JAZZ Redux: a reply to Möller
Laura Schroeter and François Schroeter
University of Melbourne

Title page

Authors:

Laura Schroeter

François Schroeter

Title:

JAZZ Redux: A Reply to Möller

Affiliation of the authors

Philosophy discipline / SHAPS

Old Quad

The University of Melbourne

Vic 3010

Australia

Address of the corresponding author:

fschro@unimelb.edu.au

(613) 8344 8169

Abstract:

This paper is a response to Niklas Möller's (Philosophical Studies 2013) recent criticism of our relational (JAZZ) model of meaning of thin evaluative terms. Möller's criticism rests on a confusion about the role of coordinating intentions in JAZZ. This paper clarifies what's distinctive and controversial about the JAZZ proposal and explains why JAZZ, unlike traditional accounts of meaning, is not committed to analyticities.

Keywords: Metaethics, evaluative terms, meaning

In a series of papers, we've proposed a relational approach to meaning and concept identity.¹ In this paper, we reply to Niklas Möller's recent criticism of our application of this 'JAZZ' model to evaluative terms (Möller 2013).

According to the JAZZ model of meaning, a speaker must satisfy two conditions to count as competent with the meaning of an evaluative term:

1. Coordinating Intentions: The individual speaker must have a coordinating intention to use the term in a way that makes best sense of the communal practice.
2. Congruence: The individual speaker's initial understanding of the term must not diverge so radically from that of others in the community as to undermine that coordinating intention. (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009: 18)

¹ The account grew out of a general critique of neo-Fregean and two-dimensional approaches to meaning and concept identity as involving implausible epistemic and psychological commitments (Schroeter 2003, 2004, 2006, 2012; Schroeter and Bigelow 2009; Schroeter 2006). The case of evaluative terms was developed as a particularly compelling case study (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009, 2013, Ms).

What's distinctive of this account is that it makes an actual causal-historical connection to others via interlocking intentions a *necessary condition* for competence with the same meaning. We contrast this 'connectedness' account of meaning identity with standard 'resemblance' accounts, which characterize sameness of meaning solely in terms of matching patterns of topic-specific understanding. Thus, JAZZ proposes a relational account of sameness of meaning, in roughly the way that a Parfitian account of personal identity or a lineage account of species identity are relational: whether two token representational states express the same meaning depends essentially on whether they are causally-historically hooked up in the relevant way. In contrast, broadly Fregean resemblance accounts of sameness of meaning are non-relational, in much the way a soul view of personal identity or a DNA account of species are: whether two token representational states express the same meaning depends entirely the properties of those states considered independently of each other.

We believe JAZZ affords an attractive account of the meaning of thin evaluative terms, like 'is the all-told right thing to do'. Unlike neo-descriptivist theories of meaning like Frank Jackson and Philip Pettit's moral functionalism or Christopher Peacocke's moral rationalism (Jackson and Pettit 1995; Peacocke 2004), JAZZ does not require that individual speakers grasp some standard reference-fixing criterion in order to count as competent with the same meaning. And unlike minimalist motivation-based theories of meaning such as Allan Gibbard's expressivism or Ralph Wedgwood's conceptual role semantics (Gibbard 2003; Wedgwood 2001), JAZZ does not require all competent speakers to associate a particular topic-fixing motivational state with the expression in order to count as competent.

However, Niklas Möller argues that JAZZ fails to provide a distinctive account of competence conditions (Möller 2013). According to Möller, JAZZ provides only a partial account of competence, which lacks the resources to rule out the alternative accounts with which JAZZ is contrasted. To show this, Möller focuses on an example that we use to cast doubt upon Gibbardian minimalism – the monomaniacal hand-clasper. Möller suggests that JAZZ generates precisely the same verdict about the case that we find problematic, so JAZZ does not rule out minimalism. The root of the problem is that any account of competence with a public language must appeal to coordinating intentions, so the allegedly distinctive aspect of the JAZZ model is consistent with any viable account of meaning (Möller 2013, 14).

In this paper, we'll argue that Möller's criticism rests on a confusion about the role of coordinating intentions in JAZZ. We'll start by examining the example Möller focuses on, the monomaniacal hand-clasper. This will allow us to clarify the role coordinating intentions play in connectedness accounts such as JAZZ (section 1) and to bring out the distinctive and controversial nature of the JAZZ proposal (sections 2 and 3). We'll then contrast the commitments of resemblance and JAZZ theories with respect to analyticities (section 4).

