Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone, *Imagination and Convention: Distinguishing Grammar and Inference in Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. viii+292 pp.

Humans are social primates, and our particular brand of sociality is enabled by cognitive capacities that are quantitatively or qualitatively unique on earth. One of these unique capacities is *language*, which allows us to store and communicate information using precise and informationally rich grammatical structures. A second capacity that makes us unique is *mindreading*—our capacity (and irresistible proclivity) to treat pieces of the world around us as agents and explain their behavior by inferring their thoughts. It seems likely that these two capacities will be the key ingredients in a full explanation of human communication. The interesting questions are: how do they work together, and what is the balance between them?

Here is an answer to these questions that has appealed to intentionalists—those philosophers, cognitive scientists, and anthropologists whose primary inspiration is the work of Paul Grice. Human communication is, at its core, special kind of applied mindreading. We go about the world compulsively attempting to discern one another's thoughts. As socially intelligent agents, we also often attempt to shape others' discernments of our own thoughts. Communication is a special case of the latter, wherein one intentionally triggers and guides an audience's attempt to read one's mind, in part by revealing the intention to do so. Intentions to hijack others' mindreading capacities in this way are called 'communicative intentions'. According to intentionalists, communication happens when an audience recognizes what effect the "speaker" communicatively intends to have on them. I put 'speaker' in scare-quotes here because communication of this sort needn't involve speech, language, or even any conventional form of signal. Rather, the agent who initiates communication must merely present their audience with some kind of evidence of their intentions—something that sets the intention-recognition process in motion. If the circumstances are right, this evidence may be entirely idiosyncratic and unprecedented—just the right wiggle of one's nose, or an act of passive-aggressively doing the addressee's laundry, for example. Alternatively, an utterance of a kind that would standardly serve as evidence of one intention may sometimes be used as evidence of a different kind of intention—a phenomenon normally called 'implicature' or 'indirect speech'.

Where does language fit into the picture? The intentionalist answer is that language is a capacity that allows us to produce and decode rich, grammatically structured evidence of our communicative intentions. By uttering 'Sam is waiting for me', for example, I signal both the kind of propositional attitude that I am trying to get you to have (belief, or something similar) as well as the kind of content that

this attitude should have (a proposition about someone named Sam waiting for me). Of course, the sentence I utter doesn't tell you *everything* about the kind of mental state I am trying to get you to have. You still have to infer my intentions in order to figure out which Sam I mean, that I am speaking literally, whether I'm also trying to imply that I really need you to stop bothering me so that I can go and meet Sam already, and so on. But linguistic utterances allow us to get the contents of much more complex communicative intentions recognized because they provide audiences with much richer—albeit still partial and defeasible—evidence of these intentions.

In *Imagination and Convention*, Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone launch a comprehensive attack on the picture I've just sketched. In its place, they put forward a view on which the sort of communicating we do with language is *essentially* a matter of exploiting linguistic conventions. To communicate is to change the conversational score, thereby coordinating in new ways with one's interlocutors. Uttering a sentence changes the score in a way that is determined by conventional grammatical principles. Utterances of different kinds update the score in different ways, and these effects constrain how future utterances will function, in turn. Following dynamic semanticists, Lepore and Stone hold that some expressions, including indefinite noun phrases as well as certain tense morphemes and modals, establish discourse referents that play a role in determining the semantic properties of various anaphoric expressions down the line. And following coherence theorists, Lepore and Stone argue that discourse unfolds according to coherence relations that place elaborate constraints on how each utterance can be interpreted in light of what has come before. All of these grammatical relationships are ultimately a matter of convention. According to Lepore and Stone, a speaker's intentions play a role in determining what they mean only by selecting from among the linguistic conventions compatible with what has been uttered in the discourse so far, and hearers rely on mindreading only in order to disambiguate between the grammatically live options.

We are thus left with two opposing pictures of human communication. Intentionalists take mindreading to be the engine of human communication, with language oiling the gears to make things more efficient. Lepore and Stone think that linguistic mechanisms do almost all of the communicative work, with mindreading merely cleaning up a few loose ends.

Lepore and Stone use two main strategies to support their picture. One is to cast their net widely in search of grammatical conventions, thereby showing how various apparent gaps between linguistic meaning and communicated content can be closed. Some of their favorite targets are stock examples of implicature and indirect speech, which they conventionalize away by appealing to newfound semantic ambiguities, discourse coherence relations, anaphoric dependencies, intonational cues to information structure, and so on. I find their case studies to be quite convincing.

