper is a contribution to the project of thinking through the issues that arise where contemporary work in philosophy of language and linguistics meet. I will be engaging with an argument that takes some of the things now widely believed among those who follow developments in pragmatics and alleges that these theses are in tension with positions held by philosophers of language on another issue namely the semantics of propositional attitude-reports. I take as my starting point recent work by Ray Buchanan in which he has alleged that ubiquitous underdeterminacy of expressed content by natural language semantics should lead to a revision of our views on meaning, communication, and the semantics of propositional attitude-reports. I will argue that in all three cases there are relatively conservative modifications to the standard view that will allow for the accommodation of underdeterminacy. In particular I think that one of the key claims of Buchanan's paper, that the semantic-values of 'that'-clauses are not propositions, can be refuted. My strategy for doing so is to give an outline of such a semantics compatible with what I take to be the genuine insights of his work.

Before I begin I would like to issue a disclaimer. It is hard to say anything that touches on the semantics/pragmatics distinction that is not extremely controversial. This is particularly unfortunate because theorists sometimes motivate their interest in that distinction by suggesting that getting clear about it will have instrumental value for some other area of philosophy (or even for something outside philosophy entirely). For one example of this sort of claim see (King and Stanley 2007, 133–135). If anything it is harder to discuss those things that are somehow related to the semantics/pragmatics debate than it was before the explosion of interest in the topic. My focus in this paper is what I will be calling *theory of communication*. While it is closely related to what is discussed in the semantics/pragmatics literature my goals here are largely independent of drawing that distinction. The point of this disclaimer is to make it clear that I am doing my best to be as neutral as possible about the most controversial parts of the semantics/pragmatics debate. My aim is to discuss some interesting issues about the study of language that do not rely on particular views in the semantics/pragmatics literature but that do arise from thinking about the idea that motivate theorists working on that debate.

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With the warning out of the way I will give a summary of what I will be arguing for in this paper. The goal is to investigate the consequences of the thesis that linguistic meaning underdetermines communicated content. I will show that some arguments that purport to show that this underdeterminacy has very radical consequences do not show it. That part of the paper is conservative and takes the form of looking in some detail at these arguments. I also make a positive proposal: Philosophers of language and linguists should adopt a model of meaning and communication where particular utterances are used to mean a collection of things, and to express them. I will argue that this follows from the sort of underdeterminacy that was supposed to motivate the arguments I reject. That, I contend, is the real lesson of those arguments.

The upshot is that underdeterminacy is extremely important. Formal languages such as predicate logic don't exhibit it, at least they can easily be constructed so as to avoid it. But, so many theorists now believe, every natural language necessarily exhibits it. It would be very worrying for those of us who identify as philosophers of language if it turned out that claims we took to be central to our investigations of language as such turned out to be applicable only to artificial languages that deliberately abstracted away from an important feature of natural language. I will argue that this conclusion would be an overreaction. Whether or not we should ultimately accept either underdeterminacy or the theses that have been claimed to be in conflict with it, there is no good argument that one cannot. That being said, I think that in fact underdeterminacy and the relevant theses about meaning and communication are all true.

## 2 Theory of communication

How to theorise about (linguistic) communication is a central concern of philosophy of language and linguistics. I will talk about *communication theorists* in what follows to denote the theorists in those fields that have that project. Such theorists are motivated by an obvious fact: People do, or at least attempt to do, something called communicating. As a rough first pass we might say that they communicate successfully when they succeed in alerting their conversational partners to the fact that they intend them to entertain a certain thought, by getting those partners to recognise that intention as being behind the uttering of certain sentences.

This kind of picture is not to be the only way to think about communication. Suppose a theorist were to contend that we should think of communication in terms of the encoding of the speaker's thoughts in a language, which can then be decoded by her audience. Assuming a mutually known method of encoding and decoding there is no scope for speaker intention to play a role. I take it that the considerations against this are largely empirical, this does not seem to be how creatures like us do actually communicate. These considerations are also the ones that motivate the underdeterminacy thesis that I will be concerned with in this paper. In what follows I will be assuming that some version of the intention-recognition story is right for roughly these reasons.

Assuming that an intention based model is to be adopted, various terms of art are needed. For instance, many *Gricean* communication theorists think that the essential next step is to make use of a technical term *non-natural meaning* as introduced by H. P. Grice in (Grice 1957). This is supposed to capture a special sort of meaning that attaches to linguistic acts of communication and distinguishes them from merely natural signs of various phenomena. Furthermore, in order to have a fully satisfying theoretical account of what is going on in cases of communication, it seems natural to introduce definitions of the *content* of an utterance and criteria for its *success* as an act of communication. One way to introduce the

notion of a content is to appeal to *propositions*. For my present purposes a proposition is just the thing a sentence means on a particular occasion. They are kept distinct from sentences in order to account for the fact that (i) several sentences can mean the same thing; and (ii) that one sentence can mean different things on different occasions. Successful communication can then be defined in terms of intention-recognition where the objects of the intentions are propositions.<sup>1</sup> This sort of approach is not limited to Griceans. It is the part of the Gricean programme that has been most widely accepted, so even those who argue against modern neo-Griceans are committed to something like this general picture.<sup>2</sup>

Buchanan sets out what he calls the *standard view* in (Buchanan 2010). This is a view very much in the spirit of the one I have been describing. On p. 342 he writes “At the core of the standard view are two basic assumptions, *Content* and *Success*[.]” He formulates them as follows:

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

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

Buchanan’s paper covers a lot of ground. Firstly, he makes an argument that, given certain plausible assumptions about the way natural languages work, at least one of (CON) and (SUC) is false. Secondly, He argues that this undermines traditional accounts of meaning. Finally, he makes some suggestions about how to reform the theory of communication. Part of his reform is a wholesale change in the way we should think about the propositions expressed by propositional attitude reports. Buchanan’s argument is extremely interesting and I will present a version of it in this paper that I think is indeed fatal to the standard view as formulated. I will argue that it is not fatal to a reformulation that preserves the spirit. Buchanan also claims that his argument shows that we must revise another aspect of the theory of communication. Following Grice he gives the following definition of *meaning* (in both Buchanan’s paper and mine ‘meaning’ always denotes *non-natural meaning* in roughly Grice’s sense):<sup>3</sup>

(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 recognise her intention (i), at least in part, on the basis of the fact that she uttered U.

I will assess Buchanan’s argument against taking (M) to be an acceptable theoretical definition of meaning. I will argue that his argument once again shows that we must reform rather than reject the traditional notion.

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<sup>1</sup>The nature and role of propositions is the subject of much discussion among philosophers of language. Exploring the issues is beyond the scope of this paper. I think it fair to say that there is a whole paradigm in cognitive science, philosophy of mind and language, and linguistics that is based on this sort of view of content and success. See Schiffer (2006) and Soames (2011) for surveys that make strong claims for the framework.

<sup>2</sup> In particular I have in mind here *relevance theorists*. They are directly in conflict with modern neo-Griceans on many points, but not this one. For the classic statement of their ideas and a recent survey see Sperber and Wilson (1995) and Wilson and Sperber (2004) respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Buchanan gives three different formulations in the course of his paper. My (M) is his (M\*) from Buchanan (2010, 343).

My strategy in this paper will be as follows. In §3 I will present a version of Buchanan's argument that, if sound, will trouble a variety of different sorts of theory. I will accept for the sake of argument that it is sound because I am interested in its consequences. I will argue in the remainder of that section that the most troubling upshot of the argument is that it denies two plausible principles of traditional theories of attitude reports that I call *specification* and *propositionalism*, following Kent Bach's terminology. This discussion is necessary in order to block the objection that it would be simpler to deny propositionalism than to take on the revisionary burden. In §4 and §5 I will describe and defend my own view. In brief, I think that Buchanan has pointed out an important and often overlooked fact that the theory of communication must deal with. I argue that my way of dealing with it is better than Buchanan's not only because it is less revisionary but also because it introduces fewer novel theoretical concepts than his proposal. Not only does my view posit fewer entities, it also preserves some appealing principles about attitude reports that have motivated philosophers of language to adopt a relational analysis of such constructions.

### 3 Buchanan's argument

One way to think of Buchanan's argument is as applying to particular cases and then being generalised. The case he gives most attention to is

- (1) Every beer is in the bucket.