1. The role of coordinating intentions in JAZZ

What's distinctive of minimalism is that competence with the meaning of thin evaluative terms is explained entirely in terms of a specific motivational role. Gibbard, for instance, suggests that to judge an action right just is to plan to perform that action (Gibbard 2003: 7-8). The core positive proposal behind the minimalist account of competence can be captured as follows:

Motivationalism: To associate a predicate with a specific motivational role is necessary and sufficient for competence with the meaning of a thin evaluative term like ‘is right’.

Motivationalism is a positive proposal that contrasts with the positive proposal behind broadly descriptivist theories of competence:

Descriptivism: To associate a predicate with a specific descriptive criterion is necessary and sufficient for competence with the meaning of a thin evaluative term like ‘is right’.

Minimalist theories are committed to rejecting all forms of descriptivism: if grasp of the motivational role is sufficient for competence, then no particular descriptive criteria are necessary for competence. We can sum this core negative commitment of minimalism as follows:

Anti-Descriptivism: It is not necessary that one associate a predicate with any specific descriptive criteria to count as competent with the meaning of a thin evaluative term like ‘is right’.

We motivate the JAZZ model in part by arguing that it can avoid an implausible liberalism that plagues minimalist theories of competence like Gibbard’s. We introduce a monomaniacal hand-clasper (MHC), who has just one plan, to clasp his hands in all possible circumstances, and who uses the term ‘fofare’ to express this plan. MHC counts as competent with the meaning of ‘is right’ on a minimalist theory like Gibbard’s. However, we argue that this is an implausible result, and we elaborate the example in such a way as to reinforce this verdict by making MHC’s planning states radically different from those of ordinary subjects’ (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009, 3-4).

Möller alters the MHC case in a number of important ways. Crucially, he makes MHC a member of our linguistic community, who acquires the English predicate ‘is right’ via a coordinating intention, and then uses it to express his monomaniacal plan.² This may seem a minor change, since:

[...] the monomaniacal hand-clasper must have picked up the term ‘right’ by some social process, and managed to fixate his usage in a way that aligns with the public usage at least so far as to describe what he plans to do, recommends to others etc. (2013: 6)

The alternative, Möller suggests, would require us to imagine MHC a ‘Swamp Hand-Clasper’ modeled on Davidson’s famous example of a creature created *ex nihilo* by a quantum accident (Davidson 1987). Möller then proceeds to argue that his modified case, MHC*, counts as competent with the standard English meaning of ‘is right’ according to JAZZ.³ He takes this to show that JAZZ fails to provide a distinctive account of competence with such expressions, since it cannot rule out minimalist theories like Gibbard’s.

² (Möller 2013: 6). Möller also alters MHC’s psychological dispositions in two key ways. We stipulate (i) that MHC is only focused on hand-clasping and has no interest in normal human goals like health and shelter, and (ii) that MHC lacks higher-order deliberative capacities that might lead him to alter his hand-clasping plans. Möller removes these two further stipulations on the grounds that they are psychologically implausible (2013: 5, fn. 8).

³ (Möller 2013: 6-11). The bulk of this argument focuses on whether MHC* meets the second requirement of the JAZZ model, Congruence.

But this argument misses the point in two ways. First, our claim was that MHC shows that minimalist theories of competence are too minimal. One cannot rebut an alleged counterexample by simply changing the example! To engage with our claim, Möller must show that his proposed enrichment of the MHC case is not just *compatible* with minimalist theories like Gibbard's, it's *required* by such theories. Otherwise our claim that Gibbard's minimalism is too minimal will stand.⁴

Second, Möller ultimately hopes to show that JAZZ doesn't provide a genuine alternative to minimalist theories. But his altering the MHC case prevents a clear understanding of the nature of the two theories under consideration. The problem is that Möller simply adds the distinctive requirement of the JAZZ model (being appropriately causally-historically connected to our linguistic community) as a plausible, but optional empirical assumption to the description of MHC. Now, it's uncontroversial that being connected by coordinating intentions is a part of *normal acquisition* of linguistic competence.⁵ But the core proposal of JAZZ is that this aspect of normal competence is *constitutive* of sameness of meaning: you cannot count as competent with the meaning of 'x is right' unless you are causally-historically connected in the right way with English speakers' actual use of that expression. In contrast, non-relational accounts of meaning such as Gibbard's deny that such connections are required for sameness of meaning. So Möller's modification of the MHC example muddles the key contrast between JAZZ and Gibbard's minimalism: the key distinction between the two positions is whether being causally connected in the right way is *necessary* for competence.