But Lepore and Stone don't claim that every putative case of unconventional communication can be conventionalized away. The rest, they argue, should not be thought of as attempts to communicate at all. The aim speaking metaphorically or ironically, or of joking, hinting, or insinuating, Lepore and Stone argue, is not to communicate a content, but to invite the hearer to engage in a flexible, imaginative thought process. Insofar as it makes sense to think of these acts as having success conditions at all, it is not communicative success that is at issue, but something more open ended.

Lepore and Stone have a powerful argument for this claim. Vincent van Gogh said that "conscience is man's compass". According to Grice and others, metaphorical communication usually works via a kind of quality implicature: we recognize that van Gogh couldn't have meant that conscience is *literally* a compass, and then our inferential black box somehow concludes that the best explanation for his utterance was that he really meant some other proposition. But *which* other proposition? Most metaphors are notoriously difficult to paraphrase, and this is because there are many equally good options. Did van Gogh mean that we should follow our consciences, or that we will get lost if we don't, or we have nothing else to go by, or something else? None of these answers is any better than the others. But assuming van Gogh knew this, he couldn't have rationally intended for us to interpret him as meaning any one of the options to the exclusion of the others. But, Lepore and Stone argue, it follows that van Gogh couldn't have (rationally) had a communicative intention *at all*. His aim in uttering his metaphor must have been something other than coordinating on a content with his audience—something more imaginative and open ended. And, as Lepore and Stone correctly point out, this problem arises for nearly all putative instances of implicature and indirect speech. Thus the most radical thesis in their book: implicature, understood as an indirect and unconventional means of communication, does not exist.

A tempting response is to loosen the requirement that the things we mean, and that audiences must interpret us as meaning, have to be precise propositional contents. Maybe it is possible to successfully communicate by some looser standard? Grice himself seems to have thought so (1989, 39–40), and others have recently argued that speakers can mean vague clouds or rough-grained properties of propositions (Buchanan 2010; von Fintel and Gillies 2009). But this solution has its own problems. A crucial feature of the intentionalist picture is that what a speaker means is fully determined by a fact about their intentions. But what fact about a speaker's intentions could ground the fact that they mean one vague cloud of propositions rather than another? Intentionalists owe an answer to this question, and it's not obvious what the answer should be.

Still, I am convinced that this problem must have a solution. It flies in the face of common sense to deny that we often communicate in ad hoc, indirect, and not-wholly-conventional ways. Moreover, even some very fuzzy metaphors can clearly be *mis*interpreted: van Gogh *didn't* mean that consciences are powered by the

earth's magnetic field, for example. This possibility of miscommunication would seem to entail that such acts have communicative-success conditions, if fuzzy ones. Finally, many direct and literal communicative acts are subject to the same sort of fuzziness, since there is usually more than one equally good ways to restrict the domain of a quantifier, more than one equally good ordering source for a modal, more than one equally good candidate for the relation denoted by a possessive, and so on.[1] If so, then by parity with Lepore and Stone's reasoning, not only indirect communication but most direct communication is illusory. So, although Lepore and Stone's argument deserves a much more careful reply than anyone has so far given it, I do not ultimately find it convincing.[2]

More broadly, although Lepore and Stone's objections to intentionalist accounts of various phenomena deserve careful attention, and although their positive accounts of some of these phenomena are convincing, their big-picture, conventionalist vision of human communication is not convincing.

Still, by an important standard, Lepore and Stone's book is a highly successful piece of philosophy. A decade ago, debates about the semantics–pragmatics interface were murky, frequently terminological, and not well grounded in a shared understanding of their subject matter. *Imagination and Convention* represents a welcome shift to a debate whose terms we should all be able to agree on. Pragmatics contributes to explanations of human communication by appealing to domain-neutral capacities, such as mindreading, that we possess by virtue of being cooperative and rational social agents. Semantics, by contrast, appeals to convention-governed, grammar-driven, and language-specific capacities that vary more between speech communities. Although this way of framing the issue doesn't, on its own, resolve the question of how semantics and pragmatics should be combined in an explanation of linguistic communication, it is a productive way of asking that question, and should allow for empirically grounded progress toward answers. In my view, this is what philosophical progress looks like.

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[1] Buchanan (2010) makes essentially this point using definite descriptions.

[2] For fuller versions of my objections to Lepore and Stone's arguments, see Harris (2016).