He gives a short dialogue in order to fix some context for the utterance:

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.' (Buchanan 2010, 347)

Here is my formulation of Buchanan's argument in a generalised form:

1. The utterance of (1) was an instance of successful communication.
2. So, the audience must have entertained the proposition the speaker meant. (From CON and SUC.)
3. So, there is a proposition such that it is a necessary condition for successful communication that the audience entertained it. (From (1).)
4. But, there is no such proposition.
5. So, we must deny (1) or (2). (From (3) and (4).)
6. It is better to deny (2). The conjunction of (CON) and (SUC) entails (2), so we must deny at least one of them too.

Some work needs to be done in order to motivate (4). Why is there no such proposition? The answer that Buchanan gives is that this falls out from the commitments of contemporary theories of communication. In that case the theorists who advance these theories should realise that they are saying something extremely radical. I will describe Buchanan's point in the next subsection and explain why I think it can be taken even further than he does.

#### 3.1 Against the standard view

Buchanan asks us to consider a theory of communication that holds that some or all of the sentences we utter do not have a proposition determined as theory content in context by the semantic rules of the language. Instead of nothing at all, what is determined is a (*propositional*) *template*. Buchanan argues that premise (4) of his argument against the standard view will be true if that is the case for (1). He suggests that the propositional template for (1) is TEMP:

(TEMP) [The  $y$ :  $\text{Bucket}(y) \ \& \ \_ \ y$ ] ( $\forall x$ :  $\text{Beer}(x) \ \& \ \_ \ x$ ] ( $x$  is in  $y$ ))

I will follow Buchanan in referring to this sort of thing as a *template*. Some theorists with this sort of view call such things *propositional radicals*, *propositional skeletons*, or *propositional schemata*. For the purposes of this paper there are no important differences between these notions.

It helps to have a set of propositions in mind when thinking about the variety of contents that are compatible with such templates as TEMP. Here is a list Buchanan gives:

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

I will refer to this list as P(ropositions) 1 through 6 in the following. These are all propositions that are compatible with TEMP in the context of utterance specified.<sup>4</sup> For simplicities sake I will take it that these are all the compatible propositions.

There are several things to say about defending premise (4) by appealing to propositional templates. The first is that what has been offered is a thesis about communication that entails (4). Denying that thesis is not the same as denying (4). So the problem is not limited to those who endorse the template view. I will show that some who explicitly do not endorse it are still within the scope of Buchanan's argument.

Many theorists do endorse some version of the template view for some class of sentences. Anybody who endorses it for any sentence will be vulnerable to a version of Buchanan's argument that uses just that sentence as its problem case. In order to be specific I will focus on one thesis defended by Robyn Carston called *underdeterminacy* (U). Carston defends (U) formulated as follows in Carston (2002, 19):

(U) Linguistic meaning underdetermines what is said.

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<sup>4</sup>Buchanan's view allows for cases where e.g. the set of beers Tim and Chet bought is not identical with the set that they will serve at the party. That means that even on a Russellian view of propositions P1–P6 can express different propositions. Buchanan has a Fregean metaphysics of content according to which the constituents of propositions are Fregean senses, so he will have the non-identity of P1–P6 trivially because the senses will be distinct.

Both *linguistic meaning* and *what is said* are terms of art. I follow Carston in taking the former to be a property of sentences in contexts, namely the thing they encode relative to that context as a result of the values assigned to their parts and the compositional rules of the language they belong to. The latter I take to be the proposition(s) that speakers of the language take to be communicated, or expressed, by the utterance of the sentence in context. What (U) tells us is that the composition of the meanings of the parts does not determine the proposition expressed by the whole. On the other hand, on Carston's view and every other sensible view, it does constrain the meaning of the whole. For example, take

(2) This steak is raw.

Relative to some context the proposition expressed may be that the steak in question is raw\*, which is the property of being not quite uncooked but insufficiently so to eat. The lexical item 'raw' does not encode this property, it has been modulated in context so that the proposition expressed is the one indicated. The speaker could not have been taken to express just anything by that utterance but she can be taken to have expressed one of a number of things that are compatible with the linguistic meaning of the sentence uttered. What is going on here can be called modulation of the meaning of 'raw.' Just how this is brought about and what the constraints are on such processes is where a lot of the action is in the kind of detailed semantics/pragmatics interface theorising that I am reluctant to get too involved with. Two relevant discussions that advance Carston's view or one very sympathetic to it are Carston (2004) and Hall (2008).

Underdeterminacy is a radical thesis but at the same time it is rather mainstream among theorists of communication. If it is true then there will be problem cases for the standard view, and there will still be problem cases if there is only a restricted sort of underdeterminacy in the language. By *restricted underdeterminacy* I mean simply that some sentences have the relevant properties. This would amount to saying that linguistic meaning sometimes underdetermines what is said. I am going to grant in what follows that at least the restricted underdeterminacy thesis is true.

I think it is worth noting that it is possible to get the sort of problem case that motivates the defence of premise (4) even if the template view is completely rejected. I will briefly discuss a view defended by Herman Cappelen & Ernie Lepore and called by them *minimalism*. I will illustrate my discussion with their approach to quantifier domain restriction (QDR) in order to make the best connection with Buchanan's argument.

One way to summarise Cappelen & Lepore's view is to present it as the claim that every sentence of English expresses a particular minimal proposition on every occurrence of use unless it contains context-sensitive expressions. If it does contain context-sensitive expressions, then the sentence expresses a proposition on each occasion of use but maybe not the same proposition. This is the view defended in (Cappelen and Lepore 2005). In that work they also defend the claim that very few sentences are context-sensitive because only a very restricted class of *indexical expressions* are. In later work Cappelen and John Hawthorne adopt a different view on that question but he still does not accept that there are such things as templates (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009). For Cappelen's views on templates see (Cappelen 2007). For another view that is in my terms minimalist see (Borg 2004). According to the minimalist view the minimal proposition expressed by a sentence without context-sensitive constituents just is the proposition that it expresses in all contexts. The minimal proposition expressed by (1) will be that every beer is in the bucket. This is so even in a context where the audience will naturally take the speaker to be trying to communicate about

a certain group of beers and a particular bucket out of the many that exist. This feature of the view means that the point I want to make about minimalism will also apply to views that are not strictly speaking minimalist but which do claim that the semantic value of (1) in context is an unrestricted proposition. The view defended by Kent Bach in his response to Jason Stanley and Zoltán Szabó's work on quantifier domain restriction is of this sort, see (Stanley and Szabó 2000; Bach 2000).

This minimalist story by itself would not allow for problem cases. They arise when another claim is added to it which is called by Cappelen & Lepore *speech act pluralism*. This is the view that more than one proposition is expressed by an utterance of a sentence in context. I will not go in to the arguments for the claim here. The important point is that the move is made to allow just the sort of propositions listed in P1–P6 to be communicated by an utterance of (1). Otherwise the theory would predict that the minimal proposition is what is communicated, which is simply false. Once the minimalist has accepted that propositions such as Buchanan's P1–P6 can be expressed by an utterance of (1) she must accept the kind of generality and indifference that motivates premise (4) of the argument presented. Note that the minimalist cannot retreat to the idea that communication is successful just in case the minimal proposition is entertained. That is not sufficient in the problem case Buchanan sets up because the minimal proposition is that every beer is in the bucket. This obviously absurd proposition is not what the speaker wants his audience to entertain. Merely entertaining that proposition would constitute communicative failure.

The points made above about minimalism follow from a very general point about pragmatic effects on what is said. The calculation of the semantic value of an expression can be seen as the product of demonstrative reasoning only if it is fully controlled by the semantics of the language and if the effects of context are available to both speaker and audience. If there are pragmatic effects that are of a piece with the calculation of implicatures then there enters in to the picture a sort of non-demonstrative inference to the best explanation. Those theorists who rely on either implicature, or who avoid minimal propositions in favour of a pragmatically modulated content as what is said are committed to this point. This means that *inter alia* Kent Bach, Robyn Carston, and François Recanati are all committed to it. For Recanati's views on the matter see (Recanati 2004a). The use of such reasoning enters in to the minimalists' pluralistic account of what is said as well. I have used minimalism as an example because it is the view in the literature which is furthest from relying on templates. This shows that the particular claims about TEMP as the semantic-value of (1) are inessential to Buchanan's main point.