By ignoring this structural difference, Möller misses the point of JAZZ. In our original example, MHC's practice with 'fofare' is *not* causally connected in the relevant way to our linguistic practice with 'right'. *Pace* Möller, there is no need to imagine MHC as a "swamp hand clasper": he might be a member of a foreign community or he might have invented his own word. We stand by our verdict that MHC does not count as competent with the standard English meaning of 'right' simply in virtue of associating 'fofare' with a certain motivational profile. JAZZ vindicates and explains this verdict, since MHC does not satisfy a necessary precondition of competence with the standard English meaning of 'right'. Minimalist and descriptivist accounts of competence, in contrast, do not make these causal connections a precondition for competence: on such accounts, you can share precisely the same meanings with unconnected linguistic communities using different expressions. These 'resemblance' models of meaning treat coordinating intentions as a contingent mechanism for establishing and stabilizing sameness of meaning within a community: coordinating intentions are part of a *genetic* account about how sameness of meaning normally arises, not a *constitutive* account of what it is to share the same meaning.

2. Why the distinction matters

What difference could it make whether coordinating intentions are constitutive of semantic competence? If resemblance theorists agree that coordinating intentions are

⁴ It's worth noting also that the MHC example was never intended to bear any heavy theoretical weight in our paper: the point of the MHC example was simply to establish the *prima facie* implausibility of minimalism.

⁵ According to a resemblance model of public language, sameness of meaning within a community is normally maintained by tacit linguistic conventions which ensure that all speakers associate the same topic-fixing conceptual roles with particular expressions (Lewis 1969).

normally present, it might seem that there is no substantial point of disagreement. The answer is that by making coordinating intentions essential to sameness of meaning, the JAZZ model can relax the resemblance theorists' strict requirement that competent speakers must share precisely the same topic-fixing conceptual role.

This relaxation is possible because connectedness theories of competence like JAZZ propose a distinctive approach to the determination of semantic values. We can distinguish competence and determination theories as follows:

- (a) Competence: A theory of competence provides necessary and sufficient conditions for token representations to express the same meaning.
- (b) Determination: A determination theory explains how token representations earn their semantic values (e.g. character, reference, expressive role): i.e. it says why the individual's use of an expression at a given time in a particular context picks out a specific semantic value.⁶

The resemblance model relies on a token-based determination theory: the fundamental units to which semantic values are assigned are token representations considered in isolation from each other. The connectedness model, in contrast, takes the fundamental units of interpretation to be entire representational traditions (i.e. the entire set of token representations linked together by the relevant causal-historical connections). On this tradition-based approach, the determination theory seeks to assign a univocal semantic value to the tradition as a whole. Token representations then inherit their semantic values from the traditions to which they are bound.⁷

This disagreement over the basic units of interpretation constitutes a key structural difference between the resemblance and connectedness models: they disagree over the explanatory priority they accord to competence and determination theories. Resemblance models start with an individualistic determination theory: semantic values are fixed by some core aspect of the subject's understanding of a token representation at a given time which determines its semantic value (perhaps taking into account facts about the external context). Two tokens express the same meaning only if they are associated with the same core understanding. On connectedness models, in contrast, we start by determining which tokens belong to the same representational tradition, and then we determine the semantic value of that tradition as a whole (taking into account associated understanding and facts about the external context). Thus resemblance models give priority to (b) over (a): the individualistic determination theory settles what's required for competence with the same meaning. But connectedness models give priority to (a) over (b): the anti-individualistic theory

⁶ This distinction is inspired by Christopher Peacocke's account of possession conditions and determination theories for theorizing about concepts (Peacocke 1992). A determination theory is also known as a *metasemantic theory* (Kaplan 1989) or a *foundational semantic theory* (Stalnaker 1997).

