Responses

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Responses

Thanks to Mitch, Zoltan and Liz for their insightful and constructive comments. Their expositions of what I am trying to do in the book seem to me entirely accurate, and their suggestions about the way the framework I develop can be modified and extended, as well as their observations about places where more clarity is needed, are well taken. Mostly in these responses I will be elaborating and expressing agreement, though I will push back at just a few points.

1. Response to Mitchell Green

There is a lot going on in Mitch Green’s comments – too much to respond to all of it – but I will first comment briefly on some of his suggestions about how the central notion of my pragmatic framework – common ground – might usefully be extended, second on his remarks about indirect ways of communicating, and third on his discussion of conversational injustice.

Common ground is something like mutual acceptance for the purposes of the conversation, but different conversations have different purposes, and a single conversation may have many purposes. Green’s first point is that for this reason we may need multiple “context sets” that conversational participants need to keep in mind. He observes that this gives rise to possibilities of misunderstanding different from those I consider, and it raises questions about the relations between different levels or layers of common ground. This seems to me exactly right. Particularly when any kind of pretense is involved in a conversation, what is officially presupposed will be different from what is really mutually believed, and both levels of mutual acceptance may play a role in the explanation of what goes on the conversation. Fictional discourse, which Green discusses at the end of his comments, illustrates some of this complexity. A fiction will often involve a fictional narrator and a fictional audience. What the narrator is presupposing (as common ground with the fictional audience) will be different from what the author is presupposing (as common ground between her and the real reader). In addition, what the author is presupposing about what is true in the story will be different from what presuppositions about reality the author is counting on the reader to share in order to understand what is going on in the story.

Second, Green notes that questions, as well as propositions, should play a role in characterizing the common ground. I agree with him that we need to distinguish the content of a question from the speech act of asking it, and that the content of a question should be modeled by a set of propositions that partitions a space of possibilities (the set of complete answers to the question). And I emphatically agree that the “grain” with which the possibilities compatible with the common ground are represented is an important feature of a context. (This is something I allude to at a number of points in the book, but do not develop in any formal detail.) That is, the common ground should represent not just the information that is taken for granted, but also the distinctions between possibilities that are recognized in the context. But I am not sure it is felicitous to talk of accepting questions, since this might be interpreted in different ways. The
phrase suggests that a question is accepted in a context if it is a recognized aim of the conversation to answer the question, and this is a stronger assumption than the assumption that the distinction made by the abstract question be recognized in the context.

Third, Green notes that conversation may have practical as well as theoretical purposes. They may be deliberations, aiming at a joint plan, and not just inquiries that aim at the pooling or imparting of information. I entirely agree. The speech act that receives the most attention in the book is assertion, which is explained as a kind of proposal, but the framework is designed to provide for other kinds of proposals as well (about what to do, and not just what propositions to accept). I will have a little more to say about the way that plans should be represented in discourse in my response to Camp.