It would be nice to be able to say that every possible theory of communication will have the necessary features to generate the problem cases. The weaker claim that any theory that can account for certain basic facts about English and its speakers (with the hope that features of human natural languages are being picked up on) will have the features that generate problem cases would be almost as good. I don't take myself to have established that. That is not just because I cannot claim to have considered every possible theory, but because it is debatable whether the theory actually held by so-called *indexicalists* generates the problem. The kind of view I have in mind is that defended by Jason Stanley and several collaborators in the papers collected in Stanley (2007). His view is that the semantic values of sentences in context are propositions, the pragmatic influence in which is limited to the fixing of values of variables found in the syntax of the sentences expressing them. I will return to this issue in §5.1, where I will suggest the possibility of raising an analogous worry to Buchanan's for that kind of view.

The key point of the preceding discussion is that speakers will make utterances in the full knowledge that pragmatic processes will partially determine the interpretation arrived at. Given the nature of these processes there will be more than one outcome compatible with the utterance made and the context. The speaker will typically be indifferent between these different interpretations. I take this as a kind of hypothesis about the required psychological state of the speaker given that she is under no illusions about how her language works and that the communication is successful. This last point can be justified by pointing out that if the speaker is not indifferent between the propositions that can be derived by the processes she knows will be employed that she should not have uttered what she did. I will elaborate on these points in §4.

I think that theorists of many persuasions should accept that the argument I set out based on Buchanan's is a good argument against the standard view as formulated by Buchanan. I think that that by itself should not worry us too much. This is because there is no reason to be committed to (CON) and (SUC) as they stand. For instance, here is an alternative to (SUC):

(SUC') Understanding a speaker's utterance U requires (minimally) entertaining what U expresses and then entertaining something compatible with her communicative intentions.

The conjunction of (CON) and (SUC') does not entail premise (2) of Buchanan's argument. Therefore that argument is not an argument against this formulation of the standard view. I think that a debate over whether this is a minor revision or a minor reformulation of the standard view would be merely terminological. I would happily concede either claim.

(SUC') is extremely schematic as it stands, although it is arguably no less schematic than (SUC). All that has been altered is the requirement for uniqueness. Having that requirement leads to trouble, so dropping the requirement will presumably avoid the trouble. In order to make the proposal clearer it will be helpful to go through what is being claimed about the case Buchanan discusses.

The speaker in this case has a communicative intention. He makes an utterance, in this case an utterance of the sentence

(1) Every beer is in the bucket.

The audience comes to entertain one or more propositions on the basis of hearing the utterance, working out its linguistic meaning and performing whatever pragmatic inferences are prompted by the context in order to arrive at a hypothesis about the communicative intentions of the speaker. Given that these processes, which are needed to restrict the domain of the quantifier and complete the definite description, are pragmatic there will be several hypotheses compatible with the evidence. I have presented P1—P6 as a idealisation of this complexity. The intention that the speaker has must be one that he could have expected his audience to be able to fix on using his utterance as evidence. Otherwise he could not have legitimately formed the intention to communicate. That rules out the possibility that he intended to communicate one of P1—P6, e.g. P2, in particular. He must have had an intention directed towards all of P1—P6. But that intention cannot just be the ordinary intention to communicate them all. If it were, then the intention would be thwarted if the audience only entertained some subset of the propositions. This is just not an accurate description of the case. At least that's what Buchanan claims and I agree. In the next section I will present an option for thinking about the special kind of intention required.

*Compatibility* is being used here is a slightly restricted sense. It is the sense in which each of P1—P6 are compatible with the linguistic meaning of the utterance. That only certain propositions are compatible restricts the communicative intentions that can be expressed by uttering such a sentence. Compatibility with linguistic intentions in the sense of (SUC') is therefore stronger than mere consistency with them. Entertaining something compatible with the speaker's communicative intentions requires the audience to entertain something compatible with the linguistic meaning of the utterance. In the case I have used as my example that means entertaining one of P1—P6, which is the result that the reformulated principle is intended to capture.

In this section I have concluded that there will be problem cases for the view Buchanan attacks and for a deep reason. The claim that speakers have communicative intentions towards only one proposition that they expect their audiences to identify cannot be true of those who use a language that exhibits underdeterminacy. Buchanan's argument is a very good one against (CON) & (SUC), because that standard view builds in uniqueness in the formulation of (SUC). But it is no argument at all against (CON) & (SUC'). So far it looks as if the revisionary implications of the argument have been small because (SUC') is not a particularly radical departure. In the next two subsections I will look at some cases that seem to be far more serious.

I suppose that some theorists might take uniqueness to be a sort of datum. I would reply that this begs the question against the view that I will develop in the course of this paper. If such a view is otherwise acceptable I can see no reason to insist on uniqueness, especially as Buchanan's argument refutes a view that entails uniqueness.

### 3.2 Against meaning

Grice famously gave an intention based account of meaning. Here is an early formulation:

“A meant [non-naturally] something by  $x$ ” is (roughly) equivalent to “A intended the utterance of  $x$  to produce some effect in an audience by means of the recognition of this intention[.]” (Grice 1957, 385)

There have been various attempts at interpreting and reformulating this principle, both by Grice himself and by those who have inherited his project. Some of this work is discussed in Neale (1992). I think it is fair to say that most of those working in the field see this 1957 formulation as an essential insight that needs to be refined rather than replaced by their own contributions.<sup>5</sup>

Buchanan formulates his principle (M) along Gricean lines, but unlike most other theorists he then presents an argument against it. His argument is essentially the same argument that he makes against the standard view.

Recall (M):

(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

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<sup>5</sup>The sort of account of speaker meaning given here in terms of intention recognition is common but not quite ubiquitous. Wayne Davis has defended a quite different account where the relevant intentions are to express beliefs (Davis (1992). Buchanan cites work by Davis in fn. 7 of his paper as a way for a neo-Gricean to reformulate the standard view. The relevant work is (Davis 2002).

utterance, (ii) A recognise her intention (i), at least in part, on the basis of the fact that she uttered U.

The argument goes much as the one against the standard view:

1. The utterance of (1) was an instance of successful communication.
2. So, the audience must have entertained what the speaker meant.
3. So, there is a proposition such that the speaker intended the audience to entertain it on the basis of recognising the speaker's utterance as expressing the intention to cause the audience to entertain that proposition. (From (M).)
4. But, there is no such proposition.
5. So, we must deny (1) or (3). (From (3) and (4).)
6. It is better to deny (3) than (1) and (M) entails (3) so we must deny (M).

The defence of (4) is the same as in the previous argument. I should note that in this argument (2) is unsupported. I think it is justified for all those who think that the notion of meaning (in the roughly Gricean sense) has a theoretical role to play in the theory of communication. That means that it will do the traditional Gricean theorist no good to deny this premise of my formulation of Buchanan's argument. What we are left with is a kind of counterexample to (M) as a proposed definition aimed at elucidating our pretheoretical notion of meaning. We know that meaning is important, but when we look closely at a clause formulating the principle and compare it to some cases that arise in the interpretation of natural languages we find the formulation wanting. The argument brings out the way that it is unsuccessful.

Looked at that way the problem does not seem so bad. After all, this is not an argument for scepticism about meaning because nobody who is a meaning sceptic will think that the argument is sound. The problem is with formulating (M) in such a way that it requires that there is a unique proposition meant by an utterance. The obvious solution is to reformulate (M) so that it does not make this requirement.

I'm now going to give such a reformulation. Before I do so I want to make a brief point about what I take myself to be doing. I take myself to be engaged in a conversation about how best to introduce a term of art into the theory of communication that allows theorists to sharpen their intuitive understanding of the term 'meaning' in such sentences as

- (3) Tim meant that every beer that Tim and Chet will serve to their guests is in the bucket of ice in the backyard.

If we grant the points about indifference that arose in my discussion of the standard view then it follows that there were a range of propositions compatible with the intention that Tim made manifest to Chet through his utterance. Let's suppose that all the propositions from P1–P6 were among them, and so the one reported in (3) was too.

