

Point of View and Belief Attributions

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1. Point of view

As the expression itself indicates, ‘point of view’ is in the first place applied to spatial locations for visual observation. I can see a certain group of objects from different positions, or points of view. When seen from certain points, a particular object in the group is hidden behind others, from other points it isn’t. It is still the same group of objects, so in one sense I see the same thing. In another sense, I don’t see the same thing, for I see different parts, sides or aspects of that same group of objects. My visual impression is different as well, unless perfect symmetry of the group makes the difference in perspective phenomenologically unnoticeable.

This duality of, on the one hand, sameness of *what* is seen, or known, or conceived, and, on the other, difference in *how* it is seen, known or conceived, or difference in how it is *presented*, is inseparable from the very idea of point of view. To a different point of view there corresponds a different aspect, or what Gottlob Frege (1892:200) called a *mode (or manner) of presentation (Art des Gegebenseins)*, of the same thing.

This contrast is not only of a spatial nature. I can think of a house while it is standing, and I can remember the house after it has been demolished. I then conceive it from two different temporal points of view. I can even conceive of a house that will later be built, although this is more difficult.

Frege’s idea of modes of presentation was not, however, limited to the spatio-temporal either. He included any way in which is identified, by whatever properties or relations. One of his early examples is that of two different modes of presentation of Aristotle; on the one hand as the greatest pupil of Plato, and on the other as the teacher of Alexander the great. The same person, Aristotle, is then identified by two different properties, involving relations to two different individuals.

These ways of presenting do work as identifying provided it holds that exactly one individual was the greatest pupil of Plato and exactly one individual was the teacher of Alexander the great. If in either case there was less or more than one, then in that case nothing is identified. For Frege it was part of the very idea of a mode of presentation of an object that not more than one thing can have the property in question. That is why he invariantly used—what Bertrand Russell (1905) later called—*definite descriptions* when giving examples of modes of presentation. In English, a definite description is an expression of the form ‘The *F*’, where ‘*F*’ is to be replaced by a simple or complex noun, such as ‘teacher of Alexander the great’. Although there can have been more than one person who was teacher of Alexander the great, there cannot have been more than one person who was *the* teacher of Alexander the great.

On the other hand, it was not essential for Frege that it there is at least one object with the property in question. There can be modes of presentation which do not succeed in

presenting any object. Frege gave examples of this, such as the presentation of something as the least convergent series. Some philosophers, such as Gareth Evans (1982), have criticized Frege for this. They claim that it doesn't make sense to say that something is a mode of presentation although there is no object it is a mode of presentation of.

Part of this discussion concerned the proper semantics for definite descriptions, where Evans preferred to follow Russell's analysis. On Russell's view, definite descriptions are to be contextually analyzed. This means that an expression that contains a definite description is considered as an abbreviation of an expression that does not contain that very description. So on Russell's analysis, definite descriptions have meaning through this syntactic transformation, and not by way of referring to an object. Frege, on the other hand, did treat the descriptions as referring expressions, i.e. as expressions whose semantic function it is to refer to objects. As a consequence, sometimes, like with 'the least convergent series', we have a meaningful expression that does not refer to anything. Frege indeed thought that this is unacceptable in a scientific language. There every meaningful expression must refer to something, and so he had to devise a work-around to cope with the problem.

On the other hand, non-referring definite descriptions are quite acceptable in natural language, Frege thought. We often use definite descriptions without knowing whether they refer or not ('the most distant star' was Frege's own example), and we even have fictional discourse ('the winged horse'). Above all, however, we use natural language to talk about what people *think*. It is certainly possible that someone believes that there is exactly one winged horse, and it would be quite in order to report of such a person:

- (1) Alfred believes that the winged horse likes oats.

On Frege's view, Alfred has a mode of presentation which does not in fact present any object, since there are no winged horses, but which nevertheless is a constituent of his thought, the belief reported. This much was part of Frege's psychological theory. Modes of presentation are thought constituents. Different modes of presentation can be of the same object, and a mode of presentation need not be of any object. Because we think by way of modes of presentation it is possible for a person to think of the same object twice without realizing that, and without even being able to realize it by means of reflection over the contents of those very thoughts. And because we think by modes of presentation it is possible to have a fully coherent thought which is not about any object, even though the thinker may justifiably believe it to be.

2. Point of view and subjectivity

Although it may be vaguely suggested by examples used, there is nothing inherently *subjective* about aspects, points of view or modes of presentation. Let's say that to be subjective is to belong to a subject, i.e. a thinking, feeling and wanting being. In this sense sensations, impressions, emotions, thoughts (in the psychological sense) are subjective, for every sensation is a sensation that somebody has, etc. But in this sense a point of

view is not subjective, for a point of view needn't be taken by anyone. There are angles from which something can be seen, but from which it isn't seen. There are possible modes under which a particular object can be presented to a subject, although it is not in fact presented under any of those modes to anyone. So points of view, or modes of presentation are not subjective in this sense.