⁷ It's worth emphasizing that as a general theory of competence, JAZZ has no structural commitment about the nature of the semantic values assigned to particular expressions. In particular, JAZZ is compatible with the possibility of a purely expressive account of the semantic values of an evaluative predicate like 'is right'. (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009) might have been misleading in this respect, since the paper treats it as common ground among the theorists discussed that evaluate predicates pick out properties. Although minimalists like (Wedgwood 2001) and (Gibbard 2003) endorse referential semantic values, some theorists who share their commitment to motivationalist competence conditions will insist that expressions like 'is right' determine expressive roles as semantic values.

of competence with the same meaning provides the relevant unit for determining semantic values.⁸

Because of this structural feature, resemblance models of competence require a precise match in core topic-fixing understanding. All competent speakers must share a specific pattern of understanding that is rich enough to fix the same semantic value (relative to a common context). And this understanding must demarcate the meaning of the target expression from all other meanings. Thus minimalists like Gibbard, for instance, must identify a motivational role that all competent speakers associate with the predicate ‘is right’ and that suffices to distinguish the semantic value of this expression from the semantic value of other expressions with closely related meanings like ‘is desirable’, ‘is pleasant’, ‘is admirable’ or ‘is hereby planned by me’. And descriptivists face a similar challenge: they must specify a core descriptive role that both (a) all competent speakers accept and (b) suffices to pick out a determinate property as the semantic value of the predicate ‘is right’.

However, connectedness models of competence do not share this strong commitment to a precise match in topic-fixing understanding. To see this, consider a more familiar connectedness theory: Saul Kripke’s causal theory of names.⁹ According to Kripke, historical chains of co-referential intentions among different speakers constitute a communal representational tradition stretching back to an original naming ceremony linking a particular name to an individual. Your own token use of the proper name ‘Gödel’, like that of others in your community, inherits its semantic value from the semantic value of the interpersonal representational tradition to which it’s linked. Because they’re connected to the same representational tradition, different individuals can knowingly coordinate on the same semantic value, despite wide variation in the understanding they associate with a name.¹⁰

JAZZ is structurally similar to Kripke’s causal theory and has the same theoretical advantages. The key difference is that whereas Kripke appeals to a quasi-anaphoric determination theory, we appeal to holistic rationalizing interpretation of the representational tradition. On our account, the determination theory does not confine its attention to the causal chain stretching back to an original baptismal event, but

⁸ For further details about this structural distinction between resemblance and connectedness models, see (Schroeter 2012; Schroeter and Schroeter Ms).

⁹ For the causal chain theory see (Kripke 1980; Devitt 1981). More generally, theories of content with an essential causal-historical component should be construed as connectedness theories. Ruth Millikan, for instance, has proposed a naturalistic connectedness model that relies on relations of reproduction and natural selection, rather than relations of interlocking intentions (Millikan 1984). According to Millikan, natural selection relations linking you and your ancestors can help explain how basic concepts like that expressed by ‘food’ manage to single out specific categories. This sort of teleosemantic theory allows different speakers to pick out the same semantic value with a term, despite extreme and rationally irreconcilable differences in the criteria and motivational roles they associate with it.

¹⁰ On this account, there is no ‘core’ reference-fixing understanding that must be shared by all competent participants in the representational tradition with the proper name. Not even a ‘meta-linguistic’ or ‘deferential’ reference-fixing criterion is necessary, since speakers can have different understanding of the precise nature of the meta-linguistic or ‘deferential’ reference-fixing conditions and still count as latching onto the same interpersonal representational tradition.

takes into account the whole set of attitudes, dispositions, and social practices associated with the historically extended representational tradition. The correct semantic assignment seeks to vindicate the most important aspects of this whole tradition.¹¹

3. Swampman

At this point, Möller might concede that connectedness models of semantic competence really are distinct from standard resemblance models, but still insist that their distinctive feature makes them unacceptable. As we noted earlier, connectedness models are committed to saying that foreign speakers cannot share the same meanings with us, since they are not causally and historically connected to us in the right way. But this may seem implausible. To highlight the worry, recall Möller's appeal to Davidson's Swampman: according to JAZZ, Swampman does not count as competent with the same meanings we associate with the expressions he uses. But how could a molecule-for-molecule duplicate of you living in the very same external environment fail to use words with the same meanings as you? One might worry that this result is a *reductio* of connectedness models of meaning identity.¹²

Adjudicating Swampman and related cases turns on large theoretical questions in the philosophy of mind and language. Obviously we cannot fully resolve such questions here. But we can give a sense of the relevant issues, and explain why merely citing Swampman doesn't threaten connectedness theories of meaning identity.