In his section on pre-ilocutionary pragmatics, Green says that “the CG-context apparatus is equipped to shed light not just on conversational implicata that are generated by the performance of a speech act, but also on some of the processes that create speech acts in the first place.” I agree, but I am skeptical of the embedded implicature hypothesis that Green mentions in this context. (This hypothesis, which he has defended elsewhere, says roughly that if a sentence S regularly implicates that P, then what is said by a sentence that embeds S will usually be interpreted so that S interpreted to include, in its content, the implicature P.) I would rather put the point this way: the distinctively Gricean reasoning that is involved in the explanation of conversational implicatures is also involved in the determination of what is said. The distinctive reasoning, in its more general form, is something like this: The interpreter, presupposing that the speaker intended to make a cooperative contribution to the conversation, asks what must the speaker have meant, or said, or presupposed, or intended in order for the utterance she produced to be a reasonable thing to have produced? This kind of reasoning is involved in a trivial way in interpreting simple literal statements. (Why did she utter the words “the plane has landed”? Because she wanted to tell us that the plane had landed, and knew that we, as competent English speakers, would take her to have said that by uttering those words.) The reasoning involved in the derivation of conversational implicatures is a more specific case of this kind of reasoning, starting with the fact that someone said (or made as if to say) something, and asking what the speaker must have meant by saying that. But the recognition of the wider use of this kind of reasoning helps bring out that the line between what is said and what is implicated is hard to draw, and tends to change over time. A generalized implicature may evolve into a change of the meaning of the expression that carries the implicature, and this may be reflected in a change in the behavior of the expression in embedded contexts. But it should also be noted that the ordinary explanation for a conversational implicature will often carry over to the explanation of an implicature of an embedded expression. Take scalar implicatures, for example: “he ate some of the cookies” will, in many contexts, implicate that he did not eat all of them. Also, “he either ate some of the cookies, or someone else did” will implicate that he either ate some but not all of them, or someone else ate some but not all of them. We don’t need to build the implicature into what is said in order to explain, using the same Gricean maxims, why this implicature also holds for the disjunctive case.
Implicature is a kind of meaning without saying. As Grice defines it, it is a kind of meaning something by saying (or ‘making as if to say’) something else. (What is this ‘making as if to say’? The point of this Gricean turn of phrase is this: When one implicates that the candidate is not good at philosophy by saying (only) that he has good handwriting and is always punctual, or when one implicates that the garage is open by saying that there is a garage around the corner, what one means (in Grice’s favored sense) includes what one says, plus more. But when one utters the sentence “that was a brilliant move” sarcastically, implicating that it was a stupid move, one does not say, but only makes as if to say that it was a brilliant move. One says something, in Grice’s favored sense, only if one means it, in his favored sense.) But the definition of conversational implicature is gratuitously narrow if it is taken to imply that one can conversationally implicate only by making statements. There is no reason to exclude implicating by asking a question, or making a request, and perhaps also by gestures or actions that are not speech acts at all. Whether silence (in a context where saying something is expected) can count as conversational implicature is a terminological question, but it seems clear that such cases of meaning without saying can be explained by the same Gricean conversational maxims.

But Green is particularly interested in cases of communication that perhaps do not rise to the level of conversational implicature because they do not involve the full range of reflexive intentions that (according to Grice’s analysis) are required for speaker meaning: eye rolling, various intonational tics, smiles and scowls that are more or less spontaneous. He says that I would treat such phenomena “as manifest events like the crashing of thunder or flickering of the overhead lights,” events that become common knowledge immediately. But, he says, “we lack an account taking us from overt behavior to the psychological state that it is sometimes designed to manifest.” Several comments on this: I think Green and I will agree that there is a continuity between natural events that are mutually recognized to be obvious to all, and communicative acts that involve the full range of Gricean reflexive intentions. My notion of a manifest event is intended to include them all (and so to emphasize the continuity). Which facts become manifest when a mutually recognized event happens will be a function of what is taken for granted in the context. So, for example, when a speaker utters the words, “Dinner is ready” in a context in which it is common knowledge that the people in the room speak English, it becomes manifest, not only that those sounds were made, and those words uttered, but also that the speaker said that dinner is ready. Similarly, when the teenager rolls her eyes, it becomes manifest not only that her eyes moved in a certain way, but that she is conveying information about her attitude. Is this then a case of speaker meaning, in Grice’s sense? That is, does the teenager intend to get the parent to recognize that she has the attitude in virtue of recognizing that very intention? This may seem a stretch. Green would prefer to put the point in terms of the expression of the attitude, where expressive behavior is behavior that is ‘designed’ to convey information about the subject’s attitudes. I take ‘design’ here to be metaphorical (though I think Green thinks the literal use of ‘design’ does not require a designer, but can have a functional or evolutionary explanation), but in any case it is clear that Green’s notion allows for expression that is not intentional. Spontaneous smiles and scowls are natural signs that probably have their origin in behavior that evolved to facilitate the conveying of information about attitudes, and so
will count as expression in Green’s sense. But we are mutually aware of the kind of information they convey (as the teenager is aware of the effect of the eye-roll), and we are able to control them to some extent. The line between a spontaneous and an intentional gesture or piece of behavior is a fuzzy one, and in any case, intentions need not be explicitly recognized by the person who acts with them.

