

Reply to Gauker

François Recanati

Gauker distinguishes between two broad families of approaches to communication. The first family, which he dislikes, he calls the *conveyance conception*. On that sort of view, the speaker intends to communicate a certain thought content which is somehow *given*, independently of the utterance, and is not simply defined in terms of the conventional meaning of the words used and the context. Of the ‘direct’ version of the view, according to which what the speaker says *is* the content of the thought he intends to communicate by his utterance, Gauker says that he is not sure whether any living philosopher of language holds it. (I think Stephen Neale does.) The indirect version is more widespread, and Gauker ascribes it to me. On that version what is said is defined, *inter alia*, in terms of the conventional meaning of the words used and the context and may therefore be different from the content the speaker intends to communicate by his utterance (even though what the speaker intends to communicate may be *one* of the factors that determine what is said — that’s what Gauker calls the ‘impure’ variant of the indirect version).

According to the *other* family of approaches, *there is no thought content that preexists to linguistic articulation*: thought content comes into being through linguistic articulation, so there is no basis for a distinction between the thought content one intends to communicate and the thought content one actually expresses. (Or so Gauker thinks.) Here also Gauker distinguishes between several versions of the approach. On the ‘single-content view’, communication succeeds when the hearer grasps the content which the speaker expresses by his utterance (what he says). On the ‘no-content view’, which Gauker favors, no content needs to be shared for communication to succeed. Communication is the use of language to facilitate interpersonal cooperation, and that need not involve content sharing.

Which view exactly do I hold, asks Gauker? Well, there are ingredients I like on both sides of the divide he describes. Like him, I don’t believe that communication necessarily involves content sharing (because indexical thoughts often can’t be shared). Communication, rather, involves some form of coordination of thoughts [Recanati (2012)]. Like Gauker also I am sympathetic to the view that conceptual thought is *not* independent of linguistic articulation.

Still, I want to retain a distinction between the thought the speaker attempts to communicate, and the content he actually expresses (what he ‘says’).¹ To that extent Gauker is right to ascribe the indirect version of the conveyance conception to me. He is right also to describe the version I hold as ‘impure’ since I take the speaker’s intentions to contribute to determining what is said. But — to answer a question he asks repeatedly — it is not the speaker’s actual intention that matters; what matters is the intention which it would be reasonable to ascribe to the speaker in the speech context.

Gauker insists that semantics and pragmatics should be aimed not merely at a theory of linguistic communication, but also at an account of the logical relations between sentences. He acknowledges that one can, in my framework, characterize various notions of validity and consistency: validity/consistency in the saturation sense and in the modulation sense, as he puts it. But, he objects, neither the saturation versions nor the modulation versions fill the bill, as there are logical facts which we can’t capture using these notions.

Among the logical facts that can’t be captured in my framework is the invalidity of the following argument, which Gauker calls ‘Weather Down’:

It is raining somewhere

Therefore it is raining

According to Gauker, the only way I could account for the intuitive invalidity of Weather Down is in terms of ‘validity in the modulation sense’ (because, in the saturation sense, the argument *is* valid, given my semantic analysis of ‘it is raining’ as saying merely that a rain event is occurring). But validity in the modulation sense can’t be the right notion to use because if it were, we could not account for the intuitive inconsistency of

(1) It is raining and it is not raining.

In the modulation sense, indeed, that sentence is consistent (since nothing prevents us from modulating the two conjuncts differently so as to mean that it’s raining in Paris and not raining in Palo Alto). Of course, I could say that Weather Down is invalid in the modulation sense, while (1) is inconsistent in the saturation sense; but Gauker feels that ‘the reason why (1) is inconsistent is basically the same as the reason why Weather Down is invalid’:

The reason is that when we say ‘it is raining’, a location in some sense stands in the background. (1) is inconsistent because the same location is in the background for both conjuncts, and Weather Down is invalid because even if it is raining somewhere, it may not be raining at the location in the background [this volume, p. 78].

Let us assume that this is right, i.e. that Weather Down is invalid and (1) inconsistent for the reason Gauker gives. He concludes that to account for the logical facts, we need to countenance ‘a kind of context-relativity that does not show up anywhere in Recanati’s taxonomy’. I find this conclusion puzzling, for (it seems to me) I do make room for that extra form of context-dependence, distinct from both saturation and modulation, even though I only mention it incidentally in *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*, (pp. 23-24, 112, 114). That third form of context-dependence I call ‘circumstance relativity’ [Recanati (2007), pp. 3-6]. The idea is that whenever we say (or think) something, what we say or think (the ‘lekton’) is to be evaluated with respect to a situation which our thought or speech concerns. The situation of evaluation (the place of rain in the case of ‘it’s raining’) is determined by contextual factors, but the contextual determination of the relevant situation is *neither saturation nor modulation*. I draw a distinction between two levels of meaning: the lekton and the Austinian proposition (i.e. the lekton *plus* the contextually relevant situation of evaluation). Notions like saturation and modulation only apply at the level of the lekton [Recanati (2010), p. 114n]. I say that the location ingredient in ‘it is raining’ can be accounted for in terms of circumstance-relativity, i.e. at the level of the Austinian proposition (rather than in terms of saturation or modulation at the lekton level), and I even say that ‘deep down, that is the account I favour’ [Recanati (2010), p. 112]. So I think I could account for the logical facts Gauker talks about (assuming they are facts) in much the same way as he does: by pointing out that if we evaluate the whole of (1) with respect to a single situation of evaluation (instead of a varying the situation for each of the conjuncts) we get an inconsistency, and similarly for Weather Down — if we evaluate the whole argument (premise and conclusion) against the same situation *s*, we find that the premise can be true (if there is a situation *s*’ ≠ *s* which is rainy) and the conclusion false (if *s* itself is not rainy). That means that the argument is invalid.

NOTES

¹ According to me, it’s perfectly possible to hold (with Gauker) that thought is inner speech and still distinguish between the thought in one’s mind and the thought one expresses in overt speech. These issues are discussed (to a certain extent) in chapter 4 of *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*.

REFERENCES

GAUKER, C. (2013), “Logical Nihilism in Contemporary French Philosophy”, this volume, pp. 65-79.

- RECANATI, F. (2007), *Perspectival Thought*; Oxford, Oxford University Press.
— (2010), *Truth-Conditional Pragmatics*; Oxford, Clarendon Press.
— (2012), *Mental Files*; Oxford, Oxford University Press.