Closely connected with this sense, which requires at least one subject, is a conception of subjectivity by which at most one subject can have what is subjective. What is subjective cannot be *shared*. Again, sensations, impressions, emotions and thoughts are subjective in this sense, and again points of view aren't. Two persons can observe an object from the same location. Of course, they cannot put their heads at exactly the same spot at the same time, but even this obstacle can be overcome by technical devices such as tv-cameras. Likewise, any way of thinking of Aristotle, or of just about any other object, can be shared by at least some other being.

There are, however, certain exceptions. Frege himself (1918:24) claimed that a person is presented to *himself* as he is to no other person. Each person thinks of himself as no other person does. For Frege this had the consequence, since modes of presentation are constituents of thought contents, that some thoughts are not communicable. But it is not so obvious, I think, that the unique *way* I have of thinking about myself corresponds to anything that could be part of a thought content, making up something like a proposition. It is not even so clear what it amounts to for a person to be presented to himself at all.

Nonetheless, that which *is* subjective *is* presented in a unique way to the subject himself. My pain is presented to me by the way it feels, and even though someone else can think about my pain and know that I have it, he doesn't think of it by way of how it feels. Rather, it is presented to him by my outward manifestations of pain. Likewise, I know my impressions, emotions and thoughts by way of immediate awareness of them, whereas they have to be communicated somehow for someone else to be presented with them.

This does not imply that your pain cannot feel exactly like my pain. If it can, then there is a (non-standard) sense in which your pain is presented to you just like my pain is presented to me. You can then correctly imagine what my pain feels like, and maybe you can think of a pain that I have had in the past just as I can. But even if this is true, you cannot feel my present pain, as I can.

So there are exceptions to the shareability of points of view or modes of presentation. But it is not because of the intrinsic character of a point of view that a particular point of view isn't shareable, but because of the unshareable character of what is viewed. So, again, points of view aren't subjective in this sense.

Let's try a third and last sense. Let's say that to be subjective is to *depend* on a subject. This sense seems often to be involved in when contrasting what is subjective with what is objective. One says that something is subjective, for it is a matter of taste and not an objective fact, or that something is subjective because it is a mere opinion as opposed to comparable with facts. In such cases it is usually thought that there are factors within the subject that are, if not wholly so at least largely, responsible for the attitude. Certain

of my dispositions make me like a particular film and dislike another. I then ascribe some variety of goodness to the one and withhold it from the other. But there are no facts of the matter. The goodness I take the film to have is not an intrinsic property of it. At most it is a relational property, since it depends on my—or at least some person’s—finding it good. In the present sense ascribed properties that are matters of taste, whether aesthetic qualities are such or not, are subjective.

But in this sense points of view or modes of presentation aren’t subjective either. The existence of a point of view does not in any way depend on any personal dispositions or other subjective factors. Or, more cautiously, to the extent that what makes the points of view possible isn’t subjective, the points of view themselves aren’t subjective. For, on an anti-realist conception of physical space, like Kant’s, space itself is subjective, and hence points of view that depend on physical locations, are subjective as well. But again, even in this case, the subjectivity doesn’t derive from the idea of a point of view itself, but is simply inherited. All in all, there is nothing subjective in the very ideas of a point of view, aspect or mode of presentation.

3. Expressions of point of view

Some linguistic expressions are openly sensitive to the point of view of the speaker. This holds in particular for certain spatio-temporal expressions, like prepositions and verb tenses or temporal adverbs. If I say

(2) The dart landed behind the rock

the content of the utterance depends, in the first instance, on my point of view. This utterance is then true, in a particular context of utterance, only if what is referred to by ‘the rock’ is between the speaker and what is referred to by ‘the dart’. As some people use it, I suppose, it would also be required that the dart be obstructed from view at the location of the speaker’s eyes (otherwise perhaps one would say ‘on the other side’ rather than ‘behind’). With such truth conditions, the truth of the utterance obviously depends on where it is uttered.

This simple account of the preposition ‘behind’ needs to be supplemented in at least two ways. First, some objects have an inherent *preferred* point of view. Thus many buildings have a front side and a back side. The building is in a sense preferably to be seen from the front side. Because of this one may speak of something’s being “behind the house”, meaning, roughly, near the house, at its back side.

Secondly, the speaker may *take* the point of view of another person, in particular the addressee. I can tell you that the dart landed behind the rock because the rock is between *you* and the dart, rather than between me and the dart. More generally, therefore, one would have to say that an utterance of (2) is true *with respect to* a contextually determined point of view. The speaker may intend a point of view different from his own location of utterance, and that will then determine the meaning of the utterance.

