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Metalinguistic negotiation and matters of language: a response to Cappelen

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ABSTRACT

In previous work, we have developed the idea that, in some disputes, speakers appear to use (rather than mention) a term in order to put forward views about how that term should be used. We call such disputes "metalinguistic negotiations". Herman Cappelen objects that our model of metalinguistic negotiation makes implausible predictions about what speakers really care about, and what kinds of issues they would take to settle their disputes. We highlight a distinction (which we have emphasized in prior work) between the question of *which disagreements speakers have* vs. *which disagreements are immediately expressed in a given linguistic exchange*. Once this distinction is clear, we can appreciate that speakers who are engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation (where certain issues in conceptual ethics are immediately expressed) can *also* disagree about other issues, including both other issues in conceptual ethics and "object-level" issues that aren't about words or concepts. In many metalinguistic negotiations, speakers (we think correctly) care more about these other issues than they do about ones concerning the meaning of a word. Because of this, Cappelen's objection fails to identify any data that challenge our model.

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Introduction

In a series of recent papers, we have developed the idea of a "metalinguistic negotiation". In a metalinguistic negotiation, speakers appear to use (rather than mention) a term in order to put forward views about how that term should be used in that context (and perhaps beyond). Metalinguistic negotiations thus concern the question of how a particular word should be used, which can include questions such as which concept should be paired with that word. Normative issues about how we

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should use our words, or what concepts we should use, are issues in what we call "conceptual ethics".[1] On our view, a range of disputes that interest philosophers – including some disputes about legal, moral, and political issues – are ripe for analysis as metalinguistic negotiations, as are various disputes amongst philosophers themselves, across a range of subfields in philosophy.[2]

A number of philosophers have raised forceful objections to our work on metalinguistic negotiation. One objection is that analyzing the relevant disputes as metalinguistic negotiations attributes an objectionable form of error to the speakers themselves, given that some speakers may reject such an interpretation of their own activity. We address this objection in a recent paper.[3] In the present essay, we focus on a different objection, raised most prominently by Herman Cappelen in his book *Fixing Language*.[4] The objection, in short, is that our model – with its heavy focus on language and the use of words – makes implausible predictions about what speakers really care about, and what they would take to settle their disputes. Cappelen suggests that if we are right that the disputes in question really are about how certain words should be used, then speakers should consider the matter settled once those linguistic issues are resolved.[5] But in fact, according to Cappelen, speakers in the relevant cases would not give up the dispute simply because they've settled the matter of how to use some word. This purportedly shows that our model of metalinguistic negotiation does not work for such cases, and is at best a good model for certain marginal disputes that are of little interest to philosophers.

There is an important way in which Cappelen's objection, if successful, cuts to the heart of the philosophical work that we want the idea of metalinguistic negotiation to do. We emphasize that for many of our argumentative purposes, what really matters is not that some particular set of

[1]This account of what "conceptual ethics" is draws from (Burgess and Plunkett 2013a) and (Burgess and Plunkett 2013b). See also (Burgess, Cappelen, and Plunkett 2020) for connected discussion.

[2]For our relevant co-authored work that we are summarizing in this paragraph, see (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a), (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b), (Plunkett and Sundell 2014), and (Plunkett and Sundell 2021). We both develop and expand on these core ideas in solo authored work, including (Plunkett 2015), (Plunkett 2016), (Sundell 2012), (Sundell 2012), (Sundell 2016b), and (Sundell 2017).

[3]See (Plunkett and Sundell 2021) for discussion of this kind of objection to our view (which (Cappelen 2018) among others has leveled against us). See also our earlier discussion of this kind of objection in (Plunkett and Sundell 2014), which discusses it in the particular context of an argument about the philosophy of law.

[4](Cappelen 2018, 174–175).

[5]In this paper, we use single quotation marks (e.g. 'cat') strictly to mention linguistic items. We use double quotation marks (e.g. "cat") for a variety of tasks, including quoting others' words, scare quotes, and mixes of use and mention.

disputes – disputes about legal interpretation, aesthetics, the nature of free will, etc. – are *in fact* metalinguistic negotiations. For many of our argumentative purposes, what matters is that such an analysis is plausible. Establishing *that* is enough, dialectically, to undermine prominent disagreement-based arguments for sameness of meaning in metaethics, philosophy of law, aesthetics, and elsewhere.[6]

Given this background, objections to us that target some specific set of disputes won't be enough to undermine the general dialectical work we want our idea of metalinguistic negotiation to do. Hashing out the first-order question of how to best analyze these disputes on a case-by-case basis – as opposed to offering quick disagreement-based arguments for shared meaning – is precisely how we argue that these debates should proceed.[7] By contrast, Cappelen's objection, if it is on the right track, threatens to show that it is extremely implausible that pretty much *any* dispute of serious interest to philosophers is a metalinguistic negotiation. Thus, Cappelen's objection challenges not only more specific applications of our framework – for example, an argument that a given dispute *really is* a metalinguistic negotiation – but also the more general dialectical application of our framework that has been at the heart of our published work.

In this paper, we argue that Cappelen's objection fails. We highlight a distinction (which we emphasize in prior work) between the question of *which disagreements speakers have* vs. *which disagreements are immediately expressed in a given linguistic exchange*.[8] Once this distinction is clear, we can appreciate that speakers who are engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation (where certain issues in conceptual ethics are immediately expressed) can *also* disagree about other issues, including ones that concern conceptual ethics and others that do not.

In fact, this idea of speakers having multiple disagreements that run in parallel – disagreements about conceptual ethics, and corresponding disagreements about various first-order matters – is a core element of our story. Questions in conceptual ethics about how we should use some key expression in a particular context are rarely "free-standing" ones, disconnected from other issues. People who disagree, for example, about how we should use the word 'torture' in the context of a political

[6]See (Plunkett and Sundell 2021) for emphasis of this point. This point also partly explains why we aim for our account of metalinguistic negotiation to be a schematic and ecumenical one, which, for example, doesn't commit itself to a detailed theory of the linguistic mechanisms through which metalinguistic negotiation happens.

[7]See (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a).

