

# ENTAILMENTS ARE CANCELLABLE

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## Abstract

Several philosophers have recently claimed that if a proposition is cancellable from an uttered sentence then that proposition is not entailed by that uttered sentence. The claim should be a familiar one. It has become a standard device in the philosopher's tool-kit. I argue that this claim is false. There is a kind of entailment—which I call “modal entailment”—that is context-sensitive and, because of this, cancellable. So cancellability does not show that a proposition is not entailed by an uttered sentence. I close the paper by describing an implication this has for a disagreement between J. L. Austin and Grice concerning the relation between felicity and truth.<sup>1</sup>

## 1 What does cancellability show?

Several philosophers have recently claimed that if a proposition is cancellable from an uttered sentence then that proposition is not entailed by that uttered sentence. The claim should be a familiar one. Its truth is assumed in many philosophical debates. For instance: it is assumed in some defences of invariantism against epistemic contextualism; it is assumed in an argument for the possibility of a relevant alternatives account of knowledge which does not require giving up a principle of deductive closure; and it is assumed in defence of a material conditional analysis of indicative conditionals.<sup>2</sup> I am sure the reader knows of other examples. The assumption is a now standard device in the philosopher's tool-kit. In this paper I argue that the assumption is false.<sup>3</sup>

I proceed in the following stages. In section 2, I define cancellability and distinguish between two kinds: contextual and explicit. I use this definition and distinction to clarify the assumption currently under consideration. In section 3, I distinguish between two kinds of entailment: modal and model theoretic. In section 4, I show that the contextual cancellability of a proposition from an uttered sentence does not show that the proposition is not modally entailed by that uttered sentence. In section 5, I show the same for explicit cancellability. In section 6, I address the concern that the conclusions of sections 4 and 5 depend on positing linguistic context-sensitivity where there is no evidence that it exists. In section 7, I explain why Burton-Roberts' and Capone's attack on the possibility of cancellable explicatures does not apply to the conclusions of sections 4 and 5.<sup>4</sup> In section 8, I describe an implication of the fact that entailments are cancellable for a disagreement between J. L. Austin and Grice over the relation between felicity and truth.

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2 See Patrick Rysiew ‘The Context-Sensitivity of Knowledge Attributions’, *Nous* 35 (2001), pp.477–514, Gail Stine ‘Skepticism, relevant alternatives, and deductive closure’, *Philosophical Studies* 29 (1976), pp.249–261 and Paul Grice *Studies in the Way of Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

3 Similar conclusions are defended by Robyn Carston *Thoughts and Utterances: The Pragmatics of Explicit Communication*, (Oxford: Wiley, 2002), by Grice, *Studies*, pp.42–44, by Jerrold Sadock ‘On Testing for Conversational Implicature’ in P. Cole (Ed.), *Syntax and Semantics: Pragmatics* (New York: Academic Press, 1978), pp.281–297 and by Charles Travis ‘On What is Strictly Speaking True’, *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 15 (1985), pp.187–299. Nonetheless, the point has not been properly acknowledged either within the recent literature that I am directly addressing or, I believe, within the broader philosophical community.

4 See Noel Burton-Roberts ‘Cancellation and Intention’ in B. Soria & E. Romero (Eds.), *Explicit Communication: Robyn Carston's Pragmatics*, (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp.138–155, Alessandro Capone ‘Are explicatures cancellable? Toward a theory of speaker's intentionality’, *Intercultural Pragmatics* 6 (2009), pp.55–83 and Alessandro Capone ‘Explicatures are NOT Cancellable’ in A. Capone, F. Piparo, & M. Carapezza (Eds.), *Perspectives on Linguistic Pragmatics* (New York: Springer, 2013), pp.131–151.

## 2 Contextual and explicit cancellability

What is cancellability? Suppose that a speaker A utters a sentence “S”. Suppose that in or by uttering “S”, A encumbers commitment to the truth of a proposition P. Sometimes it is possible for A to avoid commitment to the truth of P without forfeiting commitment to the truth of A's utterance of “S”. If so, then A's commitment to the truth of P is said to be “cancellable” from A's utterance of “S”. Consider, for example, the following exchange:

(1) A: I am out of petrol.

B: There is a garage round the corner. But I don't mean to imply that it sells petrol.