Similar remarks can be made concerning most other prepositions of location or direc-

tion, and also concerning verbs like ‘come’ and ‘go’, verb tense, verb aspect and temporal adverbs like ‘yesterday’. But these phenomena can arise with other relations than spatio-temporal as well, in particular social relations. This is well illustrated by an example given by Barbara Partee. Consider the sentence

(3) Most europeans speak a foreign language

and imagine it said by two americans, one who gives it as a reason for admiring Europe and another who gives it as a reason for not wanting to go there. ‘Foreign’ is used in both cases as expressing a relational property, a property possessed by a language in relation to a person. Whether a language is foreign or not depends on the point of view, and in the second case, but not in the first, the point of view is that of the speaker of the sentence.

All these expressions are *indexical* in a general sense, in the sense roughly that they identify an object, a property or a relation by relying on features of the context of utterance, usually non-linguistic features. The paradigmatically indexical expressions are the pronouns, spatio-temporal indexicals like ‘here’ and ‘now’, and demonstratives like ‘this’ and ‘that’. Some of these expressions are clearly openly expressive of point of view. With some it is perhaps not so clear. What would it mean, for instance, to say that the use of ‘I’ or ‘you’ expresses a point of view, rather than being simply the use of referring to the speaker and the addressee, who of course *have* points of view.

Now, if we generalize the idea of a point of view in the Fregean way, to cover different ways of conceiving things, then many more linguistic items will become expressive of point of view. We could say that the definite description ‘the teacher of Alexander the great’ expresses a particular point of view of Aristotle. We could say that ‘the color of ripe tomatoes’ and ‘Alfred’s favorite color’ express different points of view of the same shade of red (crimson?). This is, indeed, how Frege thought of the matter. In fact, Frege took two steps beyond this idea of expressing.

First, the point of view, or mode of presentation, that is expressed by the phrase ‘the teacher of Alexander the great’ is a semantic property, an ingredient in its linguistic meaning. It is what Frege called the *sense* (in German ‘Sinn’) of the phrase. More accurately, Frege said that the sense of an expression is that which *contains* the mode of presentation of what the expression refers to (1892:200). This loose idea of containment does not, however, play any role in Frege’s theory.

Secondly, sense does not only belong to complex expressions that articulate a certain mode of presentation. If I have learnt who Aristotle was, i.e. learnt what the name ‘Aristotle’ refers to, by being told that he was the teacher of Alexander the great, then the sense of the name ‘Aristotle’ itself, as used by me, is that of someone being the teacher of Alexander, and hence it is the same as the sense of the description ‘the teacher of Alexander the great’. Simple referring expressions, like proper names, have sense, and there is no special limitation to its complexity.

4. Frege on attributions

Frege employs this notion of sense for solving a certain puzzle about attitude attributions and indirect discourse. In general, if two terms refer to the same thing, it doesn't and shouldn't matter to truth and falsity which of them we use. For instance, if the sentence

(4) The teacher of Alexander the great wrote *De Interpretatione*

is true, then the sentence

(5) The greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*

must be true, as well. For Frege, it was a general semantic principle that if in a complex expression we replace a part by another part that has the same reference (Frege's 'Bedeutung'), then the reference of the new complex expression must be the same as the original one. As a special case, when the complex expression is a sentence, the truth value of the new sentence should be the same as that of the original. This is what today is known as semantic compositionality, more specifically, compositionality of reference.

Compositionality seems to fail in attitude contexts and indirect discourse. For even if the sentence

(6) Alfred believes that the teacher of Alexander the great wrote *De Interpretatione*

is true, the sentence we get by the corresponding substitution, i.e.

(7) Alfred believes that the greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*

may be false. It is indeed likely to be false if the first is true and Alfred believes that the teacher of Alexander the great wasn't the greatest pupil of Plato.

Frege's solution to this problem was the doctrine that in contexts of attitude attribution, or indirect discourse, for instance in contexts like

(8) Alfred believes that ...

linguistic expressions don't refer to their usual references. Instead they refer to their ordinary *senses*. Frege called this 'indirect reference'. This solves the problem, for according to this doctrine, the descriptions 'the teacher of Alexander the great' and 'the greatest pupil of Plato' do not refer to the same thing. They refer to their own ordinary senses, which are different. So then it is no longer a problem that the one sentence is true and the other false.

As a consequence of this doctrine, senses, or modes of presentation, is what we refer to, and hence what we talk *about* when we attribute beliefs and other attitudes. In ordinary discourse I simply express my own modes of presentation of what I talk about. In

belief attributions I not only express my own modes, but I also talk about them and attribute them to myself or others.