[8]See especially (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a, 17–18). See also (Plunkett 2015) and (Plunkett and Sundell 2021).

debate are likely to disagree about other things as well, including, for example, how governments should treat political prisoners or how they should engage in international affairs.[9] These background disagreements are part of what explains why speakers might be invested in a metalinguistic negotiation over 'torture' to begin with. In short, on our model, metalinguistic negotiations are very rarely *solely* about a narrow linguistic or conceptual issue. Instead, they often are bound up with a range of further, non-linguistic issues (which vary, depending on the dispute) over which the speakers also disagree. In many cases, it is these other issues – anything from questions about what mind-independent reality is really like to how we should live our lives – that matter more to the participants (who, we think, are thereby tracking something important about which issues matter, and why). That is true for all of the key examples of metalinguistic negotiation that we focus on in our earlier work, such as those we draw on to explain the philosophical importance of the idea of metalinguistic negotiation. Once this is appreciated, we can see that our model is fully compatible with the basic patterns of engagement that Cappelen says we should expect. Indeed, Cappelen's objection fails to identify any data that challenge our model.

§1. Metalinguistic negotiation

We start with a brief summary of our account of metalinguistic negotiation, and the broader framework for thinking about thought and talk in which it is embedded.[10]

We begin by distinguishing *disagreements* from *disputes*. On our account, two people *disagree* when there is the right kind of rational conflict in mental states between them – for example, one person believing the negation of a proposition that the other believes, or (perhaps) two people having mutually incompatible plans about what to do in a given situation. In contrast, we take a *dispute* to be a linguistic exchange in which two speakers appear (whether to each other, an observer, a theorist, or anyone else) to express a disagreement in their linguistic exchange. We are not here proposing analyses of what our existing terms 'disagreement' and 'dispute' mean, nor are we proposing real definitions of what a disagreement or a dispute really is. Rather, we use the terms

[9]See (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a) and (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b) for further discussion.
[10]The work we summarize below is the same work we cited in the first footnote, when giving our initial gloss of our account of metalinguistic negotiation.

'disagreement' and 'dispute' in a stipulative way, to mark an important kind of cut – between, roughly, a kind of *state* of conflict between mental states and the *activity* of giving linguistic expression to those conflicting mental states.

With this distinction in hand, we can then ask for any given dispute: does it really express a disagreement, or not? If we think it does, we can ask (a) what disagreement is expressed, and (b) which linguistic mechanisms are used to express it?. Regarding the latter question, we start by assuming a cut between semantics (roughly, linguistically encoded content) and pragmatics (roughly, other mechanisms we use to enrich semantic content). Some disputes express disagreement through literal semantic content. These are what we dub "canonical disputes". In contrast, we take "non-canonical" disputes to be ones that express disagreements through pragmatic mechanisms, such as implicature, presupposition, and the like. One kind of non-canonical dispute is what we call a *metalinguistic dispute*. In a metalinguistic dispute, speakers engage in divergent "metalinguistic" usages of some term to put forward rival views about that term.[11] Thus, on our view, a metalinguistic dispute is distinguished by two things: (a) the mechanism used to express the disagreement (namely, "metalinguistic" usage of a term) and (b) the topic of the disagreement expressed (namely, how that term is or should be used in the relevant context).[12]

Within the class of metalinguistic disputes, we distinguish *descriptive* metalinguistic disputes from *normative* metalinguistic disputes. In a descriptive metalinguistic dispute, the disagreement expressed concerns descriptive issues about how the word is *in fact* used by the relevant speech community. In contrast, in a normative metalinguistic dispute, the disagreement expressed concerns a normative issue about the word in question – how the word *should* be used. That kind of normative issue is tightly bound up with the practical issue of *how to* use the word.[13]

[11]This idea of "metalinguistic" usage draws from (Barker 2002).

[12]We often present "metalinguistic" usage as a special kind of pragmatic mechanism, and continue to present it in that way here. However, we stress that this is partly for ease of presentation and underscore that, on some theories, metalinguistic disputes might well turn out to be a species of "canonical" disputes, given how those theories understand the semantics/pragmatics divide. For instance, this might be true on the "dynamic semantics" model that (Barker 2013) advocates. See (Plunkett and Sundell 2021) for further discussion on this point.

[13]Note that, on some models of normative thought and talk, such as the one advocated for in (Gibbard 2003), "should" questions are analyzed in terms of "what to do" questions. If that is correct, then normative issues in conceptual ethics obviously *always* involve "what to do" questions. However, on some other theories, such as the one advocated for in (Silverstein 2017), the issues are closely connected, but distinct in important ways. We don't take a stand on these questions in our previous work setting up the idea of a metalinguistic negotiation, and neither do we here.

We stipulate 'metalinguistic negotiation' as a synonym for 'normative metalinguistic dispute'.[14]

Different aspects of a word's meaning can be the focus of a metalinguistic dispute. Some metalinguistic disputes target some context-sensitive aspect of a word's meaning, such as the threshold for a relative gradable adjective. (We cite examples of disputes over a threshold for terms like 'tall,' 'rich,' or 'spicy'.) Other metalinguistic disputes concern the most basic context-invariant meaning of the term. (We cite examples of disputes over how to use terms like 'torture,' 'athlete,' 'war,' 'law,' 'fish', and many others.) We discuss cases like these in greater detail below.

Crucially, in putting forward this framework, we emphasize the possibility of disputes that are "mixed" in the sense that speakers may express multiple disagreements, through multiple mechanisms.[15] This possibility will be especially important if we individuate "disputes" in a temporally extended way, such that a given dispute may change over time in important ways. But even if we individuate disputes in a more restricted way, there is nothing in our account that rules out the possibility that a given dispute could express multiple disagreements at once, through multiple mechanisms (e.g. through both literal semantic content as well as through implicature).

Finally, we emphasize the familiar fact that two speakers can disagree about something that *motivates* them to engage in a particular dispute, without that issue itself being expressed in the dispute, at least not in any explicit way. For example, consider the following, prosaic case. It's dinner time, and two speakers debate whether the restaurant Jerusalem Garden is likely to be crowded on Saturdays. One speaker says "yes, it's always packed on Saturdays" and the other replies "no, it's not always that bad". This dispute does not take place in a vacuum. The speakers engage in the dispute about whether the restaurant is likely to be crowded because they are trying to figure out where to go for dinner.