If B had uttered only her first sentence then B would have encumbered commitment to the truth of the proposition that the garage sells petrol. But B is able to avoid this commitment—to cancel it—by uttering her second sentence and she is able to do so without forfeiting her commitment to the truth of the first sentence. Thus the proposition that the garage sells petrol is *cancellable* from B's utterance of the first sentence. If the cancellability of a proposition implies that the proposition is not entailed by the uttered sentence from which it was cancelled, then the proposition that the garage sells petrol is not entailed by B's utterance of “There is a garage round the corner”.

There are two ways that commitment to a proposition can be cancelled.<sup>5</sup> Firstly, this can be done explicitly in the manner illustrated by (1), wherein “but I don't mean to imply that it sells petrol” is added to the original utterance. Secondly, this can be done contextually by making sure that the sentence “S” is uttered in a context which does not generate commitment to the truth of P by uttering “S”.

Various authors have supposed that cancellability in one form or both suffices to show that a cancelled proposition is not entailed by the utterance of a sentence which initially brought with it commitment to the truth of the cancelled proposition. Let “S1” and “S2” be sentences of English and P the proposition semantically expressed by “S2” in context C. Åkerman and Blome-Tillman suppose (E):

(E) If utterances of “S1, but not S2” or “S1, but I don't mean to imply that S2” are admissible in C and they cancel the speaker's commitment to P then P is not entailed by “S1” in C.<sup>6</sup>

Blome-Tillman, Haugh and Neale suppose (E) and also (C):

(C) If there is a context C' in which utterances of “S1” do not commit the speaker to P then an utterance of “S1” in context C does not entail P.<sup>7</sup>

It's these two principles—(E) and (C)—which I think are false and which I will argue are false in what follows.

## 3 Two Kinds of Entailment

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<sup>5</sup>Grice, *Studies*, p.44.

<sup>6</sup> See Michael Blome-Tillman ‘Conversational Implicature and the Cancellability Test’, *Analysis* 68 (2008), pp.156–160, at p.156 and Jonas Åkerman ‘Infelicitous Cancellation: the Explicit Cancellability Test for Conversational Implicature Revisited’, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 93, pp.465–474, at p.465.

<sup>7</sup> See Michael Blome-Tillman ‘Conversational Implicatures (and How to Spot Them)’, *Philosophy Compass* 8 (2013), pp.170–185, at pp.171–172, Michael Haugh ‘Implicature Inference and Cancellability’ in A. Capone, F. Lo Piparo, & M. Carapezza (Eds.), *Perspectives on Pragmatics and Philosophy*, (New York: Springer, 2013), pp.153–188, at p.134, and Stephen Neale ‘H. P. Grice (1913–1988)’ in A. P. Martinich & D. Sosa (Eds.), *A Companion to Analytic Philosophy* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2005), pp. 254–273, at p.261.

In order to see that (E) and (C) are false, we need to define “entailment”. We should distinguish between two kinds of entailment, which I will call “modal entailment” and “model theoretic entailment”. Here is the definition of modal entailment:

*Modal Entailment*

“S1” in context C modally entails a proposition P if and only if there's no logical possibility such that the proposition expressed by “S1” in C is true but P is not.

For example, consider the following two sentences:

- (2) Monroe is a bachelor.
- (3) Monroe is an unmarried man.

At least in those contexts where “bachelor” is used simply to mean the same as “unmarried man”, (2) and (3) express propositions such that there is no logical possibility wherein the proposition expressed by (2) is true but the proposition expressed by (3) is not. Thus, in those contexts, (2) modally entails the proposition expressed by (3).

The definition of model theoretic entailment requires some preliminaries. Let  $L$  be a language: i.e. a set of atomic expressions and complex expressions composed out of those atomic expressions in accordance with grammatical rules of composition. Let a model  $M$  be an ordered quintuple  $\langle D, W, T, C, I \rangle$  such that  $D$  is a set of objects,  $W$  is a set of worlds,  $T$  is a set of times,  $C$  is a set of contexts, and  $I$  is an interpretation function. Expressions in  $L$  can be assigned semantic values which are defined relative to a model. We can distinguish between the *types* of semantic values that expressions in  $L$  have and the *particular* semantic values that the expressions in  $L$  have. For example, suppose that “is red” is a one-place predicate in  $L$ . Suppose it is a feature of one-place predicates in  $L$ , and thus of “is red”, that they can have semantic values of the following type: functions from objects to truth-values. It nonetheless remains an open question what particular semantic value “is red” has in  $L$ : i.e. *which* function from objects to truth-values is the semantic value of “is red”. Let us say that an *admissible model* for assigning semantic values to expressions in a language  $L$  is a model that (a) assigns particular semantic values to expressions in  $L$  that conform to the types of semantic values that expressions in  $L$  have, and (b) assigns the logical connectives of  $L$  the standard classical semantic values. Then we can define model theoretic entailment as follows:

*Model theoretic Entailment*

“S1” in context C model theoretically entails “S2” in C if and only if there is no admissible model for interpreting “S1” and “S2” in C relative to which “S1” expresses a true proposition in C but “S2” does not express a true proposition in C.