What is required is a way to accommodate the required sort of indifference in an account of speaker-meaning. Such an account must make (3) come out as true but, as we have seen, were it to make (3) true while making alternatives to (3) using other members of P1—P6 false then it will not to justice to the kind of communicative intentions that the users of languages

exhibiting underdeterminacy must actually have. My approach to making the required reformulation is to deploy a special sort of intention. Fortunately I do not have to start from scratch, because there is already a suitable notion around in the literature on underdeterminacy and communication. I hope to make the points I need without taking on too many commitments about the nature of intentions and empirical claims about human psychology. The following sketch is supposed to illustrate the possibility of a certain sort of approach while acknowledging that a lot of work would need to be done to fill in the details.

In earlier work with Gary Ostertag on the problem of underdeterminacy as it relates to definite descriptions, Buchanan introduced the useful notion of a *sloppy-intention* or *s-intention*:

Thus, in uttering *g* [(‘The guy’s late’)], *S* didn’t mean, indeterminately or otherwise, any description-theoretic proposition. Nevertheless, *S* would, if asked to be more explicit, offer any one of a number of such propositions. For example, though in uttering *g* *S* didn’t mean that the author of *Smells and Tickles* is late, he would be happy if *A* would, on the basis of this utterance, come to entertain this proposition. *S* would, however, be equally happy if *A* were instead to entertain the proposition that the guy reputed to have solved the mind-body problem is late, or that the guy we are waiting for is late, and so on. In general, *S*’s communicative intentions, whatever they are, will be satisfied if *A* entertains any one of these propositions. To give this phenomenon a label, call such communicative intentions *sloppy meaning-intentions* (henceforth we will use *s-means* for ‘sloppy means’ and *s-intends* for ‘sloppy intends’). (Buchanan and Ostertag 2005, 902)

Leaving aside the original debate in which Buchanan & Ostertag were engaging I propose to extract the notion of *s-intention* and use it to accommodate the indifference principle into an intention based theory of meaning.<sup>6</sup>

I don’t think that I need anything specific from the Buchanan & Ostertag idea of an *s-intention* in order to make my point. I have borrowed it because I think it is sufficient to do the work I want without building in any unwanted features that I would be better off without. At least one other notion in the literature on communication would do the same kind of work, namely that of *weak implicature*, or rather its more general form *weak communication*. Weak implicature is described in (Wilson and Sperber 2004, §4). In their relevance-theoretic theory, implicatures are generated in order to satisfy the standing assumption that communicating agents make utterances in order to express relevant propositions. Very roughly, if the linguistic meaning does not satisfy the expectation of relevance then a search for a implicated content is triggered. If a proposition *P* must be entertained in order to secure the relevance of the utterance then it is strongly implicated. If a range of propositions are such that any one of them would secure the relevance of the utterance but none of them are strongly implicated then they are all weakly implicated. If this notion is generalised to cases other than implicatures then a notion of weak communication could be formulated. I would be happy to run (*M'*) in these terms. My only reservation about doing so is that it might appear that the

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<sup>6</sup> Roughly speaking, Buchanan & Ostertag were interested in an objection to a certain view of definite descriptions. On that view an incomplete definite description is taken to be made complete in context. Buchanan & Ostertag are concerned to rebut the objection that there will be no unique completion available. They deny that that counts as an objection. I should note that the idea that the proposition expressed by an utterance that underdetermines communicated content expresses a range of propositions can also be found in that literature, see (Blackburn 1988). The discussion there is limited to definite descriptions.

view is then committed to a relevance theoretic account of other issues. I would prefer to remain neutral.<sup>7</sup>

Here is a first attempt at using a notion of indifferent and general intention in an account of speaker meaning:

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

If this is on the right lines then the revisions that need to be made in the theory of meaning to accommodate Buchanan's points are fairly minimal.

This reformulation of the account of speaker-meaning has an obvious consequence. Speakers can mean a whole range of propositions when they utter sentences. They mean everything compatible with the intention that they are attempting to have their audience recognise. This amounts to a proliferation of meant propositions. I take this to be a welcome consequence of the view, and I will rely on it in §4 when I discuss the semantics of attitude-reports.

Of course the notion of an s-intention needs to be spelled out in order to make something like (M') work. The central idea is that there are sorts of intention that are satisfied by several states of affairs. The kind of case I am thinking of is one where we think that the overall psychological state of the subject warrants a certain intention attribution. The intention might be *to have a cup of tea*. For the sake of argument grant that this intention is propositional, i.e. that it is a state relating the subject to the proposition that she have a cup of tea. Suppose that for a particular subject Anne the intention in question is such that it will be satisfied if Anne has a cup of tea in a red cup, or a blue cup. Which of the following are then true?

1. Anne intends to have a cup of tea.
2. Anne intends to have a cup of tea in a red cup.
3. Anne intends to have a cup of tea in a blue cup.

The obvious thing to say is that (1) is true, and so are (2) and (3). But on the interpretation on which they're true it does not follow that Anne's intentions are thwarted unless she gets both a red cup *and* a blue cup. She has the sort of intention that can be satisfied several ways and she will typically be indifferent between them. This makes it natural to use the notion of an s-intention, the sort of intention that one has towards a proposition when its truth is sufficient for the realisation of one's intention but not necessary. For this sort of case, which I will call *boring* cases, there is an obvious alternative to the description in terms of s-intentions. After all, the proposition that Anne has a cup of tea can be made true in many ways. So perhaps the best description is that Anne has an intention towards that proposition and only that proposition. In that case (1) is true and (2) and (3) are false. Nothing much seems to turn on which option is adopted for this case.

For at least one reason the case used by Buchanan is an *interesting* case. Interesting cases are those where the re-description that eschews s-intentions will not keep the same objects of both the intention and s-intention. On Buchanan's view the only objects that can be intended to be communicated are not propositions. I propose that propositions can be the objects of

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<sup>7</sup>I'd like to thank Robyn Carston for drawing this option to my attention.

communicative s-intentions. The appeal to s-intentions is supposed to allow for that distinction between our views to be made. The view stands in need of clarification and further defence. My point here is that there is an option for keeping the objects of communicative intentions as propositions as long as the intentions are s-intentions. One could get the same result simply by redefining the notion of intention so that it allowed for the right kind of generality and indifference. The key point is the generality and the indifference, which is supposed to be captured by the move from (M) to (M'). Once generality and indifference of intention are captured by an intention based account of speaker-meaning then the mere fact of that indifference and generality cannot be part of an argument against the intention based account. Once (M) is reformulated the argument against the intention-based account will not go through, premise (3) can be denied.

### 3.3 Against propositionalism & specification

I have now discussed two of the three claims made by Buchanan in his paper. I have concluded that there are responses available to those who want to preserve the spirit of the views that are criticised there. The third and final argument is perhaps the most interesting. It has extremely radical consequences if it is sound. I will show that it can be resisted, but only by adopting a view that is itself somewhat novel and radical. I take the argument for that view to be the real lesson to be learnt from Buchanan's investigation of underdeterminacy.

Buchanan makes a radical proposal towards the end of his paper, one that he acknowledges takes him into quite speculative territory. I will set out the point he makes in this subsection. In §4 I will continue in the spirit of Buchanan's inquiry by offering an alternative response to the points he makes. I would like to explicitly limit the scope of my discussion before I begin it. Buchanan is committed to a Fregean metaphysics of content. The points he argues for may well follow from that view of content. As it happens I reject it, but I accept that the argument from it to Buchanan's conclusion is valid. I will not argue against the Fregean metaphysics here.<sup>8</sup>

*Specification* (S) is a controversial thesis about the semantics of attitude verbs first formulated under that name, or more fully as the *specification assumption*, by Kent Bach. In fact he formulated three theses that were supposed to be individually plausible but jointly to lead to Frege's famous puzzles:

*Relationalism*: Belief reports express relations between persons and propositions.

*Propositionalism*: The semantic value of a 'that'-clause is a proposition.