[14]As this suggests, one therefore shouldn't draw much from the idea of "negotiation" as such in understanding what we mean by a "metalinguistic negotiation". For example, some think of "negotiations" as involving situations where, at least standardly, two people come to the table with the aim of reaching an agreement. We don't think that is true of negotiations in general. But, regardless of whether it is, the important point for us is this: the parallel idea need not apply here to all normative metalinguistic disputes. In many normative metalinguistic disputes, speakers might well not care that much about actually reaching an agreement, as opposed to simply expressing their disagreements with each other (perhaps with one speaker having the aim, for example, of signaling to observers that she in fact disagrees with the other speaker). Tied to this, nothing in the idea of "metalinguistic negotiation" suggests that speakers will always be successful in actually agreeing on a meaning. It is worth noting that this is an important feature of many things people label "negotiations" in general, which may be carried out in bad faith, purely for show, or earnestly but without success.

[15]See (Plunkett 2015) for further discussion of this point.

Their background disagreement about where to go for dinner, which is tied to their conflicting preferences, motivates them to have a dispute about whether Jerusalem Garden is likely to be busy. In a certain intuitive (if somewhat vague) sense, the disagreement about where to have dinner is the more important or fundamental disagreement. But this doesn't mean that the disagreement about where to have dinner is therefore incorporated into the semantic content of the claims they make as they debate whether the restaurant is busy. The speakers disagree about two things, and are expressing one disagreement in part because of – and as a certain kind of proxy for – the other one. A theoretical analysis of this kind of situation can make it sound complex. But as we hope is obvious from the restaurant example, and from the ease with which similar examples can be constructed, the phenomenon is ubiquitous.[16]

§2. Cappelen's objection

Cappelen objects that our idea of metalinguistic negotiation is a bad fit for pretty much *all* of the philosophically interesting cases to which we've claimed it might apply, or to which other philosophers might plausibly want to apply it. He objects that our account of metalinguistic negotiation makes the wrong predictions about how the disputes in question will play out. It does so, he argues, because our view claims that speakers are invested in issues about language in a way that isn't borne out by actual exchanges. Speakers in the relevant disputes are just *not* invested in the definition of particular words in a particular language in a way that fits the model of metalinguistic negotiation. So, he argues, that model should be rejected.

Here's how Cappelen puts the charge:

> Consider a passionate discussion of whether waterboarding is torture (in the kind of setting Plunkett and Sundell imagine). Suppose someone suggests that we stop using the string of letters 'torture'—and instead start using a new string, say, 'torrture**'. If Plunkett and Sundell were right, this would be a relevant proposal—one that would be of massive significance to the ongoing discussion. However, the proposal is completely irrelevant. In response to this suggestion, the participants would not respond:
>
> Oh, very interesting. If we were to do that, we would be using a new word and I don't have strong views about how it should be defined. I was just talking

[16]See our connected discussion of a dispute concerning whether Subarus are "good cars" (in the context of a broader dispute between two people about what car they should buy) in (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a, 17–18).

> about 'torture'—I have no view whatsoever about other strings, such as 'torrture**'.
>
> The reason why they would not react like this is that their debate, and their disagreement, is independent of how particular words are used. It's about torture, not 'torture'.[17]

In this passage, Cappelen brings out the following idea: if speakers only cared about what the term 'torture' should mean in a given dispute, then we would see the conversation pattern one way (along the lines Cappelen outlines). But we don't see that at all. Instead, we see the dispute continuing. Our account thus (purportedly) makes the wrong prediction.

Cappelen also uses another argument to support this idea that speakers don't really care about the meaning of a given word (e.g. 'torture'), in a way that he thinks runs counter to the account we offer. This argument involves speakers communicating using different languages. He says:

> Speakers in the kinds of conversations Plunkett and Sundell use as their prime illustrations don't think their concerns and arguments are irrelevant to someone who speaks, say, Icelandic, Chinese, or Russian. One way to see this is to note that they will take themselves to be agreeing and disagreeing with those talking about the same issue in one of those other languages. Suppose a speaker of Icelandic says:
>
> Waterboarding er ekki pyndingum.
>
> As Plunkett and Sundell see it, this speaker is engaged in a discussion of the word 'pyndingum'. A Chinese speaker using a cognate sentence to engage in metalinguistic negotiation would be engaged in a discussion of:
>
> 拷打
>
> and a Russian speaker would be talking about how to define:
>
> Пытки.
>
> So there should be no disagreement between the English, Icelandic, Chinese, and Russian speakers. They are, after all, talking about how to define different words. That's a misdescription of these situations: there is dis/agreement between speakers of different languages. It doesn't matter what language they speak. So disagreement over whether waterboarding is torture (in the relevant kinds of conversations) isn't best construed as disagreement over how to define a word in a particular language.[18]

[17](Cappelen 2018, 174–175).

In this argument, Cappelen suggests that our metalinguistic view yields the wrong results when it comes to the presence (or absence) of disagreement between speakers of different languages. It's a different argument, but it drives at the same basic objection. In short, the objection is that our account is overly focused on language, in a way that prevents us from saying the correct things about what in fact would happen in the relevant linguistic exchanges, or about the presence (or absence) of disagreement between speakers.

§3. Response to Cappelen

What should we make of this line of objection from Cappelen? We argue that it fails, by drawing on resources that we have put forward in previous work. The main point is this: it is rare that a metalinguistic negotiation is *exclusively* or *mostly* about language, in the sense that speakers disagree *only* or *mostly* about the topic of how they should use a given word. Instead, in most cases – and certainly in most of the philosophical debates we discuss in previous work – we should expect speakers to have background disagreements that are about (a) other issues in conceptual ethics (e.g. which concepts should play certain functional roles in our thought and practices, regardless of what term one uses to express those concepts) and/or (b) other "object-level" issues that aren't about thought and talk at all (e.g. questions about how we should treat other people, where the mind-independent joints in reality are, what is more explanatorily important, etc.).[19] Many of these are disagreements that speakers will be more deeply invested in – and often justly so, given the relative importance of the different issues involved. Once we appreciate this fact, we can see that the idea of metalinguistic negotiation doesn't yield the predictions that Cappelen says it does. Thus, his objection fails.

Our basic reply is simple enough, and relatively straightforward to make, given the way we already laid out our framework. But to make the point vivid, it's worth going through it step by step.

So consider the following dispute about whether Kentucky is in the "Midwest".

Alphie: Kentucky is in the Midwest
Betty: No, Kentucky is not in the Midwest

[18](Cappelen 2018, 174).
[19]See (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a), (Plunkett and Sundell 2013b), (Plunkett and Sundell 2021), (Plunkett 2015), (Plunkett 2016), (Sundell 2016a), and (Sundell 2017).