This seems like a neat account of the matter, but it has a variety of difficulties. Let me focus on the problem that is most central in the present context. Since the sense of an expression is the mode of presentation of its reference, and since objects referred to usually are presented in different ways to different speakers, we should expect different speakers to attach different senses to the same expression, even if the reference is shared. For instance, the organizer of this conference, Göran Rossholm, is presented in a somewhat different way to you than to me, but we can both be reasonably confident that when using the name 'Göran Rossholm' in conversation, we will refer to the same person. Suppose, then, that I say

(9) Alfred believes that Göran Rossholm likes fiction.

This attribution will be false, even if Alfred indeed assents to the sentence 'Göran Rossholm likes fiction'. The reason is that Alfred simply doesn't have any thought with *my* mode of presentation of Göran Rossholm as a component. Alfred has a thought with a similar content, but not a thought with this *very* content. Hence, an attribution of such a thought to him is false, by Frege's account. And in general, a consequence of Frege's account would be that most attitude attributions are false for corresponding reasons.

This, however, is an undesirable result insofar it concerns semantics of natural language attitude attributions. We would prefer to interpret the English verb 'believes' so that a reasonable frequency of attributions come out true. Lacking strong evidence to the contrary, we would rather take a resulting high falsity rate to indicate that there is something wrong with our theory.

5. The point of view view of attributions

If we modify the Fregean account in order to avoid a high falsity rate, we would have to say that in a belief attribution we are not in general attributing a particular mode of presentation to the subject. The truth conditions are less strict than that. How much less?

Let's take a hint from an explicit expression of point of view. Suppose that I want to inform you about where Alfred believes the dart has landed. I say

(10) Alfred believes that the dart landed behind the rock.

Now, what point of view should be chosen to make this sentence come out true, given the presence of the preposition 'behind'? Is it Alfred's? Or is it the speaker's? Or perhaps the addressee's? Judging from ordinary language intuitions, all these alternatives are acceptable. Communication succeeds only if the hearer interprets the utterance with respect to the same point of view as was intended by the speaker, but beyond the need of ensuring high chances of communicative success, there seem to be no restrictions on the choice. It does not seem that I have to capture Alfred's point of view of the position of

the dart. It is enough that I can make the hearer identify the very area which Alfred, too, identifies, by whatever point of view, as the area where the dart has landed.

The hint to be taken from the example is, I believe, that the point of view is optional. In a belief attribution I can desire to capture more or less closely the attributee's point of view. I can indeed want to capture Alfred's point of view of things close enough as to make

(6) Alfred believes that the teacher of Alexander the great wrote *De Interpretatione*

come out true and

(7) Alfred believes that the greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*

come out false. But I can also choose to capture less, so that even (7) comes out true, for instance if I am talking to someone who knows of Aristotle as Plato's pupil but has no knowledge of Alexander.

On this view of the matter, the truth conditions of a belief sentence, as uttered by a particular speaker at a particular time, depends on how closely the speaker wants to capture the attributee's point of view. Attributions can still come out false. In particular, I can desire to capture Alfred's mode of presentation of Aristotle while uttering (7), and the resulting attribution is false, since unbeknownst to me, Alfred does not know Aristotle as Plato's pupil.

This is the beginning of the account of attitude attributions that I propose. It is a pragmatic account insofar as the speaker's choice of point of view is seen as guided by pragmatic factors. That pragmatics enters into attributions not a novel view of the matter. Above all it was well expressed by Willard Van Quine in *Word and Object*. Concerning both indirect discourse and attitude attribution he wrote:

Commonly, the degree of allowable deviation depends on why we are quoting. It is a question of what traits of the quoted speaker's remarks we want to make something of; those are the traits that must be kept straight if our indirect quotation is to count as true. Similar remarks apply to sentences of belief and other propositional attitudes. Thus even if we eternalize the contained sentence and also rid the containing sentence of such sources of truth-value variation as inadequate descriptions, indicator words and the like, still the whole may in some cases remain capable of varying in truth value from occasion to occasion, counting as true on occasions where no capital is to be made of the contained sentence's divergences from direct quotation, and false otherwise. Evidently we must recognize in indirect quotation and other idioms of propositional attitude a source of truth-value variation comparable to the indicator words, though more restrained in its effects (Quine 1960:218).

What Quine did not want to do, consistently with his general stance, was to base a

semantic theory of belief sentence on this observation.