It's important to bear in mind that theorizing about meaning identity involves highly controversial theoretical issues about the nature of meaning and the different theoretical roles meanings might play. As Tyler Burge notes,

the term 'meaning' has always been vague, multi-purposed, and to some extent adaptive to the viewpoint of different theories. (Burge 1979, 398)

We can use 'meaning' to refer to an expression's reference, character, descriptive or non-descriptive sense, Fregean coloring, semantic structure, etc. And we can coherently speak of the meaning of a term for an individual on a given occasion, a conventional meaning associated with the term, or the term's stable public meaning. Given this indeterminacy in our commonsense use of the term 'meaning', we need to clarify just which theoretical roles are relevant to our current explanatory interests. In short, we need a 'job description' for meanings in order to evaluate competing theories. Otherwise, we risk giving a philosophical theory of an incoherent topic.

A straightforward methodological lesson we should draw from this indeterminacy in commonsense usage is that theorists shouldn't simply rely on commonsense judgments about sameness of meaning in particular cases to adjudicate basic theoretical questions about meaning identity. We should be especially wary of relying on intuitions about highly artificial cases like Swampman or Moral Twin Earth to rule out theories of meaning. Such cases are constructed specifically to violate all normal mechanisms for ensuring sameness of semantic value within a community, by

¹¹ See (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009: §5, especially p.14) for holistic rationalizing interpretation in the case of an individual representational practice, and §6 (especially p.17) for the case of an intersubjective representational practice.

¹² It's worth emphasizing that JAZZ is not committed to Davidson's claim that Swampman does not manage to have any contentful thoughts whatsoever. The point at issue here is about *shared* meanings – not about the determination of semantic values.

positing miraculous duplication of individuals. Given the different kinds of things one might mean by ‘meaning’, there are bound to be many species of ‘meaning’ that such duplicates share with the originals – e.g. extension, character, coloring, etc. So in the absence of any specification of the precise semantic jobs we’re interested in, simply appealing to commonsense judgments of sameness of ‘meaning’ will generally yield a positive response for these cases. But obviously this doesn’t establish that there isn’t an important type of meaning that is *not* shared by the duplicates and the originals. Commonsense intuitions simply cannot rule out independently well-motivated theories in this way. It’s worth noting, moreover, that resemblance models of meaning will also violate commonsense intuitions about sameness of meaning in much less exotic cases of speakers within our own linguistic community who don’t conform to the precise topic-fixing conceptual roles posited by these theories yet seem by commonsense standards to share the same meaning. All theories of meaning have surprising consequences about particular cases. The general lesson here is that commonsense verdicts about cases cannot be the ultimate court of appeal for theories of meaning.

Still, one might object that there is a special problem facing relational accounts of meaning identity. Surely Swampman *must* share the same meaning with us, since he exhibits so many general features that we associate with sameness of meaning. After all, he’s a perfect duplicate of someone who is uncontroversially a competent speaker of English. However, one cannot simply appeal to Swampman’s resemblance to us as a decisive indication of sameness of meaning in order to refute relational models. That would beg the question at issue: whether resemblance really is the best explanation of the phenomena we’re interested in explaining with the notion of meaning. Nor will it help to appeal to the familiar translation test for sameness of meaning. Translation looks for different things on different occasions: sometimes we seek to preserve reference, sometimes connotation, and sometimes we may be interested in causal-historical links. The real question is what features of subjects’ use we *should* be focused on for our current theoretical purposes. And to answer that question, we need to step back from an examination of particular cases and take a broader view of which theoretical interests are at stake in characterizing meaning identity.

This is what we did in the paper Möller criticizes. There, we identified a crucial epistemic role played by sameness of meaning:

The commonsense notion of meaning carves out an important epistemic role: to share a meaning is to share a common epistemic perspective that ensures that we are talking about the same subject matter. Competence with the meaning of a word constitutes an entry ticket into communal discussion: it demarcates whom we should treat as a legitimate interlocutor on a given topic, and who genuinely agrees or disagrees with us.¹³

In particular, we emphasized that a plausible account of sameness of meaning should allow for open-ended inquiry and debate: interlocutors can have very different patterns of substantive assumptions and motivations without threatening their ability to semantically coordinate on the same topic. This variability in topic-specific understanding is particularly important in the case of thin evaluative predicates like

¹³ (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009: 23). It’s worth emphasizing that the epistemic roles of coordination on a common subject matter will be the same even if the semantic value picked out by a normative predicate is as an expressive role, rather than as a property.

‘is right’, because with these terms we are especially interested in allowing for coherent epistemic engagement between individuals with different cognitive and motivational states.