Finally, a remark on conversational injustice: I should say, first, that while I do say not very much in the book about the social and political uses of communicative devices, the framework, and the idea of the autonomy of pragmatics, is motivated in part by these issues, which have become increasingly prominent in the philosophy of language literature. The framework, and the Gricean ideas behind it, are designed to throw light on the role of strategic reasoning in the use of language, and even though a certain level of common interest is required to make communication possible, it is obvious that communication is compatible with deep conflicts of interest, and with the manipulation of contexts to gain advantage in conflict situations. In particular, I think the Gricean idea of speaker meaning throws light on the idea of silencing that Rae Langton and Jennifer Hornsby have discussed. It is true, as Green observes, that one can succeed in performing an illocutionary act, such as warning someone, even if one fails in the perlocutionary act of getting the addressee to heed the warning. Similarly, one can sometimes succeed in refusing even if the addressee refuses to take ‘no’ for an answer. But if it is common ground in a context that the addressee will take ‘no’ to mean ‘yes’, and if there is no alternative way of saying something that means ‘no’, then the speaker is incapable of having the intentions that the Gricean account of speaker meaning requires. She is silenced in the literal sense that she is rendered unable to say something that means what she wants to say. Of course the idea of literal silencing in this sense is an oversimplification in many cases. The person who refuses to understand ‘no’ to mean no cannot be let off the hook so easily, since the refusal will often be a willful pretense not to understand. But in more subtle ways, contexts can be manipulated to distort the possibilities of communication, and the Gricean story provides resources that help to clarify what is going on in such situations.

2. Response to Zoltan Szabo

Szabo’s comments focus on the dynamics of interpretation, which as he says is a central concern of the book. More specifically, he focuses on the idea of prospective interpretation, an idea that is manifested in presupposition accommodation, and in my proposals for interpreting deontic and epistemic modals. The rough idea of prospective interpretation is this: In general, a hearer interprets a speaker’s speech act with the help of a background of contextual information – information that the hearer takes the speaker to be assuming is available to the intended addressees. But available when? It need not be information that the speaker expects the addressees to have before the speech act takes place. Even in simple and straightforward cases, the addressees will be expected to make use of the manifest fact that the speaker uttered the words she uttered, and whatever follows from that information, when it is combined with information that was already available before the utterance took place. So to give the most obvious kind of example, when the speaker says, “I can’t come to the meeting,” the hearer needs to know who the
speaker is in order to determine what the speaker said, but the hearer need not have known, before the speaker started speaking, that she was to be the speaker. I used this most trivial kind of example to illustrate that the very general idea of prospective interpretation need not involve any pretense—any presumption that something was common ground at a time when it was not. Szabo thinks it is somewhat misleading to assimilate the idea of presupposition accommodation to this kind of simple use of information that becomes manifest as a conversation proceeds, but I did not mean to suggest that we should ignore distinctions between the simple and the more complex and interesting cases of prospective interpretation. In fact I think there is considerable diversity in the phenomena, and I agree that there are several further distinctions that need to be made. As Szabo notes, in the example where the information that Brunei is a sultanate is accommodated, the hearer’s inference to the conclusion that Brunei is a sultanate requires presuppositions about the speaker’s beliefs, and about her sincerity and trustworthiness. This is not true of the simple first person example. As he also notes, in some cases the hearer may accommodate by accepting the recognized presupposition without believing it, and perhaps without believing that the speaker believes it. And there is a further distinction that parallels a distinction between two kinds of conversational implicature: in some cases one informatively presupposes something (rather than asserting it) because the information is straightforward and uncontroversial, and more efficiently communicated in this indirect way. There is not any pretense involved in such cases. But there will also be examples of informative presupposition where there is a pretense that the information was already common ground, and where the speaker has a reason for communicating indirectly other than simple efficiency. Compare these two examples of informative presupposition: (1) “I live in the third brick house from the corner,” presupposing that there are at least three brick houses on the street in question. (2) “It goes without saying that we need to fix our cash flow problem,” presupposing that we need to fix our cash flow problem.\footnote{Example (1), mentioned in the book, was given by Lauri Karttunen. Example (2) is discussed in a paper by Barbara Abbott.} In any case of informative presupposition, one can ask, why didn’t the speaker just say it rather than presupposing it, and so leaving the hearer to infer it? In example (1), the answer is that it would simply be tedious and unnecessary to say: “there are at least three brick houses on the block, and I live in the third one” when the hearer can figure this out without my saying it. In example (2), one uses a rhetorical device to emphasize a claim, and perhaps to foreclose a possible disagreement. Gricean maxims are flouted, since one manifests that something needs saying by saying that it does not. The distinction between these two kinds of cases exactly parallels a distinction between two kinds of conversational implicature.