For example, consider the following two sentences:

- (4) Monroe is unmarried and Eira is divorced.
- (5) Eira is divorced.

No matter what admissible model we use to interpret the language out of which (4) and (5) are composed, if (4) is true in a given context then so is (5) in that context. Thus (4) model theoretically entails (5).

Modal and model theoretic entailment differ in the following respect. Whether a sentence modally entails a given proposition depends on the particular proposition the sentence expresses in the language out of which it is composed and given the context in which it is used. An analogous

point cannot be made for model theoretic entailment. One sentence model theoretically entails another, if it does, in virtue of the logical form of the two sentences—regardless of the particular propositions the two sentences express in their language and context. For example, notice that (2) in context does not model theoretically entail (3) as used in the same context: there are plenty of admissible models interpreted relative to which (2) can be true while (3) is not. That is because there is nothing about the types of semantic value assigned to the expressions in (2) and (3) which limits the set of admissible models to just those such that, in a given context, if (2) is true then so is (3). Nonetheless, in the right context, (2) modally entails the proposition expressed by (3).

I am going to be interested in modal rather than model theoretic entailment. I am going to argue that (C) and (E) are false because cancellable propositions whose truth is committed to in or by A's utterance of "S" can be modal entailments of "S".

#### 4 (C) is false

Recall that (C) was as follows:

(C) If there is a context  $C'$  in which utterances of "S1" do not commit the speaker to P then an utterance of "S1" in context C does not entail P.

One way for a speaker to commit herself to the truth of a proposition is by uttering a sentence that modally entails that proposition. But the fact that a speaker is not committed to the truth of a proposition P in one context wherein she utters a given sentence "S", does not mean that, in another context, "S" does not modally entail P. Here is an example. Consider the two sentences (6) and (7):

- (6) Mia is tall.
- (7) Mia is taller than 1.5 metres.

Where  $D_e$  is the set of objects in the model used to interpret the language from which (6) and (7) are composed, and where Height-T is a number fixed by the context of use of the relevant predicate, let us suppose that the semantic values of "tall" and "taller than" are as follows:

$I(\text{tall})$  in  $C = \lambda x: x \in D_e . x$  is taller than the height threshold Height-T in  $C$ .

That is to say, the semantic value of "tall" in a context  $C$ , is a function from objects to truth values, such that the function maps an object to true just in case the object is taller than the height threshold Height-T fixed by context  $C$ .

$I(\text{taller than 1.5 metres})$  in  $C = \lambda x: x \in D_e . x$  is taller than 1.5 metres.

That is to say, the semantic value of "taller than 1.5 metres" in context  $C$ , is a function from objects to truth values, such that the function maps an object to true just in case the object is taller than 1.5 metres.

Let us suppose that in context  $C'$ , Height-T is below 1.5 metres. Let us also suppose that in context  $C$ , Height-T is above 1.5 metres. Then when uttered in  $C'$ , (6) does not modally entail (7). But when uttered in  $C$ , (6) does modally entail (7). Call the proposition expressed by (7) in  $C$ , P. A speaker who utters (6) in  $C$  will be committed to P even though she is not (*ceteris paribus*) committed to P when she utters (6) in  $C'$ . Thus (6), (7),  $C$  and  $C'$  constitute a counterexample to (C). The contextual cancellability of P from (6) does not show that P is not entailed by (6) in  $C$ . The problem with (C) is that the propositions modally entailed by a sentence depend on the context of the sentence's use when the sentence includes context-sensitive expressions. So if one "cancels" a commitment to the truth of a proposition—a commitment encumbered by uttering "S"—by

changing the context in which “S” is employed, then one might have changed the content of “S” and hence the modal entailments of “S”. The fact that the utterance of a sentence in one context does not commit the speaker to a given proposition, does not mean that the sentence, when uttered in a different context, does not modally entail that proposition.