The present proposal is not pragmatic in the sense of leaving it to pragmatics, i.e. outside of semantics, to deal with point of view, or mode of presentation, issues. On such a view, the speaker at most pragmatically *implies* that the attributee has a particular point of view of the referent. For instance, by (6) I imply that Alfred thinks of Aristotle as the teacher of Alexander the great. If he doesn't, but does think of Aristotle as the greatest pupil of Plato, then my implication has failed, but this is a pragmatic failure only. If (7) is true, then, on such an account, (6) is true as well. Since the two definite descriptions identify the same individual, they can be freely interchanged without altering the truth value, even in belief contexts. The first philosopher to offer a fully worked out account of this kind was Nathan Salmon (1986). On Salmon's account it is in fact part of the semantics that the attributee thinks of the referent under some mode of presentation or other. This is intended to explain how a person can believe e.g. both that Aristotle did write *De Interpretatione* and also that Aristotle *didn't* write *De Interpretatione*, without being openly illogical, because believing it under different modes of presentation.

One problem with such an account is that interchanges of expressions do seem to make a difference in belief sentences even when they are not used categorically, i.e. for attributing a belief. There seems to be some difference in content between

- (11) If Alfred believes that the teacher of Alexander the great wrote *De Interpretatione*, then he will want to read it

on the one hand, and

- (12) If Alfred believes that the greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*, then he will want to read it

on the other. However, neither of these sentences is used for attributing a particular belief to Alfred. The speaker cannot be said to imply by (11) that Alfred thinks of Aristotle as the teacher of Alexander the great. He may even be agnostic about this.

Moreover, it seems that (11) and (12) can differ in truth value. It would be strange to say that (11) is false, even if Alfred is disposed to want to read *De Interpretatione* on hearing that "it was written by the teacher of Alexander the great". But on Salmon's account it is false if Alfred does believe that the greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*, and he does not want to read it. The result would be even more counterintuitive if we changed the example from indicative to subjunctive conditionals.

6. Substitutions in belief contexts

The way, or the extent to which the speaker of belief sentence wants to capture the point of view of the attributee can be represented by indexing. To each point of view corresponds a particular equivalence class of linguistic expressions, namely those expressions that are appropriate for capturing a point of view up to a certain degree. For instance, for

a particular purpose it may be acceptable to represent Alfred's conception of Aristotle by the descriptions 'the greatest pupil of Plato', or 'the greatest pupil of Socrates's greatest follower', or 'the greatest pupil of the author of Theaetetus', and so on, regardless of how Plato is referred to, but not e.g. as 'the teacher of Alexander the great'. To simplify somewhat, we can say that what characterizes the class of admissible substituends is that they are of the form

the greatest pupil of x

(or of a trivial transformation of this form) where the variable ' x ' is to be replaced by an expression referring to Plato (and, perhaps one should add, does not itself contain the name 'Aristotle'). Let's represent this by an index 'P'. To complete the description of the requirements on the content sentence we would have to say something about the verb phrase 'wrote *De Interpretatione*'. So suppose that 'wrote' can be replaced by any expression roughly equivalent in meaning with 'wrote', and that '*De Interpretatione*' can be replaced by nothing else than itself, because the only way of referring to it that is relevant to Alfred's attitude, or so the speaker thinks, is to use this very title. Let's use the indices 'W' and 'D' for representing this. Using these symbols we would get indexed belief sentences such as

(13) Alfred believes that [[the greatest pupil of Plato]_P [wrote_W *De Interpretatione*]_D]]

or

(14) Alfred believes that [[the teacher of Alexander]_P [wrote_W *De Interpretatione*]_D]].

The bracketing follows the phrase structure of the content sentence, and each index attaches to the constituent for which it marks the proper substitution class. With such an indexing the context dependence on the speaker's intention has been eliminated. Such a sentence is just true or false at a particular time, given that the reference of the proper names have been fixed.

The truth conditions of (13) could loosely be stated as follows:

(15) Alfred believes of Aristotle, presented as P, of the *wrote* relation, presented as W, and of the *De Interpretatione*, presented as D, that the first stands in the second to the third.

If Alfred believes something *of* Aristotle, then he does believe that *of* the teacher of Alexander, *of* Plato's greatest pupil, *of* the author of *Metaphysics*, and so on. The believes-of construction creates an *extensional* context, where we can freely interchange expressions with the same reference without changing truth value. So, by (15) we say of Alfred that he believes something of Aristotle, the *wrote* relation and the book in ques-

tion, namely that they are related in a particular way to each other. This somewhat cumbersome and imprecise way of stating the truth conditions will be improved upon shortly.

With these truth conditions (13) is false if, for instance, Alfred believes that the author of *De Interpretatione* was not a pupil of Plato's, or not his greatest pupil, or if Alfred does not know the book *De Interpretatione* under that very name.