*Specification Assumption*: Belief reports specify belief contents, i.e., to be true a belief report must specify a proposition the person believes. (Bach 1997, 222)

One way for (S) to be false would be for a situation with the following structure to occur: (i) S believes that P, (ii)  $\square$  S believes that Q  $\square$  is a true report of fact (i), and (iii)  $P \neq Q$ . This is exactly the sort of argument Delia Graff Fara gives in Fara (2003). I call this a *difference thesis* because it keeps relationalism while denying specification. Denying propositionalism

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<sup>8</sup> Buchanan is explicit about his Fregean commitments. In fn. 49 Buchanan cites the Fregean attitude report semantics found in Forbes (1987, 1990). He also cites other denials of specification such as Bach (1997) and Fara (2003). I think that those arguments can be responded to convincingly as well, but of course I will not do so here.

as well results on a stronger *difference-in-kind thesis*.<sup>9</sup> I use that term to denote the view that attitude reports express relations between persons and some entity other than a proposition. Specification will then be false because the belief report does not specify a proposition at all. On this way of looking at things, Buchanan is not committed to denying relationalism. On his view belief is still a matter of relation to propositions, and a belief-report expresses something about the propositions to which its subject is related. It is the latter two claims that he denies. On his view, which he takes to be motivated by underdeterminacy, the semantic-values of ‘that’-clauses are not propositions and in addition a true report does not attribute a unique proposition via specifying it. My first task will be to explain how he gets to that result.

Here are two examples of attitude reports from Buchanan’s paper (p. 362):

(4a) Chet said that George W. Bush lives in Washington.

(4b) Chet believes that George W. Bush lives in Washington.

Here is what he has to say about the examples:

[W]hile believing is a relation to propositions, the similarity between, for example, [(4a)] and [(4b)], is that in both reports the semantic value of the ‘that’-clause is a proposition-type, say  $\Psi$ . The crucial difference between *saying* and *believing* would then consist in the fact that, while [(4a)] is true just in case Chet said  $\Psi$ , [(4b)] is true if, and only if, Chet believes some proposition of the type  $\Psi$ . On this suggestion, the fundamental objects of our beliefs are **not** the contents of our speech acts.

(Buchanan 2010, 362–363)

I will rather formulate his point as the *propositional property thesis* (P):

(P) In both speech and belief reports the contribution of the ‘that’-clause to the proposition expressed by the report is a proposition-type.

If (P) is true then propositionalism and specification are false. I will follow Buchanan in using uppercase Greek letters as schematic letters for proposition-types. Here is how Buchanan defines the notion of a proposition type:

[T]he 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 [i.e. P1–P6] might be said to instantiate the proposition-type displayed in [(TEMP).]  
(Buchanan 2010, 357)

He then defines a further notion:

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.

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<sup>9</sup>There are other ways for propositionalism to be false. Recanati argues against it in (Recanati 2004). More generally, on a so-called *operator account* of attitude verbs it will be false. That’s a big topic that I will avoid. For a start on the issues see (Lewis 1998; King 2003; Ninan 2010). I will say that I think that there are defensible alternatives to the operator account.

(Buchanan 2010, 358)

I should note that while I will object to some revisionary ideas that employ the notion of a restricted proposition-type I have no quarrel with the idea that is being introduced. In fact I think it can usefully be adapted to fit with s-intentions and (M'). Given Buchanan's idea we can think of the restricted proposition-type as a set of propositions (i.e. the set that has the property). That set of propositions will be co-extensive with the set of propositions meant in the (M') sense. The claim I want to resist is the move to saying that such types are the semantic-values of 'that'-clauses, or that they are what we say.

Here is how I see the argument for (P) that starts with the fact of underdeterminacy. I think this is close to what Buchanan has in mind, although I am more concerned with the argument and responding to it than I am with faithfully capturing Buchanan's intentions. In the terms I have set things up the following contrast can be drawn between the traditional relational view and Buchanan's new proposal. According to the traditional view, belief is a matter of a subject standing in the belief relation to a proposition. The proposition expressed by

(5) Eve believes that that steak is raw.

might be represented as

(6)  $\langle\langle\text{Eve}, P\rangle, \text{BEL}\rangle$

where 'P' is a schematic letter for some suitable proposition. According to Buchanan's proposal this picture might be amended as follows: A sentence determines a proposition-type  $\Psi$ , which is the property shared by all and only those propositions compatible with the linguistic meaning of the sentence. This requires a second alteration because now the relation in question is not *belief*, but some other relation  $\text{BEL}^*$  that holds between subjects and  $\Psi$ s. This proposition expressed by (5) might now be represented by

(7)  $\langle\langle\text{Eve}, \Psi\rangle, \text{BEL}^*\rangle$

Someone attracted to this proposal might give the truth conditions of (7) stipulatively as

(8)  $\langle\langle\text{Eve}, \Psi\rangle, \text{BEL}\rangle$  is true iff  $\exists P(\Psi(P) \ \& \ \langle\langle\text{Eve}, P\rangle, \text{BEL}\rangle$

This is more complicated than the traditional idea, not just because there are new entities (proposition-types) but also because, while subjects believe propositions, the propositions expressed by belief reports do not relate them directly to propositions but to proposition-types. I should also note the obvious similarity between this toy account of the proposition expressed by (5) and the semantics given in Forbes (1987). This is intentional on my part and I hope it accurately captures Buchanan's idea.

Why should we analyse (5) as (7) rather than (6)? I take it that the idea is that no other proposal can handle the facts of underdeterminacy. Buchanan makes two distinct claims. Firstly that proposition types are the things that are said. That would follow if propositions were not the kind of thing that can be speaker-meant. I have argued in the previous two subsections that this is not so. There is no reason to think that the reformulated accounts of communicative success and speaker-meaning given there are refuted by underdeterminacy. In that case underdeterminacy does not refute the idea that propositions are the objects of sayings.

What about the second claim, namely that proposition-types are semantic-values of ‘that’-clauses in belief reports? Buchanan rejects that idea on the grounds that such ‘that’-clauses will not be able to specify a unique proposition to be attributed to the subject of the report. Given the relational semantics being used to analyse the sentence, some other object is required. The one he selects is that of a proposition-type. This motivates the analysis of (5) as (7).

This is where things stand: Buchanan suggests that the argument against the standard view of communication and of meaning gives us reason to adopt the sort of account I have sketched, one that is independent of the Fregean tendency in the metaphysics of content literature. I have suggested that conservative responses are possible to these arguments. If Buchanan’s argument against specification is to go through he must establish that there is no conservative response there either. One strategy would be to engage with the detail of that argument. I will take a different approach. In §4 I will set out a way to accommodate Buchanan’s central insight in a way that does not require the sort of proposal he makes. If I am granted that a simpler view is *ceteris paribus* a better one then it will follow that my view is better. As an additional benefit, the view I propose allows for the original motivations for the relational analysis of attitude-reports to be respected. Even if my proposal is no better than Buchanan’s, as long as it is a possible analysis and compatible with underdeterminacy the claim that underdeterminacy entails the denial of specification and propositionalism is refuted.

A full assessment of the motivations for the relational analysis would be beyond the scope of this paper. I will just present one popular idea. The simple thought is just that reports like (4a) and (4b) seem to stand in certain entailment relations. I repeat the reports for convenience:

(4a) Chet said that George W. Bush lives in Washington.

(4b) Chet believes that George W. Bush lives in Washington.

The truth of these reports seem to entail that there is something that Chet both said and believes. If the same sort of thing is the object of both Chet’s beliefs and sayings then we have a neat account of that fact. If that is not so, then we lack any convincing account. Of course there is a lot to be said about this simple thought. I present it only to give an idea of why a philosopher of language might want to keep the relational analysis if at all possible. My main point is that someone who is so inclined can do so, rather than being an endorsement of any particular motivation for doing so.

#### 4. Intention & Responsibility

In this section I will bring together my remarks about communicative intentions with the issue about attitude-reports raised in the preceding section. My goal is to give an outline of an account of the attitude reports that respects the relational analysis. This will show that Buchanan’s conclusions are not warranted by the observations he takes to motivate them.

Here is what I take to be the central issue that everything I am discussing here revolves around. As Buchanan points out, utterances of natural language sentences are made with intentions that are in a certain way both *general* and *indifferent*. Here is how he introduces the terms:

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 [(1).] (Buchanan 2010, 356)

I think that the term ‘fundamental problem’ is too loaded. I don’t think that there is a serious problem. I will call it the *fundamental fact*. I think this fundamental fact follows from the features of natural language I mentioned in §3.1. One way to approach the point I have in mind is through the following considerations. For simple formal languages it is well understood how to go about pairing up the formulae of the language with propositions. Following e.g. Scott Soames’ we can speak of formulae expressing a proposition relative to a context (and an assignment). I refer to Soames because he gives a complete system for a relatively rich formal language. The system has the power of first order logic with a belief predicate. The general idea can be extended to include modal operators and second order quantifiers. In such a framework it is perfectly acceptable to use a technical notion of *expression*. When it comes to natural languages this is much more problematic if expression is supposed to track the intuitive notion speakers of the language have of what is expressed or communicated by utterances of sentences.