### 5 (E) is false

Recall that (E) was as follows:

(E) If utterances of “S1, but not S2” or “S1, but I don't mean to imply that S2” are admissible in C and they cancel the speaker's commitment to P then P is not entailed by “S1” in C.

(E) looks like it is not susceptible to the problem faced by (C). The problem with (C) was that in order to check whether a proposition is contextually cancellable one has to change the context of the sentence from which the proposition is being cancelled. But changes in context can induce changes in the content of the sentence and hence changes in the modal entailments of that sentence. Since the context is held constant when checking whether a proposition is explicitly cancellable, it may seem that no contextual changes need to be induced when performing the check and so any changes in a speaker's commitments witnessed when performing the check cannot be accounted for by appeal to changes in the content of expressions in “S1”. However, I will now argue that even if the context is held constant, the addition of “but not S2” or “but I don't mean to imply that S2” to “S1” can influence the content of “S1”. I will argue for this by describing various ways in which the words that follow an expression can influence the content of that expression. I will then return to the case in which those words are explicit cancellations.

Let us begin at the sub-sentential level. Context-sensitive expressions can have different contents depending upon how the sentence in which they appear continues. Perhaps the simplest example of this is Searle's “cut”.<sup>8</sup> Consider some possible continuations of “John cut...”:

- the grass
- the cake
- the cocaine
- the air
- the line

Depending upon how we continue “John cut” we will (typically) understand “cut” in different ways. Typically, when you cut the grass you do not slice it into pieces with a knife. Rather, you take the lawn mower and you shred the blades of grass. Similarly, typically, when you cut the cake, you do not shred the top layer with a rotating blade. Etc. I say “typically” because you could cut the grass like you cut the cake and you could readily express such a thing with the sentence, “John cut the grass”, given the right context (as Searle shows). Even so, the correct content to assign to “cut” depends on (but is not entirely determined by) the expressions that follow it.

One way to describe this phenomenon is to say that the content of the verb “cut” is *shifted* by the addition of new material. To describe the phenomenon in this way is to suggest that there is already a content of “cut” by default and that the content changes from one content to another with the addition of the next word. This is a stronger proposal than is warranted by the behaviour of “cut”. Firstly, what is the default content of “cut”? It is not clear that any particular content has priority over another in this respect. Secondly, let us suppose that there is. Still, although that might tell us something about how a sentence that includes “cut” is processed, it does not tell us much

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<sup>8</sup> John Searle ‘The Background of Meaning’ in F. Kiefer, M. Bierwisch, & J. Searle (Eds.), *Speech Act Theory and Pragmatics* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980), pp.221–232.

about the correct way to understand the truth-condition of the sentence in context. At the moment, our concern is not with how we figure out this truth-condition but just with what is relevant to making the sentence have the truth-condition that it has in context. The expressions that follow “cut” seem to be relevant to this—regardless of whether, when interpreting a sentence containing “cut”, we first assume it has one content and then—after having read the sentence in which it figures—conclude that it has another. This point will be relevant in section 7.

We can get the same effect at the super-sentential level also. Here is an example.

*“local bar”*

- (8) John always visited a local bar. He was an insurance salesman visiting a different town every two days or so. For that reason, he couldn't always return to the same bar. That would have been expensive and impracticable.
- (9) John always visited a local bar. There was a beautiful waitress who worked there and she happened to be John's neighbour.

In (8), the material that follows the first sentence leads us to accept a reading of the first sentence according to which John visits a bar that is local to each town he visits. In (9), the material that follows the first sentence (the same sentence as in (8)) leads us to accept a reading of the first sentence according to which John visits a bar local to his place of residence. Thus the content of the context sensitive expression “local” is influenced by the sentences that follow the sentence in which it appears. The same effect can be achieved with other context-sensitive expressions located in the first sentence of a string of sentences.

Finally, there are examples wherein the continuation from the original sentence includes the phrases that figure in (E).

- (10) John always visited a local bar but I don't mean to imply that it was the same bar every time. He was an insurance salesman and was in a different town every day or two.
- (11) John always visited a local bar but, although he travelled a lot at the time, I don't mean to imply that he was visiting a different bar each time. There was a beautiful waitress who worked at the bar near his home and she happened to be John's neighbour.