Let's suppose that Alphie and Betty agree on the facts about Kentucky's location in the USA, what other states count as being in the "Midwest", the facts about how other speakers tend to characterize the "Midwest", and so on. Such a situation is ripe for a metalinguistic analysis – for the idea that what Alphie and Betty are really doing is engaging in a tacit argument over how the term 'Midwest' should be used in their context. Let's suppose for now that this analysis is correct.

So far, our description of the case provides some motivation for understanding the dispute as a metalinguistic negotiation. But it tells us almost nothing about why (or whether) such a dispute would be worth taking part in. So now consider a handful of different sets of circumstances in which Alphie and Betty's dispute might take place.

Scenario 1: Alphie and Betty are on a long road trip. Nothing hangs on their conversation, and they know it. They are bored and looking for things to talk about.

Scenario 2: Alphie and Betty are writing a grant application and want to use their words in accordance with US Government conventions. They both think that the best usage of 'Midwest' for this context is the one that lines up with definitions provided by the United States Census Bureau.

Scenario 3: Alphie and Betty identify with people they see as "Midwestern", and view others with suspicion. Alphie and Betty will take the better usage of 'Midwest' for this context to be one that lines up with those areas whose residents they take to be actually worthy of their comradery and cultural identification.

Scenario 4: Alphie and Betty are cultural anthropologists. They are interested in how various cultural trends are distributed geographically in the United States. They take the better usage for this context to be the one that lines up with the geographical contours of certain practices that Alphie and Betty have observed to be labelled "typically Midwestern".

Scenario 5: Alphie and Betty are geologists. They are investigating large-scale geological features that are mostly distinctive to the region referred to as the "Midwest", and are trying to determine the exact contours of those features. Alphie and Betty take the better usage of 'Midwest' for this context to be one that aligns with the actual structure and boundaries of those features.

These scenarios bring out a general philosophical point: insofar as disagreements about language matter, they do so for different reasons,

depending on the situation. In scenarios 2-5, it *does matter* how the term 'Midwest' is used. But it matters for completely different reasons in each case, given the context of the dispute.[20] A debate about whether Kentucky is in the "Midwest" can be a matter of idle chatter, personally or theoretically significant claims about social groups, or an objective debate concerning literal joints in the bedrock. The linguistic analysis is the same in each case. The stakes are a matter of the particulars of that context, and the concerns of the speakers. Of course, Alphie and Betty could be wrong about the normative and evaluative factors that go into settling how the term 'Midwest' should be used in the relevant context. But we have set up the cases in such a way as to suggest that, at least *prima facie*, Alphie and Betty are responding to the normative and evaluative factors that really do matter for their context.

Four further points are worth emphasizing about these scenarios.

First, Scenario 1 is the *only* one in which we should be tempted to think that Alphie and Betty disagree exclusively about how the term 'Midwest' should be used. In every other scenario, there are further factors that hang on how the term 'Midwest' is deployed. Issues such as how to write a grant application, how to treat people from Kentucky, how to characterize and categorize social groups, or how to portray the geological structure of nature are all (respectively) involved in these cases, in addition to the question of how the word 'Midwest' should be used. These other issues run in parallel in key ways to the question of how the word 'Midwest' should be used, at least in the relevant context. Speakers might well grasp this fact, if only implicitly. In the cases we've described, views about these matters are plausibly what *motivate* Alphie and Betty to engage in their negotiation about the term 'Midwest' in the first place, just as the question of where to eat dinner motivates the speakers considered above to debate whether the restaurant Jerusalem Garden is likely to be crowded.[21]

[20]This point reflects what (Sundell 2017) describes as the "metaphysical neutrality" of interpreting a dispute as a metalinguistic negotiation. In (Sundell 2017), this point is made in the context of aesthetic disputes. (Sundell 2017) argues that, in some cases, debating how to apply some predicate of taste can be seen as a negotiation of an aesthetic standard or a standard of taste. But understanding a dispute about taste in this way makes no commitment one way or the other about the nature of aesthetic value, or about which aesthetic standard is correct. Different standards might implicitly be at issue in different contexts. "To describe an exchange as a negotiation of standards is not yet to say anything at all about the rule by which the results of that negotiation can be measured." (Sundell 2017, 91–92).

[21]Furthermore, note that even if these background disagreements weren't part of what (even just unconsciously) motivates Alphie and Betty, it would be plausible that Alphie and Betty could quickly recognize that they also have these disagreements tied to the use of 'Midwest'. This would then affect the motivations they subsequently have for continuing or giving up on disputes about the use of 'Midwest'. In short, we might then see patterns that resemble those we would expect if they had

Second, because these background disagreements are what motivate the speakers to engage in their negotiation, there is reason to think the speakers would *not* stop arguing, or treat the issue as settled, if the negotiation were to be settled in such a way as to cut it off from the underlying, motivating disagreement. Suppose, for example, that the speakers in Scenario 5 agreed – without having achieved any consensus on the geological issues – to stipulate that the term 'Midwest' refers to a region excluding Kentucky, and (taking a nod from Cappelen) the term 'Midwest**' refers to a similar region including Kentucky. Would the analysis we've been considering predict that the speakers would thereby treat the issues between them as fully settled? Clearly it would not. By hypothesis, such a stipulation does not settle the question of where the relevant geological joints are located. The speakers' method for expressing the underlying, geological disagreement would change. But the underlying disagreement would remain *unresolved*. And so the speakers would not treat their overall argument as settled.

Third, notice that in each of scenarios 2-5, even if we limit our attention to issues in conceptual ethics, the issue of how to use the English word 'Midwest' is not the only one that matters. Instead, it seems that at least part of what is at stake (and perhaps the more important issue) is what kinds of categorization or classification to employ in our thought and talk. Assuming a certain understanding of concepts, we could put the point this way: part of what is at stake here is which of a relevant set of candidate concepts should be used in thinking about Kentucky as it relates to nearby states in the USA, for certain sorts of purposes.[22] More generally, the core question is this: how should Alphie and Betty categorize states, given what they – Alphie and Betty – are up to? This is the kind of thing that speakers could disagree about, even if they were speaking different languages.[23] Notice also that they might care about how (or whether) a particular word should be used for reasons other than a view about which of a

initially been actually motivated by those views in the first place. We won't belabor this kind of point in what follows in describing the behavior of speakers in different cases. But we want to flag that this same kind of point applies to the relevant cases involving 'torture' that we go on to discuss, in the context of Cappelen's objection to us.