One remark about the initial Sultan of Brunei example before moving on to other cases of prospective interpretation: One might ask, if it is so easy to accommodate the presupposition that Brunei is a sultanate, why is Szabo’s (2) (The Sultan of Brunei is infallible and Brunei is a sultanate) so clearly unacceptable? It is the redundancy of the second conjunct that is the problem, not the fact that the first conjunct requires the presupposition. Whether the information that Brunei is a sultanate is old news, or accommodated, the second clause will be inappropriate.
As Szabo says, I argue that the phenomenon of accommodation is a general feature of cooperative interaction, one that we can make sense of independently of specific linguistic rules and practices, but he is skeptical about the thesis that “accommodation does not require conventions.” Accommodation is, by definition, a kind of indirect communication, and we can make sense of this only by contrast with direct communication, which does depend on a specific linguistic practice. Furthermore, the inference to the content of an informative presupposition will depend on specific assumptions about the semantics of the speech act that conveys, indirectly, the information. This is exactly right, and I did not mean to suggest otherwise. Let me invoke, again, the analogy with Gricean conversational implicature to help explain the sense in which I hold that the process of accommodation is independent of linguistic rules. It is important to the contrast between conventional and conversational implicature that the former is explained in terms of general conversational maxims, together with facts about the ordinary truth-conditional semantics for the sentences that carry the implicature. That is, you need to know what the speaker said (or ‘made as if to say’), and how it was said in order to determine and explain what was conversationally implicated. That is what one gets from the conventional semantics. With conversational implicatures, nothing about indirect communication need be built into the semantics in order to explain how the expressions are used to communicate indirectly. Similarly, my claim is that there need not be anything about indirect communication built into the semantics in order to explain how we communicate indirectly by accommodation – we don’t need any special rule of accommodation in our language game in order for it to be a practice in which accommodation takes place. But the semantics for the expressions used to communicate indirectly by accommodation will play a central role in explaining why accommodation can be expected to take place in particular cases. As Szabo says, sentences with referring expressions will require an existential presupposition because the existence of a referent (in standard cases) is required for the sentence to express a proposition (according to a plausible hypothesis about the semantics). Or to take another example, the word ‘too’ (in ‘The boss’s husband was at the party too’) requires the presupposition that someone other than the boss’s husband was at the party. This presupposition requirement is explained by the fact that the word ‘too’ is anaphoric (meaning something like ‘in addition to x’, with the x determined by context). Unless there were a specific individual to be the referent of the implicit x, a proposition would not be determined. But the notion of presupposition, or of accommodation, need not be mentioned in the semantics in order for these explanations to be given.