In (10), the material that follows the first clause leads us to accept a reading of the first clause according to which the bars were local to the towns John visited. In (11), the material that follows the first clause leads us to accept a reading of the first clause according to which John visited the bar local to his home.

The capacity of words and sentences that follow a context-sensitive expression to influence the intuitively correct reading of the context-sensitive expression problematizes (E). Recall once again that (E) states:

(E) If utterances of “S1, but not S2” or “S1, but I don't mean to imply that S2” are admissible in C and they cancel the speaker's commitment to P then P is not entailed by “S1” in C.

In order for (E) to be true, the addition of “but not S2” or “but I don't mean to imply S2” cannot influence the content of “S1”. If they do then it is possible that a speaker can explicitly cancel commitment to the truth of a proposition even though that proposition *is* (modally) entailed by “S1” when “S1” is not supplemented with the addition of “but...” Consider (12):

- (12) A: Does John have a local?  
B: John always visited a local bar but I don't mean to imply that it was the same bar every

time. He was an insurance salesman and was in a different town every day or two.

In this context, if B had not added the explicit cancellation, then B's first clause would have committed B to the proposition that John always visited a bar that was local to John's place of residence. Thus, B's initial utterance would have modally entailed the proposition that John always visited a bar that was local to John's place of residence. However, in actual fact, B explicitly cancels commitment to this proposition with B's second clause. For this reason, the first clause does not modally entail this proposition. The entailment is cancelled. As (12) illustrates, the fact that the content of context-sensitive expressions can be influenced by explicit cancellations falsifies (E).

## 6 Context-sensitivity

The problems posed for both (C) and (E) arise only insofar as some of the expressions that figure within the relevant uttered sentences are context-sensitive. One might think that the problems posed for both (C) and (E) are severely restricted because of the limited extent of context-sensitivity. For instance, consider again (1):

(1) A: I am out of petrol.

B: There is a garage round the corner. But I don't mean to imply that it sells petrol.

Had B uttered only her first sentence, B would have committed herself to the truth of the proposition that the garage sells petrol. But given her second sentence, B explicitly cancels commitment to this proposition. Does this show that the commitment that B would have made had she uttered her first sentence alone (without the cancellation) would not have been an entailment of the first sentence? Well, one might think that there is no plausible context-sensitivity of “garage” that could account for this contextual variation in modal entailments. The word “garage” just does not vary content in the right way. Moreover, one might think that this is commonly true: because context-sensitivity just is not that common, the objection raised in this paper against (C) and (E) is overblown. It affects fringe cases but most sentences to which (C) and (E) have been applied are unaffected. In response to this concern, I will make two remarks.

Firstly, regardless of the scope of context-sensitivity, it has been shown that cancellability is not necessarily the manifestation of non-entailment—*contra* Åkerman, Blome-Tillman, Haugh, and Neale. Context-sensitive modal entailments are cancellable. So if you want to conclude that a proposition is not entailed by an uttered sentence, you are going to need to show more than that the proposition is cancellable.

Secondly, there is at least *prima facie* evidence for widespread context-sensitivity. We can see how *prima facie* evidence for context-sensitivity can arise in unexpected places by looking in particular at the word “garage”. I will present two contexts of use for a single sentence that includes the word “garage”. There seems to be a shift in the sentence's truth-value across the two contexts despite no relevant change in the condition of the world the sentence is used to describe. This suggests that there is a change in what the sentence requires of that world in order for the sentence to be true. One explanation of this is that “garage” has shifted content between the two contexts. This is *prima facie* evidence that “garage” is context sensitive. This is only *prima facie* evidence because other explanations need to be ruled out (e.g. that some other expression in the sentence accounts for the truth-value shift, that there is an ambiguity, that speakers are confusing an implicature for the content of the sentence in context, and so on). Nonetheless, this is the kind of evidence that many have taken to be sufficient to posit context-sensitivity for other expressions.

Here are the two contexts.

### *Context 1*

In the ghost town is a dilapidated petrol station without any petrol, long overgrown with

plants and rusting away. A group of ghost town enthusiasts approach a tour guide who knows the contents of the town, and the surrounding area, very well. They say to her, “hey, is that the garage? It's so rare to find a garage in one of these ghost towns. We're so excited to see this one.” The tour guide understands what they're looking for but for whatever reason says, “No, that's not a garage. To find a garage you'd need to move on to the next town.” The ghost town enthusiasts believe the tour guide and move on to the next town. There they discover that what they were looking for was indeed the object they spoke about with the tour guide. It being all too clear that the tour guide understood what they were looking for, and that the tour guide knew what they were referring to, they become angry with the tour guide and return to complain. Is what the tour guide said false? Here, it seems that the tour guide was knowingly saying something false. She could be rightly accused of doing so by the ghost town enthusiasts.