[22]For connected discussion, see (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a) and (Plunkett 2015). Note that the views the speakers can have here need not be ones in favor of a specific concept, as opposed to ones in favor of a group of concepts. For example, in the debate over which concepts to pair with the word 'Midwest', a speaker might be in favor of a range of concepts that all include Kentucky in its extension in the context at hand. Or, in a metalinguistic negotiation over 'torture', a speaker might be in favor of a range of concepts that all include waterboarding in the extension of that concept in the context at hand.

[23]For extended discussion of this point, see our discussion in (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a, 19–22) about arguments concerning the "moral twin earth" case from (Horgan and Timmons 1993).

relevant set of candidate concepts should be used for categorizing things. For example, they might be interested in what Cappelen calls the "lexical effects" of that word in the relevant context – roughly the kind of emotional and psychological resonance a word has, which is likely to trigger certain reactions in people.[24]

Finally, notice that, for *all* of these scenarios, it would be perfectly felicitous to say, at least in most contexts, that Alphie and Betty are arguing about "whether Kentucky is in the Midwest".[25] Some theorists (e.g. some linguists or philosophers of language) might care a lot about the fact that the disagreement that Alphie and Betty express is, in the first instance, one about language. A theorist who cares a lot about this fact might insist that a dispute like this isn't *really* best described as being "about whether Kentucky is in the Midwest", at least for certain theoretical purposes. But for ordinary speakers, in ordinary contexts, these distinctions won't matter. After all, if the distinctions are controversial and unclear to theorists, we shouldn't think they would be transparent or significant to ordinary speakers. Thus, it's perfectly fine for ordinary speakers – including Alphie and Betty themselves – to describe Alphie and Betty as disagreeing about "whether Kentucky is in the Midwest". As we emphasize in parallel cases, this means that an analysis of cases like this as metalinguistic negotiations is an analysis that *vindicates* the intuition that the dispute in question is "really about" the first-order matter that is intuitively involved. It does so in a way tied to ordinary language descriptions of what a dispute is "really about". It's entirely consistent with that to say that the dispute is *also*, and in closely related ways specific to their context, about how they should use the term 'Midwest'.[26]

With these points in mind, now return to the dispute about whether "waterboarding is torture". We could cook up scenarios where speakers disagree *only* about how the English word 'torture' should be used, and nothing else. These would be similar to Scenario 1, where Alphie and Betty are on their road trip, killing time, playing for no stakes. But those cases will be the unusual ones, and are very different from the kinds of

[24]See (Cappelen 2018, 122–137).

[25]As one of us (Sundell) puts the point: "A philosopher or linguist might be anxious to clarify [the ordinary, intuitive] description, but it is hardly obscure why [the speaker] describes things as she does." See (Sundell 2011, 279). For connected discussion, see (Plunkett 2015) and (Plunkett and Sundell 2021).

[26]Cappelen's own work *bolsters* this claim about metalinguistic negotiation. As Cappelen argues in (Cappelen 2018) and elsewhere, sameness of topic doesn't track sameness of intension, and thus shared word meanings, in the sense of identical intensions, are not required for the truth of disagreement reports, agreement reports, or "samesaying" reports.

cases to which we have drawn attention in previous work. Instead, in the relevant cases, speakers involved in these disputes disagree about further matters – how governments should treat prisoners, what attitudes we should have towards governments given their treatment of prisoners, what legal actions should be taken against governments or individuals who condone or engage in waterboarding, and so forth. It's these issues – which we will abbreviate, for ease of presentation, as the question of *whether it's wrong to waterboard* – that explain *why* the speakers enter into their metalinguistic negotiation in the first place.

Arguing about how the English word 'torture' should be used is one way of expressing a disagreement about these underlying, non-linguistic issues. This method of expressing the underlying disagreement strikes some people as needlessly complex or "indirect", calling into question the plausibility of such an analysis. But as we have argued elsewhere, the issue of what counts as "direct" and "indirect" is delicate.[27] On our view, the question of how the word 'torture' should be used is significant to the speakers to the extent that they agree that those things labeled 'torture' are impermissible.[28] It's that background agreement that links their exchange about language to their disagreement about the permissibility of waterboarding. But this approach is not intrinsically more direct *or* indirect than a "first-order", canonical analysis. On that kind of view, the question of whether waterboarding "really is torture" is significant to the extent that the speakers agree that those things which *really are torture* are impermissible.[29] Whether one goes for a canonical or non-canonical analysis, a particular question about categorization or classification stands in for the question of whether it is wrong to waterboard. In neither case is torture *as such* what's fundamentally at issue. The debate, in this sense, isn't about torture *or* 'torture'. It's about whether it's wrong to waterboard.[30]

[27](Plunkett and Sundell 2021, 20).

[28]Or agree in some other way on the implications of a practice's being labeled 'torture'. What matters is that they agree on the upshot of a decision that the label is apt.

[29]Some might argue that the concept TORTURE is "thick", in the sense that it has a negative valence by definition. This wouldn't affect the argument though. Depending on which kind of "canonical" analysis of the dispute is being considered, and what theory of thick concepts is being used, the speakers' agreement that torture is impermissible might be true by the definition of 'torture', or it might be independent of it. Either way, the agreement that things that *really are torture* are impermissible is still required for the question of whether waterboarding is torture to have the significance it does.

[30]This is not to detract from the claim, argued for above, that our view *vindicates* various ordinary language characterizations of the dispute: such as "they disagree about whether waterboarding is torture" or "they disagree about waterboarding" or "they disagree about torture". Again, see (Plunkett and Sundell 2021).

So instead of the slightly bizarre, no-stakes negotiation about the word 'torture' that we *could* cook up, imagine the kind of case Cappelen asks us to imagine: "a passionate discussion of whether waterboarding is torture (in the kind of setting Plunkett and Sundell imagine)." And suppose, as Cappelen asks us to, that one speaker suggests we stop using the word 'torture' and start using the word 'torrture**' – with no further comment from that speaker on how their linguistic suggestion might connect to the issue of whether it's wrong to waterboard. Cappelen claims that "if Plunkett and Sundell were right, this would be a relevant proposal – one that would be of massive significance to the ongoing discussion". He suggests that if we were right, the other participant would respond "Oh, very interesting. If we were to do that, we would be using a new word and I don't have strong views about how it should be defined. I was just talking about 'torture' – I have no view whatsoever about other strings, such as 'torrture**'."