Of course some indirect communication is conventionally marked as such. As Grice argued, there are conventional as well as conversational implicatures, and I want to allow for cases where a presupposition requirement is built into the semantics (as with the word ‘even’, as in ‘Even most Republican politicians think the election of Trump would be a disaster’, presupposing, roughly, that others think this, and that it is more surprising that Republican politicians should). Exactly how presupposition requirements and particular cases of presupposition accommodation are explained is an empirical question for linguists to answer, but I conjecture that most of the standard cases can be explained with
a combination of specific semantics that does not appeal to the notion of presupposition together with general features of the dynamics of discourse.

As Szabo notes, the notion of prospective interpretation plays a different and central role in my suggestions about the role of epistemic and deontic modal expressions. I follow David Lewis in using a simple model of the semantics and pragmatics of a game of commands and permissions to distinguish the speech act of issuing commands and giving permission from the speech act of assertion, and argue that this helps to clarify some of the behavior of epistemic ‘might’ and ‘must’, and of indicative conditionals, which are a kid of epistemic modal. The contrast with assertion is this: An assertion is interpreted (the proposition expressed is determined) relative to the prior context; the proposal is to change the context by adding this content to the common ground. But in the case of commands and permissions, the relevant proposition is determined by the posterior context: The context change rule is something like this: change the context so that it is a context relative to which what is said is true. The distinction is subtle, since as we have seen, the prior context is not the context as it was before the utterance took place, but the distinction is still significant, since the speech act rule for commands and permissions (in Lewis’s game) introduces a potential circularity which, in the case of permission (and by analogy, epistemic ‘might’) requires an appeal to additional structure in the model of context.

I apply the label ‘expressivist’ to this kind of account, and as Szabo says, the traditional expressivist holds that “promises, evaluations, or permissions are not the sort of thing that could be true or false.” I agree with Szabo that this last claim is dubious, but it is one that more recent expressivists such as Allan Gibbard have explicitly rejected, and it is a central feature of Lewis’s game that commands and permissions have truth conditions, and that the truth conditions play an essential role in explaining the way that the issuing of the command or permission changes the context.

In Lewis’s artificial game, one player is the master, who has absolute authority over another, the slave. That artificiality makes for a sharp line between the ‘direction of fit’ in the case of ordinary assertion and in the case of the issuing of a command. In more realistic cases of commands, requests and permissions where lines of authority may be contested, the line is less clear. With epistemic modals, there may be no relevant lines of authority at all – the decision whether to accept or reject a ‘might’ statement is something to be negotiated. No one can simply make it true that the Red Sox might have won the game by saying so.

Szabo asks, about the account of epistemic modals that is based on an analogy with Lewis’s game, is this an expressivist account? “That depends,” he says, “on whether we can substantiate the claim that the speech acts performed are not assertions.” But I don’t agree that it depends on this terminological question. Whether or not it is appropriate to label epistemic ‘might’ claims as assertions, it does seem to me that (1) to say something of the form ‘it might be that p’ is, in effect, to propose that we leave open, in our context, the possibility that p, and (2) the ‘might’ statement expresses but does not assert that we are not in a position to exclude this possibility. This is the basis for labeling it an
expressivist account, but it still might be appropriately called an assertion (not about what possibilities we are in a position to exclude, but about what might be the case).

Response to Elisabeth Camp

Liz Camp’s comments ask what becomes of semantics on the account of pragmatics developed in the book. She worries that my picture may carry me beyond where I want to go, “forcing a choice between an even wider application for pragmatics or a more ecumenical conception of semantics.” She raises good questions about the extent of the domain of semantics that need answers, but I am not sure I want to avoid going where she thinks I may be carried by the conception of pragmatics and semantics that I sketch. I did not mean to suggest, and do not believe, that semantics is restricted to the compositional process by which truth-conditional content is determined, but I also want to argue that the informational model that is the core of the account of common ground can accommodate some of the phenomena that she argues are left out or distorted by the account.