If (13) is interpreted as (15), and if it is true, then (14) is true as well, even though the description 'the teacher of Alexander' does not belong the substitution class P. This is a deviant example, for usually the substitution class would be determined by means of the expression actually used, as the class of expressions that share a certain property with the expression indexed. We could therefore introduce the index 'I', for sharing meaning, or intension, the index 'E', for just sharing extension, and the index 'L', for being literally the same. Then we can recast the indexing in (13) as:

(16) Alfred believes that [[the_I [greatest_I [[pupil of]_I Plato_E]]] [wrote_I *De Interpretatione*_I]].

Here 'the' is replaceable only by synonymous expressions, and the same holds for 'greatest', 'pupil of', and 'wrote'. 'Plato' can be replaced by any co-referring expression, and 'De Interpretatione' only by itself. Notice, however, that e.g. the subscript 'I' as occurring in 'greatest_I' refers to the substitution class of expressions synonymous with 'greatest'. What it refers to depends on the expression it attaches to. It should therefore be regarded as a function symbol taking the expression as argument. Therefore, we should see 'greatest_I' as an abbreviation of 'greatest_{I('greatest')}'.

7. Extensional structure

There is a kind of substitution class that merits special attention. That is the referential substitution class, i.e. the class of expressions referring to the same entity, or having the same extension. We can for instance speak of the class of expressions that are co-extensive with 'the greatest pupil of Plato', and that class includes 'the greatest pupil of Plato', 'Aristotle', 'the teacher of Alexander the great', and so on. We can ascribe beliefs while not aspiring to approximate the attributee's point of view any closer than what is captured by the referential substitution class. With the index 'E' for reference sharing, we have belief ascriptions of the kind

(17) Alfred believes that [[the greatest pupil of Plato]_E [wrote_E *De Interpretatione*_E]]

The speaker whose intentions would be faithfully represented by such an indexing would accept e.g. replacing '*De Interpretatione*' by 'the second part of the Organon' and 'wrote' perhaps by 'stood in the relation governed by chapter such-and-such of the copyright legislation to' (with proper replacement for 'such-and-such'). (17) is roughly

equivalent to the believe-of construction above, without containing any further mode of presentation requirements.

We could say that (17) relates Alfred to a *fact*, or *state of affairs*. This would be the fact that Aristotle wrote *De Interpretatione*, which is the same fact describable or specifiable by indefinitely many different sentences. There is a basic intuition that when we ascribe a belief to a person, we say what the world is like according to the beliefs of that person, or again how the world must be in order for the belief to be true. We talk about the world when we talk about beliefs.

The notion of a state of affairs, like the corresponding notion of a *fact*, which is a state of affairs that obtains, is a problematic one. Philosophers have objected against using them for mainly two reasons. One is that the *individuation* of facts is unclear. That is, it is unclear under what condition we should count a statement of the form

(18) The fact that p = the fact that q

as true. What expression substitutions are allowed in the context

(19) the fact that ...

without altering the extension of the definite description? In effect, there is an argument, called ‘the slingshot’, which aims to show that given two intuitively correct principles of substitution, talk of facts collapses: any true sentence may be replaced by any other true sentence in this context, and hence there is only one fact.¹ The other objection, delivered by Peter Strawson (1950), is that talk of facts is redundant. The world does not contain any category of facts. Rather, talk of facts is just talk of true propositions.

To the extent that we want to go talking about facts, the notion of a fact must be clarified by fixing the substitution condition of the context (19). It should be done so as to avoid the slingshot collapse. It should also be done so that talk of facts does not reduce to talk of propositions. For present purposes I shall identify state of affairs with extensional structure of sentences, where extensional structure is just what is marked by the E-indexing.

This accords with some basic intuitions, for we would say e.g. that with the sentence

(20) Alfred believes that Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*

I clearly attribute to Alfred a *different* belief than I do by (7), no matter how loose I want to be in characterizing belief content. Intuitively, I have attributed to Alfred a belief in a *different* state of affairs. And this accords well with the fact that we cannot obtain

(21) Alfred believes that [Plato_E [wrote_E *De Interpretatione*_E]]

from (17) by acceptable substitution, for Plato was not identical with his own greatest

1. See Davidson 1967:19 and Neale 1995.

pupil.

In a sense we can say that extensional substitutions mark the lower limit of belief attributions. We allow expressions to be replaced by co-extensional expressions in the belief context when we are not interested at all in conveying how the attributee conceives of the state of affairs we present him as believing in.²

8. The form of attributions

Since extensional structure must be preserved in a belief attribution, unless one is attributing a different belief, it makes sense to say that in a belief attribution the speaker *relates* the attributee to an extensional structure, or state of affairs. Such and such a state of affairs is what the attributee believes to obtain, according to the speaker. But usually the speaker goes beyond that, since usually he also wants to capture to some extent the attributee's point of view.