More generally, we can isolate a number of desiderata on the kind of sameness of meaning at issue in metaethics:

1. Semantic coordination: Sameness of meaning provides a semantic guarantee of sameness of topic. A theoretical account of sameness of meaning should explain how grasp of the same meaning helps to ensure (perhaps together with context) that competent speakers coordinate on the same semantic value when they use a particular term. This coordination explains the difference in logical form between claims like ‘what’s right is right’ and ‘what’s right is what maximizes utility’ or ‘what’s right is what I morally approve of’.
2. Accessibility: Sameness of meaning is a normal, stable, and easily accessible way of ensuring semantic coordination. A theoretical account should vindicate the idea that ordinary speakers succeed in grasping the meaning of ‘right’.
3. Flexibility: Sameness of meaning allows for coordination on a determinate topic despite open-ended variation in competent speakers’ epistemic and motivational states. A theoretical account should be able to explain how genuine (semantically guaranteed) disagreement about the topic is consistent with speakers differing with respect to virtually any specific belief or motivation.
4. Congruence: Sameness of meaning must ensure sufficient overlap in beliefs and/or motivations to explain everyday communication and coordination.

We contend that JAZZ provides a more plausible account of the psychological mechanisms that actually ensure semantic coordination than do resemblance models of meaning identity. Moreover, these mechanisms can ensure coordination without the strong topic-fixing conventions that are required by standard resemblance models of meaning identity, which are both psychologically and epistemologically dubious.¹⁴

A critic of our account might take issue with the theoretical job description we’ve outlined for theorizing about meaning identity in metaethics. Perhaps we are wrong to place special emphasis on the desiderata of semantic coordination despite open-ended variability in beliefs and motivations. Alternatively, a critic might agree with the job description we’ve outlined, but argue that we are wrong in supposing JAZZ is the model that best fulfills these desiderata. Perhaps a resemblance model provides the best overall balance between the different desiderata. However, to engage with our argument, critics must focus squarely on these broader theoretical issues. Simply citing commonsense intuitions about particular cases like Swampman or citing everyday criteria for judging sameness of meaning like the translation test will not advance the debate. Such commonsense tests are too coarse-grained to adjudicate between different theories of meaning identity for the purposes of metaethics.

4. Analyticity

One central advantage of JAZZ, we argue, is that it avoids the structural commitment to analytic truths that’s characteristic of resemblance models. However, Möller

¹⁴ For the specific application of these points to the case of normative concepts, see (Schroeter and Schroeter Ms). For a general overview of epistemic roles played by sameness of meaning and the advantages of connectedness accounts, see (Schroeter and Bigelow 2009; Schroeter 2012). For the importance of intra-personal connections for concept identity, see (Schroeter 2013).

maintains that we are confused on this point. A minimalist like Gibbard offers an *analysis* of what's required for competence with thin evaluative predicates in terms of their motivational role; but according to Möller this analysis does not ground *analytic truths*, since one need not accept this analysis in order to count as competent:

Just as a person may be competent with the term 'knowledge' without accepting any particular analysis of knowledge, Gibbard would no doubt accept that his opponents are competent users of evaluative terms, even if they deny his analysis of them. (Möller 2013: 13)

Is there an important sense in which resemblance theories, whether motivationalist or descriptivist, are committed to analytic truths? And does JAZZ succeed in avoiding that commitment?

To answer these questions, it's important to clarify the notion of analytic truth at stake. One might be tempted to say that an analytic truth is a true sentence that any competent speaker would immediately recognize as true simply in virtue of understanding the claim: e.g. you won't count as competent with the term 'bachelor', unless the claim, 'All and only unmarried but eligible men are bachelors' immediately strikes you as true. However, this is a much too demanding characterization of analytic truths. Contemporary champions of a priori conceptual analysis like Frank Jackson hold that most analytic truths are not obvious: you may need a great deal of a priori reflection about possible cases to recognize a correct characterization of the implicit topic-fixing pattern of understanding associated with 'knowledge' or even 'chair'. Jackson likens your mastery of the core topic-fixing pattern of understanding associated with your words to your implicit knowledge of the rules of grammar for your language: although you immediately recognize particular uses that violate the rules, typically you won't be able to immediately recognize a true formulation of the rules that implicitly guide these judgments.¹⁵

According to resemblance models, competence with a given meaning requires the speaker to associate an expression with a core topic-fixing pattern of understanding, which distinguishes the meaning she associates with this term from all other possible meanings. We can think of this distinctive pattern of understanding as a kind of implicit knowledge that her term is to be governed by *this* core pattern of understanding. Such implicit knowledge affords a priori access to analytic truths – i.e. explicit statements of the core topic-fixing pattern of understanding governing a term (or partial characterizations of that core pattern) that can be known to be true purely in virtue of semantic competence. According to a resemblance model, the core pattern of understanding governing your own expressions can in principle be explicitly known through the kind of purely hypothetical reasoning about cases and counterexamples that's characteristic of a priori conceptual analysis.