On one traditional way of distinguishing semantics from pragmatics, semantics is the study of propositional content, while pragmatics concerns what speakers do with content – the force with which it is expressed. As I emphasize in the book, I do think the content/force distinction is central; as Camp notes, on my model of assertion, it is the job of a compositional semantics to provide a proposition, and the force rule says how, given a proposition, the act of asserting it changes the context. But I do not want to use content/force distinction to draw the line between semantics and pragmatics. The distinction I emphasize in the book is between (1) features of discourse that depend on an institutional practice, with conventional constitutive rules and (2) features that can be understood independently of any particular practice. The idea of the autonomy of pragmatics is that we can theorize about communicative function independently of particular languages and language games, and then understand semantics as a theory about the devices by which languages serve those functions. Compositional rules for determining the propositional content of complex expressions in terms of the meanings of their parts will be a part of semantics, but on this way of drawing the line, so will the specification of way the illocutionary force of an expression is marked in the language, as well as what the forces are with which propositions may be expressed. Lexical semantics will concern the meanings of words that contribute to determining propositional content, but also the meanings of words that serve other functions – for example to help speakers and hearers to stay on the same page with respect to the information that is available to them to interpret what is said, and to guide the direction of the conversation. As Camp says, an account of illocutionary force is “at the periphery between semantics and pragmatics.” The model of the force of an assertion that I give is an example of an attempt to specify (independently of linguistic devices) what an assertion does, and then saying how the rules of the game provide for doing it. But I want to acknowledge that the sharp distinction between means and ends – between what language aims to do, and the devices it uses to do it – is oversimplified in a way that Camp’s work has helped me to appreciate. The general idea of common ground (like Grice’s general idea of speaker meaning) can be understood independently of particular languages and linguistic practices, but linguistic practices, with their grammatical and semantic rules, are among
the things that the users of language have common knowledge about, and this allows for distinctions between different levels of common ground – common acceptance for the purpose of the conversation – that depend on the fact that communication that is taking place by means of an institutional practice of language use. As Camp has persuasively argued in work she cites in her comments, speakers may, in adversarial situations, have strategic reasons to communicate in indirect ways that are not acknowledged in the conversational record, where the conversational record should (I would argue) be modeled as a certain level of common ground, one that allows for the possibility that something may be common knowledge or belief between conversational participants even if it is not recognized in the conversational record. I agree with Camp that characterizing different levels of acceptance and common acceptance should be done, in part, in terms of the kinds of commitments that the kind of acceptance involves.

One further remark about illocutionary force, norms and commitments: J.L. Austin, the founder of the theory of speech acts, distinguished illocutionary acts very finely: assertions, reports, predictions, warnings, conjectures, etc. were all different kinds of illocutionary acts, and it was sometimes presupposed in early discussions of speech acts that a difference in illocutionary act type meant a difference in illocutionary force. But it could be that speech acts differ in some important respects, perhaps in the norms they are judged by, or the commitments they make, even if they are intended to change the context in the same way. My simple model of assertion is really a model of a broader class of speech acts than those that are properly labeled by the term “assertion,” and the remark I make that Camp quotes (“a full characterization of what an assertion is would also involve norms and commitments”) was intended to point to this distinction. Knowledge may be a norm of assertion, as Timothy Williamson has argued, but it is not a norm for every speech act that fits the context change rule by which I characterize assertion.

The picture I try to paint in the book is pragmatic in a sense that does not involve a distinction between semantics and pragmatics: following the old British ordinary language tradition, it emphasizes that speech is action, and that we should understand discourse as a sequence of actions that are intended to change the situation. Camp is sympathetic to this general picture, but in the end is concerned that my way of developing it puts too much emphasis on an informational structure, as the essential feature of a situation that speech is intended to affect. As she acknowledges, the informational states involved in the theory will include information about the values, purposes and plans of the participants, but she still worries that too much is forced into a truth-conditional mold, and that this distorts important aspects of what language is used to do. I will conclude these comments by trying to respond to this general worry.