The problem with this argument is now clear. On our view, the speakers' motivation for having the dispute they do – the reason their discussion is "passionate" – is that they disagree about whether it is wrong to waterboard. By hypothesis, the speaker in Cappelen's scenario makes a suggestion that does nothing to advance that debate. So, on our view, there is no reason to think that the speakers would treat this as a significant proposal.[31]

Another way to see what's gone wrong is this: according to Cappelen, the other participants in this exchange should eagerly allow that they have "no view whatsoever" about other words. But whether the speakers have views about other words is not so simple. Ultimately, it's a matter of whether, and how, they presuppose that those other words are connected to the underlying disagreement. Cappelen describes someone putting forward a suggestion that has nothing to do with the underlying disagreement – only with the word. And so of course the suggestion sounds bizarre. In practice, if the participants in Cappelen's exchange

[31]The kind of out-of-the-blue change in terminology Cappelen describes, divorced from considerations relevant to the underlying disagreement, should be distinguished from something which *does* happen – especially in philosophical contexts: namely, the kind of careful and deliberate paraphrase strategy described by Chalmers in (Chalmers 2011). For example, consider the following statement: "Ok, let's forget about the word 'torture' for the moment and ask instead whether a technique like waterboarding, causing the degree of suffering and trauma that it does, is consistent with our values and other applicable laws." As we emphasize in previous work, such a strategy can be highly effective, and we recommend it in certain contexts. (See Plunkett and Sundell 2013a and Plunkett 2015). At the same time, as we stress in (Plunkett and Sundell 2013a), we think it's not automatically the best way to go in every situation – it depends on the context. In any case, this kind of linguistic proposal differs in obvious ways from the out-of-the-blue proposal Cappelen describes.

were to treat the 'torrture**' suggestion charitably, they might assume – contrary to Cappelen's description – that 'torrture**' is being introduced as a term that is roughly synonymous with 'torture', or at least meant to play a similar normative role in our thought and talk.[32] If the speakers assumed this, it would imply, for example, that things called 'torrture**' will be subject to certain kinds of moral, political, and legal consequences.

If the discussion proceeds in this way, then the other participants absolutely should care about the claim that "waterboarding isn't torrture**". Based on a charitable interpretation, they take it to be relevant to the question of whether waterboarding is permissible, and specifically to suggest that it *is*. If they disagree with the original claim that "waterboarding isn't torture", then they should disagree with the claim that "waterboarding isn't torrture**" for the exact same reasons. The underlying disagreements about whether waterboarding is wrong haven't gone anywhere. If the 'torrture**' suggestion is taken to be relevant to those disagreements, then the other participants should *not* just assent to a claim that "waterboarding isn't torrture**" – at least if 'torture**' has similar associations in the context as 'torture'. This is also partly what explains why speakers will likely be invested in normative issues about how words in English that are synonymous with 'torture' (or closely connected in meaning to 'torture') should be used.

The same response applies to questions about what speakers should think about non-English words that are aptly translated as 'torture'. An Icelandic speaker who argues (in the kind of context we've been imagining throughout) that "waterboarding er ekki pyndingum" suggests that waterboarding is morally permissible. An English speaker who argues that "waterboarding *is* torture" suggests that it is not. The two speakers disagree with each other. They disagree – just as our account would predict – about the permissibility of waterboarding. Since they are not communicating with each other, there is no dispute to analyze, and so no work for the notion of metalinguistic negotiation to do. They're just two people who hold conflicting views, and who thus disagree in our sense of "disagreement". Of course, if they ended up speaking to each other in either English or Icelandic, then they might find themselves advancing their respective views by advocating, metalinguistically, for certain ways of using the English word 'torture', or the Icelandic term

[32]On the idea of "normative roles", see (Eklund 2017), drawing on (Railton 1986). See also (Plunkett 2020a) for further discussion. We should also note that we are using the idea of "normative role" to get a general idea across, and are open to thinking that the idea of "normative role" might not be the best way of discussing that idea at the end of the day.

'pyndingum', given the connection between the use of those words and assumptions about the permissibility of the actions they describe.[33]

If a dispute over waterboarding really is a metalinguistic negotiation, then it's true that the *immediate* disagreement expressed in the dispute is one about how the term 'torture' should be used. After all, the mechanism of metalinguistic usage involves the speaker using a word to advocate for a certain way of using that very word. The mechanism of metalinguistic usage does not allow a speaker to directly put forward a view about *all* words from other languages that might aptly be translated as the word in question.[34] Nor does metalinguistic usage allow the speakers to directly put forward views about object-level issues, such as how we should treat prisoners, the proper role of international law, or governmental policy.

But analyzing some dispute as a metalinguistic negotiation does *not* require holding that the disagreement about the relevant lexical item is the *only* disagreement that matters tied to that metalinguistic negotiation. Far from it, as we've emphasized. Nor does it imply that it is the *main* or *most important* disagreement the speakers have. In a metalinguistic negotiation about whether "waterboarding is torture", a plethora of other disagreements are tightly bound up with the dispute, even if they aren't literally expressed or directly implicated in the conflicting metalinguistic usages of 'torture'. So, when Cappelen claims that "if Plunkett and Sundell were right, this [purely linguistic proposal] would be a relevant proposal – one that would be of massive significance to the ongoing discussion", he's mistaken about what the view predicts. On our account, the proposal would not be of massive significance. This is

[33]We are here stressing the ways in which speakers engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation over a given term 'X' in English will also, in many cases, have strong views about how non-English words that are aptly translated as 'X' should be used. It's worth noting, however, that our account has an important (and we think correct) kind of flexibility built in here. In short, our account does not predict that *every* time speakers engage in a metalinguistic negotiation over a given term 'X' that they will then also have a disagreement – or the same disagreement – about terms in other languages aptly translated as 'X', or statements in other languages where that translated term for 'X' has been used. It will depend on why the speakers have a disagreement about how 'X' should be used, and whether those considerations carry over to the term it has been translated to in the other language. It could depend on whether the term it is being translated into has the same "normative role" as 'X', what the relevant "lexical effects" are of each term in each language, whether the translated term has the parallel legal significance as 'X' for the parallel jurisdiction, etc.. The same point applies to terms that are close to being synonymous with 'X' within a given language.