### *Context 2*

Almost simultaneously—but out of earshot of the ghost town enthusiasts—a man running out of petrol asks the tour guide, “hey, is that a garage? I'm running out of petrol.” The tour guide responds exactly as she did to the ghost town enthusiasts, “No, that's not a garage. To find a garage you'd need to move on to the next town.” Suppose the man subsequently discovers that the tour guide understood what the man was looking for and that she understood what the man was referring to. If we asked the man whether the tour guide had said something false, the man could reasonably answer: “No, what she said is true. That's not a garage: at least not in the sense I was after.” It seems that, in this context, what the tour guide says is true.

If competent speakers of English agree that “that's not a garage” shifts truth-value between Context 1 and Context 2, and assuming that “that” invariably refers to the dilapidated petrol station, and assuming that there is no further ambiguity in the sentence which could account for the shift of truth-value, and finally, given that the world spoken of with this sentence does not (relevantly) change between the two contexts of utterance, then we have reason to believe that “garage” has a content that can shift with the word's context of use. There are many “if”s here. Nonetheless, I stress again, this is the same kind of evidence that is used to show that uncontroversially context sensitive expressions are context-sensitive. Insofar as the same case can be made for “garage”, there is just as much reason to think it is context-sensitive as there is for uncontroversially context sensitive expressions (such as “tall”, “red”, “local” etc.).

The same kind of evidence can be generated for a great many expressions. It does not take too much effort to construct similar examples for words as varied as quantifiers (“every”), vague adjectives (“bald”), colour adjectives (“red”), non-colour adjectives (“modern”), comparative adjectives (“brighter than”), verbs (“won”), count nouns (“duck”), mass nouns (“water”), names (“Anne Grimaldi”) and others. So the range of sentences for which context-sensitivity poses at least a *prima facie* challenge to (C) and (E) is not restricted to fringe cases.

### **7 Entailments are cancellable even if explicatures are not**

An explicature of a sentence in context is a proposition which (a) is a content which the speaker intends to express by uttering the sentence and (b) has a structure which is isomorphic with the structure of the sentence. An explicature is, in effect, the content of a sentence in context. Carston claims that explicatures are cancellable.<sup>9</sup> Burton-Roberts and Capone object to Carston's claim.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances*, p.138.

<sup>10</sup> See Burton-Roberts, ‘Cancellation and Intention’, Capone, ‘Are explicatures cancellable?’ and Capone, ‘Explicatures are NOT cancellable’.



Now, the entailments of an explicature of a sentence are not themselves explicatures.<sup>11</sup> Nonetheless, one way in which the modal entailments of a sentence in context can be cancelled, I have argued, is by modifying the content of the sentence that has those entailments. For this reason, Burton-Roberts' and Capone's objection against the cancellability of explicatures might well imply that modal entailments are not cancellable. In this section, I show that their objection has no such implication.

The explicatures of a sentence in context are, by definition, intended by the speaker of the sentence. Burton-Roberts and Capone both object that, because of this fact, explicatures cannot be cancelled. If you cancel commitment to a proposition then you do not intend to communicate it. But if the proposition is an explicature then you do intend to communicate it. Thus, to propose that a proposition is both an explicature and cancelled is to land oneself in contradiction. Hence, *contra* Carston, explicatures are not cancellable.