We can say, therefore, that in a belief attribution the speaker relates the attributee to a state of affairs, with respect to a corresponding point of view. The logical form of a belief attribution therefore is given by

$$\text{BEL}(A, S, P)$$

expressing a relation between a believer *A*, a state of affairs *S* and a point of view *P*. This is also roughly how it has been conceived in main current analytic treatments over the past decades. The present proposal differs in suggesting extensional state of affairs instead of propositions as the second argument. It also differs because of the free choice of substitution classes.³

It further differs by allowing point of view to vary from part to part of the content sentence. Because of this, we really have a structure, or array, of points of view. We could represent the attribution (16) as

$$(22) \quad \text{BEL}(\text{Alfred}, \text{THE}, \text{GREATEST}, \text{PUPIL OF}, \text{Plato}, \text{WROTE}, \text{De Interpretatione}, \text{I}, \text{I}, \text{I}, \text{E}, \text{I}, \text{L}).$$

Here the second argument is a state of affairs, i.e. an extensional structure. This is set theoretic structure with extensions of expressions as basic components. The argument symbol is a complex term referring to that extensional structure. A term in small caps refers to the extension of the corresponding expression.⁴ The third argument is the point-

2. Note, however, that a sentence can be E-indexed in different ways by assigning indices at different depths of the syntactic tree. The upper limit of this is simply to index the top node, i.e. the entire sentence. This would yield a belief attribution like 'Alfred believes that [Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*]_E', which is not more specific than saying that Alfred believes something or other that is false.

3. The idea that the choice of mode of presentation by the speaker may be context dependent is itself not new. Stephen Schiffer (1992) has labelled it 'the hidden-indexical theory'. It is not part of Schiffer's conception that the choice openly determines substitution conditions, and neither—which is related—that the variation can include e.g. direct quotation.

of-view structure, the structure of corresponding substitution class indices. For brevity, the abbreviation format given above has been used. The third argument, given simply as ‘ I, I, I, E, I, L ’, is really an abbreviation of

I(‘the’), I(‘greatest’), I(‘pupil of’) , E(‘Plato’) , I(‘wrote’),
L(‘De Interpretatione’)

(this holds for the extensional indices of the second argument as well, but here there is no need to make it explicit, since the context is extensional anyway).

In order to increase perspicuity, the third argument symbols could be equivalently distributed over the second, giving

(23) BEL'(Alfred, THE_I GREATEST_I PUPIL OF_I Plato_E WROTE_I *De Interpretatione*_L)

(where BEL' is the corresponding two-place relation of a believer and a structure of extensions and points of view). However, the resulting form (23) is fully determined already by

(16) Alfred believes that [[the_I [greatest_I [[pupil of]_I Plato_E]]] [wrote_I *De Interpretatione*_L]].

That is, the logical form of a belief attribution is determined by the relevant structured indexing of the content sentence itself. The relevant structured indexing, in turn, is determined by the phrase structure of the sentence and the dispositions of the speaker to accept substitutions in the content sentence without altering the content of the attribution. The speaker’s dispositions therefore determines the underlying structure of the belief sentence, to the extent that it is determinate.

In a sense, the non-extensional nature of belief sentences is explained this way. There are two sources of non-extensionality. One is that a particular substitution need not preserve the extensional structure intended by the speaker. For instance, by

(7) Alfred believes that the greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*

the speaker might intend either the structure of (16), that is

4. What is GREATEST, i.e. the extension of ‘greatest’? We can regard it as a function from properties to individuals. When the argument is the property of being a pupil of Plato, the value is Aristotle. The function can itself extensionally be thought of as the set of argument-value pairs, containing among other elements the pair being a pupil of Plato, Aristotle . Note that since ‘greatest’ is a syncategorematic term (it does not correspond to any particular category, but picks out a different attribute for different arguments) it cannot itself take extensions as arguments, for it can give different values for different properties even if these have the same extension.

(16)* [[the [greatest [pupil of] Plato]]] [wrote *De Interpretatione*]]

or the structure of (17), that is

(17)* [[the greatest pupil of Plato] [wrote *De Interpretatione*]].

When (17)* is intended, ‘the greatest pupil of Plato’ may be replaced by ‘the teacher of Alexander’ without altering extensional structure, but not in the case of (16)*. It would then amount to attributing to Alfred a belief in a different fact, having Alexander and TEACHER OF as basic elements rather than Plato and PUPIL OF. Note that this amounts to non-extensionality only at surface level, in the unanalyzed (7), for in the analyzed form of (16), the description ‘the greatest pupil of Plato’ is not a constituent.

The second source of non-extensionality is that produced by non-extensional indexing, meant to reflect point of view. This is a surface phenomenon, too, and it is resolved by proper analysis. At surface level, two occurrences of an expression is fused into one. In the one occurrence the expression is used, in the other mentioned, which is to say that it only occurs within quotation marks. This phenomenon was once illustrated by Quine (1953:139) with the sentence

(24) Giorgione was so-called because of his size.