[34]In this sense, Cappelen is correct in the remarks he makes in (Cappelen 2018, 175) about what would be missing about the possible "translation strategy" that he offers to us as a possible response to his objections. That strategy involves the idea that speakers, via metalinguistic usage of a given term 'X', directly express views about a range of words, across a range of languages, that should be translated into 'X'. As our remarks here in this paragraph make clear, we agree with Cappelen that that strategy is not one that we should endorse. However, as our remarks also underscore, we think Cappelen misses the crucial work that issues about translation might well do here.

because it concerns only one point of disagreement among several, and one that *inherits* its significance from the other, underlying disagreements. Because of this, there is no reason to think that our proposal would predict that the speakers involved in the dispute would (by our lights, mistakenly) *view* the proposal as having "massive significance". So Cappelen's objection fails.

Cappelen concludes his argument by suggesting that in a broader sense, the metalinguistic analysis misidentifies what the relevant disputes are really about. In the waterboarding case, "it's about torture, not 'torture'."[35] This, we suspect, is meant to have the ring of a platitude. And the implication is that, according to our story, it's not about torture, but rather it's just about the word 'torture'. We can now see three things that are wrong about this. First, as we have emphasized, the fact that a dispute is, in the first instance, about 'torture', is consistent with its also being about torture. Second, at the level of ordinary language and common descriptions, our account *vindicates* intuitive descriptions of the kind Cappelen gives.[36] In this case, there is no reason to think a metalinguistic analysis is inconsistent with the accuracy of the ordinary English claim "they disagree about torture".

Finally, there is an important sense in which Cappelen's claim is not only *not* a platitude, but is not even correct. Cappelen's slogan is meant to get at the issue that, intuitively, the speakers really care about; or, put another way, the issue their disagreement fundamentally boils down to. But, in that intuitive, "brass-tacks" sense of "aboutness" that Cappelen is trying to capture, the debate isn't about torture *or* 'torture'. It's about *waterboarding*: whether it's permissible, how to treat people who perform or condone it, and the host of other connected moral, political, and legal issues tied to the practice. A fixation on *torture* – to the exclusion of the underlying moral, political, and legal issues – is just as misguided as a fixation on the word 'torture'.

Once the details of our framework are clear, we can see that Cappelen's objection to us seems to be attacking a different view – a view on which the *only* thing (or perhaps the *main* thing) that matters to speakers in a metalinguistic dispute is the use of certain terms in their language. That idea is not one that we endorse. Indeed, we have argued at length that it's an idea we should reject.

[35](Cappelen 2018, 175).
[36](Plunkett and Sundell 2021).

§4. A modified version of Cappelen's objection, and a response

We've argued that Cappelen's objection to our account of metalinguistic negotiation fails. At the basis of Cappelen's objection is the idea that our account is committed to certain linguistic issues being "massively" significant – and being treated as such – within the context of a certain kind of dispute, while in fact those issues aren't "massively" significant in a dispute of the relevant kind, and wouldn't be treated as such by speakers. We argued, in short, that our account is committed to no such thing, and thus Cappelen's objection to us fails. One might think, however, that this response is a bit too quick.

Suppose Cappelen concedes that the metalinguistic analysis does *not* predict that speakers treat purely linguistic proposals (such as "let's just switch to talking about 'torrture**'") as having "massive significance". One might still think that a metalinguistic analysis would be committed to the speakers treating such linguistic proposals as having at least *some* significance – and thus as a *comprehensible* move in the conversation. After all, even if the underlying, object-level disagreement is the more significant one, the speakers *do* disagree about how the word 'torture' should be used. The idea that they disagree about that is at the center of the whole idea of their dispute being a "metalinguistic negotiation". So it seems that a proposal to move away from that word, to some other new word, should have at least *some* significance on our account.

In light of this, consider a refined version of Cappelen's objection:

> If our account of metalinguistic negotiation is correct, then purely linguistic proposals (like Cappelen's "torrture**) would be *relevant* proposals—proposals having some (even if not *massive*) significance. They might come off as slightly obtuse, of course. Or the speaker might (rightly) be treated as having missed the point a bit. But, because it is at least somewhat relevant, the proposal shouldn't seem *bizarre* or *totally beside the point* to the people involved in the dispute. And yet such a proposal would in fact be treated as having *no significance at all*. It would *rightly* be treated as bizarre and totally irrelevant.[37]

Cappelen's original objection required that our analysis predict that these proposals be treated as having massive significance. This version of the objection is stronger, because it makes a more modest claim about what our analysis is committed to: namely, that the purely linguistic proposals Cappelen imagines should be treated as having at least *some*

[37]Thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting a refined version of Cappelen's argument along these lines.

significance. Since – according to the refined objection – even if that more modest prediction is false, our view still faces a challenge here.

We think this refined version of Cappelen's objection is a stronger argument. Nonetheless, we think it also fails. To see why, start by distinguishing two different topics: (a) what our account predicts about whether something *does matter* in a metalinguistic negotiation and (b) what our account predicts about what people involved in a metalinguistic negotiation *take* to matter. This distinction reveals that there are two, slightly different versions of the refined version of Cappelen's objection.

In the first version, the objection is that our account is committed to a purely linguistic proposal mattering (even if only a little bit), when it in fact matters not at all. In the second version, the objection is that our account predicts that speakers should *believe* the purely linguistic proposal matters (at least a little bit), and treat it as relevant (at least a little) – when in fact they would respond by saying it matters not at all. To see where these arguments go wrong, let's start with the second version, and move backward.

The first thing to say on this version of the objection is that, as we have argued elsewhere, there is no reason to think that speakers engaged in a metalinguistic negotiation will always correctly identify the dispute they are engaged in *as* a metalinguistic negotiation – let alone correctly identify all the dynamics or details at work in that metalinguistic negotiation.[38] Therefore, we shouldn't expect that speakers, upon encountering a purely linguistic proposal that only barely matters, will identify the proposal as mattering a little bit, as opposed to just describing it as "not mattering".

The second thing to say is that speakers running those two ideas together – the idea of something mattering very little vs. the idea of it mattering not at all – is something that we should expect, entirely independent of any details of the metalinguistic analysis. As Mark Schroeder has suggested, drawing on Gricean resources, people will often run together issues about what's *assertable* (in an ordinary context) about whether something matters with what's *true* about whether it matters.[39] Suppose that an issue matters in a conversation, but only a

[38]Among other reasons, this is because (a) practitioners aren't always good theorists of their own activity and (b) because the distinction between analyzing a dispute as a metalinguistic negotiation vs. a canonical dispute can be a subtle one, which involves distinctions (e.g. the semantics vs. pragmatics distinction) that will often be of little importance to ordinary speakers in ordinary contexts. For further discussion, see (Plunkett and Sundell 2021) and (Plunkett and Sundell 2014).