A minimalist theory of competence like Gibbard's is committed to analytic truths in this sense. To be competent with the Gibbardian meaning of 'x is right' is to be disposed to use that predicate to express one's hypothetical plans to perform x. So a competent speaker whose use of the term was implicitly governed by this core pattern of understanding could in principle come to recognize this to be true, simply by exercising and reflecting on her own implicit linguistic dispositions. The analytic truth that captures her semantic competence might be expressed as follows:

Gibbardian analysis: 'x is right' expresses the speaker's hypothetical plan to perform x.

¹⁵ For these points, see (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009: 5) and (Jackson 1998, 2000).

Of course, Gibbard doesn't expect his philosophical opponents to immediately recognize this analysis as true: a priori conceptual analysis is hard. But insofar as they share the same Gibbardian meaning, all competent speakers must implicitly rely on this core pattern of understanding. More generally, minimalist theories must identify a core motivational role that all competent speakers must associate with evaluative expressions – yet variability in motivations do not intuitively seem to preclude competence with such expressions.¹⁶

Connectedness models of competence (such as JAZZ) are not committed to there being any core topic-fixing pattern of understanding that's required for competence with particular meanings. It follows that connectedness theories do not inherit the resemblance model's structural commitment to analytic truths (Schroeter and Schroeter 2009: 23).

But Möller objects that JAZZ *must* be committed to analytic truths in the relevant sense, since it offers an account of what's required for competence with a given expression. If any non-obvious analysis of what's required for competence with 'right' is sufficient to ground an analytic truth, then surely the theoretical principles that define JAZZ (Coordinating Intentions and Congruence) will count as analytic truths (Möller 2013: 13, fn. 22).

There are two reasons why a connectedness theorist should reject this line of objection. First, a theory like JAZZ does not require competent speakers to have implicit knowledge of the two theoretical principles that define the model. Unlike resemblance models, JAZZ does not explain competence in terms of an individual's grasp of a core topic-fixing criterion. The theory requires speakers who are competent with a public meaning to have an intention to coordinate with others in their community; but it does not require all competent speakers to have an implicit understanding of the precise nature of the Coordinating Intentions and Congruence requirements as defined by the theory. After all, JAZZ was introduced in part to explain how competent speakers might be ignorant or mistaken about the precise identifying characteristics of familiar properties like *being right* or *being a dog*. So it would be odd if JAZZ were then to require that speakers must know the precise identifying characteristics of the property of *being competent with the meaning of x* in order to count as competent with the relevant expression. A proponent of JAZZ can insist that knowledge of the defining principles of JAZZ is based on substantive theorizing and perhaps empirical discoveries about the representational traditions to which one belongs – so it's not just a matter of making one's implicit knowledge explicit.

Second, even if all competent speakers *did* implicitly grasp Coordinating Intentions and Congruence, these principles would not be part of a conceptual analysis of an evaluative term like 'is right'. On our account, these are perfectly general metasemantic principles that apply across the board to *all* expressions in a speaker's language: they apply equally to 'is a bachelor', 'is a dog', and 'is right'. Thus, the defining principles of JAZZ would be akin to general rational principles, like the principle of non-contradiction or the principle of ontological parsimony. Perhaps one

¹⁶ See (Merli 2008) for an extended defense of this point. The strict motivational requirements for competence posited by minimalists seem to violate commonsense assumptions about semantic coordination just as much as the descriptive requirements posited by neo-descriptivists.

must be disposed to respect the principle of non-contradiction in order to count as competent with the meaning of any expression; but it seems misleading at best to say that the principle of non-contradiction is an analytic truth knowable purely on the basis of understanding the meaning of ‘is a dog’ or ‘is right’. Similarly, it would be misleading at best to say that the general metasemantic principles of JAZZ would be analytic truths based on conceptual analysis of the meaning of particular expressions like ‘is right’.