The way in which the relationship between formulae (thought of as a disambiguated interpreted representations of sentences) and propositions expressed is to be complicated varies from theory to theory. Many views accept that in the case of natural languages the semantics of the language underdetermines what is said. The ‘slack’, so to speak, is taken up by one or another kind of pragmatic process which is why intentions are relevant and why those intentions must be s-intentions. They must be s-intentions because they must be recognisable by the audience and plain intentions just aren’t. Ordinary intentions would not be recognisable because an intention to express one possible pragmatic enrichment of an uttered sentence rather than another is not a legitimate communicative intention if both are possible enrichments. Communicative intentions have to be recognisable. I repeat that this is not supposed to be a claim that any theorist with broadly Gricean inclinations for the treatment of speaker-meaning would want to take issue with.

Given that we speak a language like that, we must go about communicating a certain way. When Chet utters (1) he has to consider not just his s-intentions but Tim’s capacity to recognise those s-intentions on the basis of his utterance. I take that to be equivalent to saying that Chet’s actual intentions are characteristically general and indifferent. I have claimed that the thesis I have called proliferation follows from this. Once it is recognised that a language is like that, the only way to give an intention based account of meaning and communication is to acknowledge that a number of propositions are meant. I will first elaborate on that consequence of the view, then I will apply it to attitude-reports.

I now want to fix ideas by talking about a case. I will use a new example. Take a sentence such as

(9) Aisha is ready.

I take it that everybody thinks that in some context this will be taken to express the proposition that Aisha is ready to go to the party, and in another it will be taken to express the proposition that Aisha is ready to take the bar exam. I will label these contexts C and C’ respectively. This might be explained by a theory that takes (9) to express a template that needs completion with an activity that Aisha is ready for, or it might be thought that there is such a thing as being ready *simpliciter* and the stronger proposition is a kind of implicature. The template story can be compatible with any theory of pragmatic enrichment. I think that all the same remarks will apply to e.g. ‘It is raining’ and other similar cases. A minimalist

story will involve the speech act pluralist idea that more than one proposition is expressed, both the minimal one that Aisha is ready and the stronger one e.g. that Aisha is ready to go to the party.

However it is to be explained there is the simple idea that that is how the utterance will be taken. I am using the notion of being taken to express in such a way that it allows for the fundamental fact, i.e. it may be taken to express any one of a number of propositions and if it can be so taken the utterer had better be prepared to accept any and all such interpretations. I certainly don't mean to use 'express' in a way that entails that all and only those propositions assigned to an utterance context pair by the semantics of the language are those expressed. I mean what a minimalist means by *what is (taken to be) said*, or what a relevance theorist means by *what is (taken to be) the explicature*. What I have in mind is the theoretically interesting idea of what is said that tracks the propositions that are communicated by utterances and are taken to be done so directly. The fundamental fact generalises to all utterances of all sentences of the kind of languages that humans learn as first languages because these languages do not determine all of what is said by such utterances.

My proposal is just that the recognition of the fundamental fact has to extend to attitude reporting sentences as well. Here are analogues of (4a) and (4b) that embed (9):

(10a) Emile: Eve said that Aisha is ready.

(10b) Emile: Eve believes that Aisha is ready.

I think that it is fair to assume that the sort of propositions that such reports are supposed to get their audiences to entertain are about the contents of the mental states of the subjects of the reports. That is common ground between those who deny specification and relationalism and those who accept them. The audience is supposed to be able to discern what is being said about the content of the subject's states from the content of the clause in construction with the complementiser 'that'.

Looking at attitude reports this way is not supposed to be particularly controversial. I intend to make only the following modest points: (i) The proposition expressed by an attitude report is about the subject's mental state and is determined in part by the TC of the report, (ii) as a matter of empirical fact the claim taken to be made about that state is sensitive not just to the semantic value of the TC but also what is said (if these differ). (i) is a truism and I will drop (ii) if it turns out that this is not so. One direction to take this line of research would be to think through in more detail the way contents derived pragmatically enter into the explicit content of attitude reports. This will be connected to the way in which these contents embed in other constructions. These issues are discussed in (Carston 2004). My conjecture is that something like the following will turn out to be true: When the content at issue is the kind that is generally associated with a sentence uttered in context, that content will end up in the proposition expressed when the sentence is in construction with an attitude verb.

If I have to drop (ii) then the situation would look very different concerning Buchanan's proposal and mine. Neither of our views would be tenable if it turned out that the template view was right for the unembedded sentences. Instead the right view would be a difference in kind thesis that built templates into the propositions expressed by attitude reports. If the minimalist view was correct then my view would have the advantage over Buchanan's because then a difference in kind thesis would also not be required. This is something of a digression because I think (ii) is right.

I want to make the following simple proposal for how to accommodate the fundamental fact for attitude-reports. Given a context  $C$  where the restricted propositional property for a sentence  $S$  is of a set  $\{P1, \dots, P6\}$  then a report that embeds  $S$  uttered in  $C$ , the restricted propositional property for the report will be  $\{\langle\langle S, P1 \rangle, BEL \rangle, \dots, \langle\langle S, Pn \rangle, BEL \rangle\}$ , where  $S$  is the subject of the report. Recognising that all these propositions were meant, and that they all relate subjects to propositions dispels the idea that there is a requirement to give the proposition expressed in terms of a relation to a propositional property.<sup>10</sup> Each of these propositions relates a subject to a proposition, not to a proposition-type.

The motivation for my idea is that a perfectly general observation about the consequences of speaking a certain sort of language needs to be kept in mind when considering the fragment of the language that embeds other sentences of that language. I have already argued that it is perfectly acceptable to think of speakers as having meant all the propositions compatible with their utterance. If the point holds for simple sentences then it holds for sentences that attribute propositional attitudes. I take it to be a feature of the view that nothing has to be added to it in order to handle attitude-reports as a kind of special case. Everything follows from the basic idea of speaker-meaning. That idea itself is traditionally Gricean as I have presented it. The only departure is that it allows for a proliferation of the propositions meant. It is no longer just the proposition that the speaker means, but the propositions that she means. This follows from the nature of the communicative intentions that she can form when using a language that exhibits underdeterminacy.

This concludes my assessment of Buchanan's arguments. The position I have arrived at can be summarised as follows. Underdeterminacy is a serious issue for traditional accounts of meaning and communication. One way to respond would be to abandon the traditional accounts. If they are abandoned then the relational analysis of attitude-reports must be abandoned as well. That option looks extremely costly. The alternative is a conservative reformulation of the traditional accounts. This allows for the relational analysis to be preserved. On this view the facts about underdeterminacy motivate a kind of speech act-pluralism that might be called conservative proliferation. A set of propositions are expressed by the utterance of sentences. These are constrained by the linguistic meaning of the uttered sentence. The main point in favour of this view is that it preserves the relational analysis.

I will finish this section by discussing a pair of related objections to my proposal which, I think, helps to clarify what I am committed to.<sup>11</sup> The first objection turns on the standards required for legitimate assertion of attitude reports. I will make my points with (5):

(5) Eve believes that that steak is raw.

According to Buchanan's proposal the proposition expressed by (5) is:

(6)  $\langle\langle \text{Eve}, \Psi \rangle, BEL^* \rangle$

I have suggested that the better treatment will represent the speaker as having meant in the relevant sense each of the following:  $\{\langle\langle \text{Eve}, P1 \rangle, BEL \rangle, \dots, \langle\langle \text{Eve}, Pn \rangle, BEL \rangle\}$ . Given

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<sup>10</sup> I have assumed for simplicity that 'to believe' and 'to say' make a complete and context-insensitive contribution to the proposition. Otherwise I would need to complicate matters by giving a longer list to set out the relevant restricted proposition-type. This is the position that a certain sort of contextualist will be in when they come to think about 'to know' in this framework. The essential point wouldn't change.