[39]Our line of argument in this paragraph and the next draws from an argument given in (Schroeder 2007, 94–96), drawing on resources from (Grice 1967/1989). Schroeder's argument concerns judgments about normative reasons for action in particular. We here extend parts of it to cover judgements about something "mattering" to a dispute. Like reasons for action, things "mattering" in this way is

little bit. Then it's likely to be infelicitous – even highly infelicitous, or "bizarre" – to bring this issue up in that conversation prior to other, more important issues, at least without specifying that it is a relatively non-weighty issue. This is for the familiar Gricean reason that bringing the matter up will typically carry an implicature that it was worth bringing up. A bare existential statement that something matters will (in most contexts) carry with it the implicature that it matters a good deal – otherwise, why would the speaker bring it up at all, especially prior to other, more weighty issues, at least if they are being generally responsive to Gricean norms? Suppose we are in a context where a proposal concerns an issue that, by hypothesis, is unrelated to other issues that matter far, far more (and which the speakers will often correctly recognize as mattering as such). In this kind of context, such a proposal will be so infelicitous as to lead speakers to endorse the only slightly loose description of being "totally" irrelevant – even if there is, in fact, a very small degree to which the proposal is relevant. Given this, our account fits with the prediction that speakers involved in a metalinguistic negotiation will often describe linguistic proposals that matter very little as mattering "not at all", and act in ways that reflect that judgment. So the refined version of Cappelen's objection is simply wrong that our account commits us to making the prediction it saddles us with.

The Schroeder-inspired line above extends to the first version of the improved objection – where what's at issue is not what the speakers think, but what the theory itself entails. If it's true that our account entails that a purely linguistic proposal matters *a little bit*, how problematic is this in the face of the theoretical claim that it matters not at all? Well, the same Gricean mechanisms at work with speakers involved in a conversation also suggest we should, in general, be at least somewhat distrustful of the judgments of theorists when they claim that something does not matter at all. In short, it's easy for *anyone* to run together issues about what's *assertable* (in an ordinary context) about whether something matters with what's *true* about whether something matters. Because of this, without further argument, we simply don't see it as a great theoretical cost to say that the proposals under consideration

something that speakers have practical interests in tracking and which can have more or less normative "weight" (that is: they can matter more or less). This is part of what makes such an extension of Schroeder's line of argument plausible (even if not guaranteed). For more discussion of why this is so, in the context of extending Schroeder's line of argument to the case of negative existential judgments about evidence in particular, see (Plunkett 2020b).

matter *to a very small degree* in the context of a metalinguistic negotiation – especially given that, for the reasons we've already described, this account can make the right predictions about the responses of speakers involved in those disputes.

One last point is worth observing in our response to the refined objection. In responding to the argument so far, we have conceded, for the sake of argument, the claim that our account entails that a purely linguistic proposal should matter to the speakers or to the conversation, at least a little bit. But even this point is not obviously correct. Insofar as one analyzes a dispute as a metalinguistic negotiation, one commits to the idea that linguistic issues matter in the context of that dispute. But they matter for specific reasons. The question of how to use the word 'torture' matters because of issues about the treatment of prisoners. The question of how to use the word 'Midwest' matters because of (for example) issues about geography, or culture. In other words, the linguistic question *inherits* its significance from the non-linguistic issues its connection to which we have emphasized throughout this paper.

Cappelen's "torrture**" example, by design, severs that connection. In Cappelen's argument, the proposal that the speakers switch to the word 'torrture**' intentionally eschews any connection or relevance to the underlying issues that have led the speakers to engage in the dispute. (That's why it's supposed to be so problematic for us.) But precisely because of this feature of the case, it's highly plausible to suggest that, in the context of this specific dispute, there is no way for the proposal to inherit *any significance at all*. The speakers care about a certain object-level issue. Other issues matter to them to the extent that they are relevant to, stand in for, or could forward the debate about, that object-level issue. Suppose it emerges that some proposal fails entirely to be relevant to, stand in for, or have the capacity to help advance the debate about that object-level issue. Then there is a good argument that our account is consistent with the idea that this proposal *is* entirely irrelevant, and the speakers who judge it to be so are *correct*. If this understanding of the situation is wrong – that is, if our account is ultimately committed to the claim that purely linguistic proposals "matter", in some sense, at least a bit – then, as discussed above, we can concede the point, and avail ourselves of the other, Schroeder-inspired strategy for responding that we discussed above. But given the importance of the connection between the metalinguistic issues and the object-level issues that

have been our focus throughout, we take this stronger line of response to have some plausibility as well.

Conclusion

In this paper, we've argued that Cappelen's original objection to our account of metalinguistic negotiation fails, and that a more compelling, refined version of the objection fails as well. On our model, metalinguistic negotiations aren't (or very rarely are) "just" (or even "mainly") about language – or even "just" (or "mainly") about issues in conceptual ethics more generally. Rather, they are, in typical cases, tightly bound up with disagreements about a whole range of object-level matters.[40] How we use words matters, in ways that reflect all manner of beliefs and attitudes, extending far beyond language itself – and, indeed, extending far beyond issues about thought and talk more generally. For many metalinguistic negotiations – and certainly for those that have been our focus – these further, non-linguistic issues ultimately matter *more* than the disagreement in conceptual ethics that the conflicting metalinguistic usages of some term immediately express. This, we think, reflects a more general truth about *many* disagreements in conceptual ethics, regardless of the linguistic mechanisms by which they are expressed. Many disagreements in conceptual ethics are tied to underlying "object-level" issues that aren't about words, concepts, or other "representational" or "inferential" devices. In many cases – including in many of the cases that matter to philosophers in areas such as ethics, epistemology, metaphysics, philosophy of law, and aesthetics – these underlying object-level issues lend significance to our disputes about words and concepts.

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[40]The same is true of other recent work in philosophy that draws on our idea of "metalinguistic negotiation" to put forward views that are closely connected, such as the views in (Thomasson 2016), (Hansen 2019), and (Belleri 2017).

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