First, as noted above, the account allows for words and constructions that do jobs other than express propositions, and the explanation of the meaning and role of such expressions is part of semantics. But I think the notion of common ground as a state representing the information that is presumed by the participants to be available for the interpretation of what is said in the conversation helps to explain the roles of this kind of expression. Words such as ‘Frankly’, ‘unfortunately’, ‘however’, ‘therefore’,

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‘although’, ‘but’ and ‘even’ send conventional signals about the speaker’s aims and assumptions that help to avoid potential misunderstanding. A hearer might be confused, for example, by a statement that seems to change the direction of a conversation, or to count against a line of thought that the speaker has been developing, worrying that she has misunderstood. A ‘but’ or ‘however’ can signal that the speaker intends to make a shift, or a contrasting claim. The words do not contribute to what is said – to the proposition expressed – but will still influence the way the context changes, since the information that defines the context includes information about the speaker’s intentions and presuppositions.

These words do not play a role in defining detachable pieces of information that form the content of what is said, but as Camp says, many expressions seem to mix factual and evaluative content, and to express item of “information” that are detachable, even if not factual, and that enter into compositional constructions. She is particularly concerned with the semantic understanding of epithets, ethnic slurs and of so called ‘thick’ evaluative terms (such as ‘rude’, ‘frugal’, ‘chaste’ ‘elegant’ ‘cautious’, pretentious’). She thinks that “the boundaries between expressive and informational content are more flexible than . . . Stalnaker’s . . . models allow.” But on the contrary, I think the models I discuss are ideally suited to recognize and clarify the mix and interaction of evaluative and factual content, and clarifying this mix is one of the central aims of the account. The possibilities that define the common ground are individuated by what is required to represent agreement and disagreement among the participants in the conversation, and this includes disagreement about plans, priorities and values, as well as disagreement about straightforward facts. I follow Allan Gibbard’s strategy for representing the mix of factual and expressive content by defining a more fine-grained notion of proposition. Gibbard’s model, in his early work, takes the possibilities that propositions distinguish between to be pairs consisting of a factual possible world and a system of norms. One can then do the compositional semantics for expressions that mix factual and evaluative claims in exactly the way standard possible worlds semantics does it, using these more fine-grained propositions. Whether a “proposition” of this kind is more factual or more evaluative will depend on the presuppositions: if the evaluative part of the content is presupposed in a context, then the distinction made by that content, relative to that context, will be factual. An ethnic slur, for example, will normally require a negative evaluative presupposition, but in possible situations compatible with that presupposition, the term will apply on factual grounds. The “interesting mix of independence from and involvement in truth-conditional machinery” that Camp and others she cites have helped to clarify is quite compatible. I think, with the pragmatic framework that I am promoting. In some cases, whether a distinction is grounded in fact or in planning priorities and evaluative attitudes may be itself a matter of controversy, and the Gibbardian strategy of using the truth-conditional structure to represent evaluative content helps to explain this kind of controversy.

Camp questions whether this kind of truth-conditional framework is able to capture “the actual conventional effects of the relevant utterance-types. Psychologically, there is a difference between endorsing the proposition that someone deserves respect and actually respecting them.” That is certainly true, but it is not clear that in speech, one can do more
than to endorse the proposition (and not to say other things that conflict with this endorsement). I agree with Camp that one needs to say more than I say in the book about commitments, and the way commitments are created in discourse. Perhaps to endorse the proposition that someone deserves respect is to undertake a commitment to respect the person. I don’t think the general framework, with its notion of truth-conditional content extended to include plans, priorities and values, is incompatible with this kind of development, and I think it should be congenial to the kind of work on these issues that Camp is doing.