<sup>11</sup> I would like to thank Derek Ball and Torfinn Huvenes in particular for discussion of these points and a resulting clarification of my views.

that speakers are committed to what they mean, it might be thought that making such an assertion requires one to be committed to each of these propositions and therefore to the following conjunctive proposition:

(11)  $\langle\langle\text{Eve}, P_1\rangle, \text{BEL}\rangle \& \dots \& \langle\langle\text{Eve}, P_n\rangle, \text{BEL}\rangle$

The worry is that (11) is obviously stronger than (6). It entails it, but is not entailed by it. This would mean that on my proposal speakers are being held to higher standards. Typically the propositions they express are logically stronger than on Buchanan's proposal.

My response to this is just that I endorse the consequence. If a speaker really is indifferent between the expression of a set of propositions then she is irresponsible if she does not believe them all. My account captures this in a way that its rival does not. So this is not an objection to my view unless it can also be shown that my claim about the judged responsibility of speakers is false. I am happy to rest my case on it.

The second objection is related to the first, although it takes a somewhat different approach. It is accepted by many theorists that so-called *indirect disquotational speech reports* such as (5) and (10a) are in an important sense *easy*. Easiness is used as a diagnostic for context-sensitivity in (Cappelen and Lepore 2005). Also relevant is the new account of easiness in (Cappelen and Hawthorne 2009). It might be objected that I make the reports hard, because I take it that the reporter is committed to the subject having said all the propositions having the restricted propositional-property determined by the context of the report.

I have no strong theoretical commitment to easiness. I take it to be an empirical claim about the intuitions of speakers. The details of that debate are complicated.<sup>12</sup> That being said I do not think that easiness has to be rejected in order to accept the view I am proposing. All I am committed to is that the report is misleading. Here it is helpful to use the sort of example that Cappelen & Hawthorne like:

(12a) Aisha (in Aberdeen): Felicity went to a nearby beach.

(12b) Emile (in Sorrento): Aisha said that Felicity went to a nearby beach.

My first point is that this could be very misleading. It could be misleading in a case where the audience of the report will take Aisha to have said that Felicity went to a beach nearby to Aberdeen whereas she in fact said that she went to a beach nearby to Sorrento. It might be so misleading in a particular case that Emile would be considered to be extremely irresponsible. Nothing that the proponent of easiness wants to say, or can plausibly say, contradicts this point. I can therefore respond to the objector by saying that I am not denying easiness on any plausible reading of easiness. The data was not that reports will always to judged responsible. It is more like they are judged to be acceptable but incomplete.

Before leaving this objection I would also like to point out that nothing in my account contradicts the claim that the easy reports are in fact true, and for the reason that Cappelen & Hawthorne think that they are true. I will not give a full account of their view. The essential point is that they think that context-sensitive expressions that allow for easiness can do so

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<sup>12</sup> There are lots of interesting things to say about easiness, indirect disquotational speech reports, and the uses to which they are put by Cappelen & Lepore and Cappelen & Hawthorne. A relevant contribution to the debate is (Gross 2006). Cappelen & Lepore respond to it in Cappelen and Lepore (2006, §6). See also Gross' response to the response in (Gross 2008).

because they are *contextual parasites*. The semantic-value of the embedded clause gets to be fixed by the original context of utterance. That means that the report gets to be true, because the semantic-value of the clause is whatever value that utterance had as actually made.

Cappelen & Hawthorne argue that this is supposed to be a feature of how ‘nearby’ interacts with reports, arriving at it as a kind of inference to the best explanation of easiness. Their account preserves the truth of the report but truth does not guarantee responsibility. If Cappelen & Hawthorne are right about their parasitism story then I can preserve easiness in the same way if I choose.

## 5. Proliferation implemented

In §4 I gave an account of attitude reports that preserves the standard virtues of the relational analysis while accommodating what I chose to call the fundamental fact. The view was not developed there in much detail. Here I want to say some more about it, and compare it to some other proposals in some related philosophical and linguistic work.

Firstly I want to make a feature of the view explicit. The claim is not that a sentence relative to a context has more than one proposition as its semantic value relative to that context. I have argued for proliferation in what is expressed, in a limited class of cases and with certain restrictions. The argument is supposed to work for those who think that the sentence has either zero propositions as its content relative to a context, or one (minimal) proposition. The conclusion is supposed to be compatible with both those views and is not intended to replace either of the claims they make about semantic value in context. The view I have offered as conservative proliferation is the view that a utterance in context expresses all and only those propositions determined by the utterers s-intentions towards her audience. Those s-intentions are constrained by the semantic value of the sentence in context and by the fact that these are communicative s-intentions.

In §5.1 I will discuss a sort of view that would take issue with my claim and suggest an alternative. This view aims to proliferate contexts rather than contents expressed. In §5.2 I will discuss an approach that proliferates utterances. In both cases I will conclude that there is nothing to prefer in such an alternative.

### 5.1 Proliferation of contexts

In order to set out the issue here I need a rough and ready distinction between two ways that the term ‘context’ might be used in the literature I am engaging with. I take it that in one sense the context of utterance of an expression can be characterised as the situation in which the utterance was made. Features of the situation will include who made the utterance, when they made it, and where they were at the time. One term for this might be the *position* of the utterance. Fixing the utterance’s position is the kind of thing that the story Buchanan tells about context of utterance the utterance of (1) is supposed to fix.<sup>13</sup> The story is supposed to make clear that both the speaker and his audience will have mutual beliefs about which beers and bucket are in question. There is another notion one might find interesting, which is the *context of evaluation* as found in theories inspired by David Kaplan. The system LD in Kaplan (1989) is an example of the type. The idea is that such contexts are n-tuples, for instance speaker, time, location triples, that are mapped by the characters of expressions to contents. These notions of situation and context may or may not come apart substantively. One might think that every parameter in the context gets fixed by facts about the situation.

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<sup>13</sup>I take the term ‘position’ and the idea of *positional context* from Egan (2009).

One might also think that being in possession of all the facts about the situation allows one to know the values of these parameters. Depending on how exotic the parameters are, it might be that it is therefore hard to know which context an utterance is made in.<sup>14</sup>

This approach has been developed in many ways. According to the analysis of quantifier domain restriction presented by Stanley and Szabó the semantics for the language determines the proposition expressed by a sentence such as (1) relative to a context (Stanley and Szabó 2002). This is supposed to be an alternative to an account that relies on underdeterminacy, an approach that is called *indexicalism*. The central idea is that nouns share their nodes with a function variable and an index variable. When the variables are free the values are set by the context. Crucially for the analysis these variables can be bound by quantifiers if the variables are in the quantifiers' scopes. Part of the proposal is a syntactic analysis such that the logical form for (1) can be partially given as

(13) [NP [Det [Every]] [N [<beer, f(i)>]]]

Suppose one grants the theorist that  $[[\langle \text{beer}, f(i) \rangle]]$  relative to context  $C = [[\text{'beer'}]] \cap \{x: x \in c(f)(c(i))\}$ ,  $[[\text{'beer'}]] = \lambda x. x \text{ is a beer}$ , and that context sets values for  $f$  and  $i$  such that  $c(f)(c(i))$  is a subset of the beers that matches the content expressed by the speaker e.g. those in the bucket of ice in the garden. This semantics then predicts the right results. Assuming the only somewhat controversial claim that the values of variables are fixed before what is said is calculated it follows from this analysis that a full proposition gets assigned as the sentence's semantic value rather than a template. Unlike the minimalist proposal, the proposition varies from context to context.

It will still be possible to generate problem cases of the sort Buchanan appeals to. Given this semantics, (1) expresses different propositions in different contexts, where a context is what fixes the values of the relevant variables. If the context is fixed by the intentions of the speaker then, if the audience only has the sentence uttered to go on, then it follows that there are several propositions compatible with the intentions that the audience can discover from the utterance. If the context is a more public thing then the audience has the same sort of problem. She will not know which of a class of propositions the speaker has expressed. In no case is there scope to say that one of the propositions from the class is such that it is necessary that it be entertained for communication to succeed. At least there is no way that is not *ad hoc*. I take this to be another example where a view that does not fit the pattern of underdeterminacy also illustrates the fundamental fact.

There are things to be said for and against indexicalism as a treatment of quantifier domain restriction and as a general approach. Nothing I have to say here suggests that we should go one way or the other on that debate. My point is just that the indexicalist proposal does not avoid the issue raised by the case Buchanan uses to show the fundamental fact.