5. Conclusion

In closing, we’d like to return to what seems to have led Möller to miss the distinctiveness of JAZZ. Möller is right to note that coordinating intentions are not unique to JAZZ: any genetic story about how public meanings are normally established in a community will appeal to some form of intention to coordinate one’s own understanding with that of others in one’s community. So Möller concludes that JAZZ does not involve any distinctive commitments. Indeed, he claims JAZZ is strictly compatible with either a minimalist or a neo-descriptivist theory of competence with evaluative predicates.

However, JAZZ differs from resemblance theories in two key respects. First, interlocking coordinating intentions are *constitutive* of competence with the same meaning – they are not simply part of a *genetic* story of how competence is achieved as they are on a resemblance model. Second, the content of the coordinating intentions posited by JAZZ underwrites a *tradition-based* determination theory as opposed to a *token-based* determination theory: the basic units to which semantic values are assigned are the representational traditions defined by interlocking coordinating intentions, and particular token uses of expressions inherit their semantic values from the traditions to which they are connected.

As a result, JAZZ differs from resemblance models of meaning in that it does not require all competent speakers to accept some topic-fixing patterns of understanding. This is a particularly welcome result in the case of thin evaluative predicates, since we have a strong interest in allowing for semantic coordination on a determinate topic in thin evaluative discourse despite open-ended variation in evaluative beliefs and motivations.

References

- Burge, Tyler. 1979. Sinning against Frege. *Philosophical Review* 88:398–432.
- Davidson, Donald. 1987. Knowing One’s Own Mind. *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 61:441–458.
- Devitt, Michael. 1981. *Designation*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Gibbard, Allan. 2003. *Thinking How to Live*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Jackson, Frank. 1998. *From Metaphysics to Ethics: A Defence of Conceptual Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- . 2000. Reply to Yablo: What do we communicate when we use ethical terms? *Philosophical Books* 48:24–29.
- Jackson, Frank, and Philip Pettit. 1995. Moral Functionalism and Moral Motivation. *Philosophical Quarterly* 45:20–40.
- Kaplan, David. 1989. Afterthoughts. In *Themes from Kaplan*, edited by J. Almog, J. Perry and H. Wettstein. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Kripke, Saul. 1980. *Naming and Necessity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Lewis, David. 1969. *Convention*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Merli, David. 2008. Expressivism and the Limits of Disagreement. *The Journal of Ethics* 12:25-55.
- Millikan, Ruth. 1984. *Language, thought, and other biological categories*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press.
- Möller, Niklas. 2013. All that JAZZ: Linguistic Competence and Improvisation. *Philosophical Studies* Online first.
- Peacocke, Christopher. 1992. *A Study of Concepts*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- . 2004. Moral Rationalism. *Journal of Philosophy* 101:499–526.
- Schroeter, François. 2006. The Limits of Sentimentalism. *Ethics* 116:337–361.
- Schroeter, Laura. 2003. Gruesome Diagonals. *Philosophers' Imprint* 3 (3):1–23.
- . 2004. The Limits of Conceptual Analysis. *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 85:425–453.
- . 2006. Against A Priori Reductions. *Philosophical Quarterly* 56:562–586.
- . 2012. Bootstrapping our Way to Samesaying. *Synthese* 189:177–197.
- . 2013. Are Concepts Creatures of Darkness? Critical Discussion of Robert Stalnaker's *Our Knowledge of the Internal World*. *Analytic Philosophy* 54:277–292.
- Schroeter, Laura, and John Bigelow. 2009. Jackson's Classical Model of Meaning. In *Mind, Ethics, and Conditionals: Themes from the Philosophy of Frank Jackson*, edited by I. Ravenscroft. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Schroeter, Laura, and François Schroeter. 2009. A Third Way in Metaethics. *Noûs* 43:1–30.
- . 2013. Normative realism: co-reference without convergence? *Philosophers' Imprint* 13 (13):1–24.
- . Ms. Normative Concepts: A Connectedness Model.
- Stalnaker, Robert. 1997. Reference and Necessity. In *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, edited by C. Wright and B. Hale. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wedgwood, Ralph. 2001. Conceptual Role Semantics for Moral Terms. *Philosophical Review* 110:1–30.

Minerva Access is the Institutional Repository of The University of Melbourne

Author/s:

Schroeter, L;Schroeter, F

Title:

Jazz Redux: a reply to Mo#ller

Date:

2014

Citation:

Schroeter, L. & Schroeter, F. (2014). Jazz Redux: a reply to Mo#ller. *Philosophical Studies*, 170 (2), pp.303-316. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11098-013-0219-2>.

Persistent Link:

<http://hdl.handle.net/11343/282944>