Here is why this objection does not apply to the conclusions of sections 4 and 5; viz. that modal entailments are both contextually and explicitly cancellable. There are at least two things one might speak of with the word "cancellability". Firstly, there is the matter of whether a speaker could avoid commitment to the truth of a proposition P which she actually commits to when uttering a sentence "S" in a context C either by uttering "S" in a different context or by appending an explicit denial of commitment to P in C. If she could do so then we say that P is cancellable. Call this *cancellability-1*. Secondly, there is the matter of whether a speaker can express a proposition Q by (intentionally or not) expressing a proposition P and then expressing  $\neg P$ , with the result that, in context, the speaker commits herself to Q. I countenanced this possibility in section 5 but denied that anything I said had committed me to accepting it. We call P cancellable insofar as this can be done. Call this *cancellability-2*. The first kind of cancellability is thought to be a useful diagnostic for distinguishing between different aspects of communicated content. I have been arguing that it does not distinguish modal entailments from other communicated contents—contrary to (C) and (E). The second kind of cancellability is a process that a speaker may go through in communicating a given content: she expresses a proposition by first expressing and denying another. A proposition can exhibit cancellability-1 without exhibiting cancellability-2. For example, suppose that a speaker utters a sentence "S" on its own in C and thereby expresses P. However, were she to have uttered "S" with an explicit denial of commitment to P in C, then she would not have expressed P at all (not even "on the way" to expressing some second proposition): she would simply have expressed some other proposition Q. Here, P exhibits cancellability-1 but P does not exhibit cancellability-2: in neither actuality nor in the possibility considered is P both expressed and denied (as is required for it to exhibit cancellability-2). Examples (8)-(11) appear to illustrate this possibility: insofar as you do not initially register the cancelled proposition upon reading the first sentence of each example (I do not), the cancelled proposition apparently exhibits cancellability-1 but not cancellability-2.

In the current paper, we are interested in cancellability-1 because it is that which is supposed to indicate non-entailment, according to (C) and (E). Burton-Roberts' and Capone's argument against cancellable explicatures targets cancellability-2. But then Burton-Roberts' and Capone's charge that explicatures are not cancellable (i.e. do not exhibit cancellability-2) poses no threat to the logically independent thesis that the modal entailments of a sentence in context are cancellable (i.e. do exhibit cancellability-1).

### **8 The relation between felicity and truth**

The fact that entailments are cancellable has implications for an issue of contention between J. L. Austin and Grice. They held different views on the relation between felicity (i.e. whether an uttered sentence is exaggerated, vague, bald, rough, misleading, not very good, rather general or too concise etc.) and truth. Austin thought that the two interact: if an uttered sentence fails to be felicitous in some respect or other, then generally, 'it is pointless to insist on deciding in simple

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<sup>11</sup> Carston, *Thoughts and Utterances*, p.123.

terms whether the statement is “true or false”<sup>12</sup>. For Austin, felicity, in many cases, is a precondition for an uttered sentence to achieve the status of being truth-evaluable. Grice, on the other hand, thought that felicity and truth are two independent ways of assessing an uttered sentence. There is the question of whether an uttered sentence is inappropriate because it ‘fails to correspond with the world in some favored way’, and there is the different question of whether an uttered sentence is inappropriate for some *other* reason.<sup>13</sup>

One reason—and I think the main reason—why Grice thought that these are independent matters is that, even if an uttered sentence suffers from tremendous infelicity because some precondition for felicity does not obtain, nonetheless ‘most people would, I think, on reflection have a more or less strong inclination to say’ that the uttered sentence is true.<sup>14</sup> In turn, Grice's main reason for thinking that most people have such an inclination is the fact that propositions according to which a felicity condition obtains are cancellable from uttered sentences. He thought that if someone utters a sentence “S1” and can deny a proposition P that states that a given felicity condition obtains (without forfeiting commitment to the truth of the utterance “S1”), then the truth-value of P is independent of the truth-value of the utterance of “S1”. Thus even if the falsity of P makes the utterance of “S1” inappropriate, that does not mark any interaction with the truth of the utterance of “S1”.

One implication of the fact that entailments are cancellable should now be apparent. Consider a proposition P which describes a felicity condition of an uttered sentence, “S1”: if P is false then, for some reason or other, “S1” is inappropriate. Suppose that the utterer of “S1” can cancel commitment to the truth of P. Is Grice right to suppose that, generally, this means that P's truth is independent of the truth of the utterance of “S1”? No—given that modal entailments are (a) cancellable and (b) such that if they are false then the utterance of “S1” “fails to correspond with the world in some favoured way”. So one implication of the fact that entailments are cancellable is that there is more mileage in the Austinian view on the relation between felicity and truth than Grice was willing to allow. The idea that an uttered sentence must get an awful lot right before the question of its truth or falsity can be sensibly raised (at least ‘in simple terms’ i.e. without explicit cancellations, for instance), is worth more exploration than it has tended to attract under Grice's influence.

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<sup>12</sup> John Langshaw Austin ‘Truth’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society: Supplementary Volume*, 24, pp.111–128, at p.124.

<sup>13</sup> Grice, *Studies*, p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Grice, *Studies*, p.9.