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<sup>14</sup>Egan (2009) argues that the situation does not determine the context in all cases, because the situation is the speaker's predicament and the context for a given utterance is partly fixed by the audience. In Kaplan's classic paper there are only three parameters and they are things that do seem to be easily available to the audience, knowledge of situation can be knowledge of context while keeping knowledge of context easy. When such things as speaker intentions are allowed into contexts this is less clear. One treatment that allows in the intentions is Stokke (2010). In general the various contextualist treatments of certain natural language phenomena will allow for more contextual parameters and a less mechanical connection between the situation and the context. See Glanzberg (2007) for discussion. The point I will return to is that there is a *prima facie* tension between rich contexts and easy identification of contents by an audience.

My view is that there is no very interesting difference between the view that says that (1) does not express a proposition in its context of utterance and one that says that it does, but that the audience has access to information that does not reduce the number of contexts that might be relevant to one.<sup>15</sup> That is not to say that there are not hard questions for the advocate of context-proliferation. One is whether they deny the claim about indifference and generality that Buchanan pushes. It is one thing to say that the utterance of (1) in a context that includes certain speaker intentions gives only P1 and another gives only P2 if it is clear that the speaker has some such intention. The less it is clear that she does, the less likely this is as a solution.

One way to avoid that worry would be to go for a more interesting version of context-proliferation that is formally different from the underdeterminacy and propositional-proliferation view. The approach I have in mind does not have the problem raised in the previous paragraph. Earlier in this section I suggested that there are two ways of thinking about a context of utterance, that might or might not come apart. I suggested a view where the positional context and the context of assessment do not come apart. Suppose that they do. In his Andy Egan has made a proposal about the semantics of certain indexicals in a system based Kaplan's but in which their content is set by both the utterer's context and that of the audience. The cases he uses to motivate the view are utterances such as

(14) Jesus loves you.

by a priest to a congregation. We are supposed to imagine a case where each of the congregants takes the priest to have asserted to her a singular proposition that is true just in case Jesus loves that particular congregant. (Crucially, the priest has not asserted that Jesus loves the group, or anything like that.) There are two important things to say about the proposal. Firstly, it is clear that the audience is setting a kind of context of assessment but is not changing the positional context. So these two things can come apart. Secondly, it is clear that at least in some sense the uttered sentence does not have a proposition determined by the speaker's context. There is something that looks formally like underdeterminacy going on in these cases according to Egan's treatment.

The issue now is whether proliferating these sorts of context in this way provides any kind of grip on the issue Buchanan is interested in and the more general issues in the theory of communication it leads in to. I am inclined to think that it does not. It is just not the case that what is going on is that each audience member is able to fix on one of  $\{P1, \dots, P6\}$  and that means that some parameter in the context of evaluation has been fixed by some feature of that audience member's. My conclusion is that this would be an interestingly different proposal to mine, but also one with very little to recommend it. The case I have been discussing is just not the kind of case that Egan's proposal helps with.

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<sup>15</sup> There are interesting ways to develop what might be called a *cloud of contexts* view and link it to a theory of assertion, retraction, and disagreement. See von Fintel and Gillies (2011). Towards the end of their §4 von Fintel & Gillies briefly discuss applying their view to quantifier domain restriction case. The central idea is that a class of expressions is used to put into play a class of related propositions. This is modelled formally with a set of contexts. All these propositions are available for uptake/denial, although according to the proposal only one will in fact be taken. On some cloudy views, perhaps my claim that context-proliferation is not interestingly different from proposition-proliferation is false. One issue in need of discussion is whether the cloudy context-proliferating view can account for the way in which speakers and hearers are indifferent.

My conclusion is that there is no reason to think that proliferating contexts will deal with the kinds of issues Buchanan raises. The problem just reappears for the identification for the correct notion of context.

## 5.2 Proliferation of utterances

Another possible alternative would be endorse proliferation of the utterances made. The thought here is that each utterance expresses at most one proposition, and the cases where it looks like more than one proposition is expressed are to be explained as cases where more than one utterance has been made. This could be offered as an alternative to the proposal I have made where the same utterance expresses several propositions. The alternative proposal could be fleshed out in several ways. Here are three possibilities which are distinguished by the way they make precise the notion of an *utterance*.

Firstly, one might think of an utterance as the making of certain sounds. This is certainly a notion in common use but it is also a bad fit with the idea that utterances are being proliferated. The speakers in the cases I am interested in clearly make only one utterance in this sense.

A second notion of *utterance* makes use of certain formal machinery. On this view there is a technical notion of a sentence, being the kind of thing that determines a function from contexts to contents, and a context. This notion of sentence is more restricted than just the thing uttered, because making the same sounds can be (part of) the utterance several different sentences on different occasions in cases of lexical and/or structural ambiguity. Utterances are thought of as sentence context pairs. If contexts are contexts of evaluation in the sense introduced in §5.1 then proliferation of utterances will amount to proliferation of contexts. All the same remarks I made in that section about that proposal will still apply. This point only holds if we hold the sentence fixed, but in the case I have been discussing there is no reason to think that a different sentence is involved. If the context is positional then, given that the same sentence is involved every time, there is nothing to proliferate. That is because nothing changes about the speaker's position.

A final way to type utterances is due to Egan. He proposes something that I will call the *conversational move test* and formulate as:

(CM) There is exactly as many utterances as there are conversational moves made.

Here is Egan's discussion:

It's not just context-sensitive vocabulary that one can use to express different propositions to different audiences. The con man says, "the money is in the bank", communicating to his dupe the false proposition that the money has been deposited in the financial institution, and to his confederate that the money's been buried by the side of the river. We can use ellipsis to the same effect—when I'm involved in two simultaneous conversations, I can use "I will" to communicate to one audience *that Egan will be at the party* and to another *that Egan will pay the cable bill on time this month*. In these cases, we haven't even got the same (syntactically individuated) sentences being directed at the different audience members. In the "bank" case, the con man's utterance to the dupe and to the confederate contain different lexical items, and in the "I will" case, the utterances I make to my two audiences contain different bits of elided material. In these cases, it's much more natural to say that the speaker's made one

utterance to one audience and a different utterance to another audience, than to say that the speaker's single utterance has got different constituent structures relative to different audiences. And, thinking of utterances as something like conversational moves, I find it much more attractive to say that the speaker's made two distinct *conversational moves*, rather than making a single move that has very different upshots for different audiences. And once we're multiplying utterances in the ambiguity and ellipsis cases, it seems fairly natural to do so in the context-dependence cases as well. (Egan 2009, 270)

If this is the test, then it is clear that it is negative in the case I have been discussing. That case has one audience member, and one sentence. To say that more than one conversational move is made would be bizarre. In that case I conclude that there is no proliferation of utterances.

In this section I have argued that there is only one way in which the utterance proliferation view can be made even *prima facie* plausible as a response to the case I am interested in. That one way amounts to proliferation of contexts of evaluation. Therefore utterance proliferation offers nothing new.

## 6. Conclusion

I will conclude with a brief recapitulation of my project in this paper. I took Buchanan's argument as a starting point. My claim has been that the insight that motivates him is a genuine one, but that none of the revisionary conclusions that he claims to follow from it have been shown to do so. Along the way I have made claims about the sort of business a theorist of communication ought to be in and the lessons to be learnt from recent work on context-sensitivity and underdeterminacy. I think that those points are good ones in general, even beyond the narrow focus of my discussion of Buchanan.

Other morals emerge as well. I have argued that it is possible to accept Buchanan's fundamental fact and make sense of it in a very conservative extension of traditional frameworks for the study of communication. In particular such frameworks can accommodate underdeterminacy. That can be taken as an argument for underdeterminacy, or at least as an argument against one argument against it.

Finally, I have offered reasons to think that both minimalists and those whose views are more traditionally associated with underdeterminacy ought to embrace what I call conservative proliferation. Some minimalists (i.e. Cappelen & Lepore) already defend a radical propositional proliferation, although other minimalists (e.g. Borg) do not. Those contextualists associated with underdeterminacy tend to talk about *the* proposition expressed by a sentence in context. I have tried to show through my discussion of Buchanan's underdeterminacy based arguments that they ought not to do so.

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