Despite the fact that Giorgione was named ‘Barbarelli’, we would produce a false sentence by substituting ‘Barbarelli’ for ‘Giorgione’ in the true (24). But this is explained by the fact that the analyzed form of (24) is

(25) Giorgione was called ‘Giorgione’ because of his size.

In the analyzed form the first occurrence of ‘Giorgione’ can be freely replaced by any co-referring term. The second occurrence can be replaced by no other expression without altering truth value.

Correspondingly, expressions in the belief contexts have implicit double occurrences, on the present theory, for they occur both in a normal referential way, and quoted, as arguments to the index functions, as in:

(26) Alfred believes that [Lisa_E(‘Lisa’), sleeps_I(‘sleeps’)].

The first occurrence of ‘sleeps’ can be replaced, the second occurrence, in quotes, cannot. This explains the failure of substitutivity in the fused surface level occurrence.

Given this kind of analysis of belief sentences, can we say that belief sentences are compositional, i.e. that the meaning of the whole sentence is determined by the meanings of the parts and the way it is put together? In a sense yes, and in a sense no. For the yes part we can say the following. First, that a sentence is ambiguous, lexically or structurally, is no obstacle to its having a compositionally determined meaning, for we must then require only the set of all meanings can be compositionally determined from the different

lexical meanings or syntactic structures of the sentence. Unanalyzed belief sentences are ambiguous. They are disambiguated by means of structured indexing. For each such structured indexing the meaning of the sentence is compositionally determined. So given the possible extensional structures, determined by the syntax of the sentence, and given a set of possible indices, the set of possible readings is generated in a perfectly compositional way.

However, in the sense that all possible readings must be generated compositionally from a pre-determined set of rules, the answer is no. The reason is that there is no definitive limit to what kind of substitution conditions a speaker can intend, i.e. to the respects in which he may want to capture the attributee's point of view. Therefore there is no fixed set of indices that covers all possible readings.

9. What is content?

It is natural to think that in attempting to capture an attributee's point of view more or less closely, we are selecting a point on a scale with an upper limit. The upper limit consists in that very way in which the attributee thinks of the objects or states of affairs in question, and that is *the* content of his belief. I think this view of the matter is misconceived.

Suppose it is true that whatever object a person thinks of, he thinks of that object from some particular point of view, under some mode of presentation or other. Similarly, suppose that for any property, or relation, or any state of affairs, that a person thinks of, he thinks of it under some mode of presentation. If that is the case, then it seems virtually impossible to fully capture someone's point of view by means of linguistic articulation, for it will only lead to a regress. If we start with

(27) Alfred believes that Aristotle wrote *De Interpretatione*

and want to proceed with the way Alfred thinks of Aristotle, then the next step might be

(7) Alfred believes that the greatest pupil of Plato wrote *De Interpretatione*.

But even if this goes some way to approximate Alfred's conception of Aristotle, it contains the name 'Plato', and again Alfred thinks of Plato under some mode of presentation. To capture that, we must find some further linguistic expression, and that will probably contain yet another name, and so on. This is a problem, unless the name itself expresses, as its meaning, the very mode of presentation, so that no further articulation is needed. This was Frege's theory. But this has the consequence, as we saw before, that most belief attributions are false, because of intersubjective differences in mode of presentation.

If the problem cannot be solved by name meaning, then it seems that it must be solved by means of replacing names by descriptions that do not themselves contain any names.

But it is in itself wildly implausible that (for more than a few exceptional examples, such as ‘the man I just met’, or ‘the shortest painter ever’) a speaker associates, or even is able to associate, any particular proper name with some description that both identifies the bearer and doesn’t contain any proper name in turn. And even apart from this, there is the additional difficulty that general terms stand for properties or relations which the speaker again can think of differently than others do. So, by using general terms in the description we risk taking the regress further anyway.

All in all, it seems that with any new description or reformulation, intended to approximate closer to a particular point of view, we create a new problem of the same kind. So we cannot completely capture someone’s point of view in an attribution. But if we still want to stick to the intuitive idea that a belief content is exactly what we characterize in our belief attributions, then we cannot also say that belief content *contains* the believer’s proper point of view, no matter how impossible it is to characterize it. For that again means that most or all attributions are false. To avoid that, it seems we must make some distinction between *content* and point of view.

I think we should stick to the idea that when talking of what someone believes, we are talking about the world, saying what the world is like according to the attributee. Also, we are doing nothing else. That is, the content of a particular belief is fully exhausted by the totality of ways the world could be like according to this belief. It may seem that this idea leaves no room for the representation of a point of view, but that is not the case.

The point of view of the attributee comes out as the difference between related, true attributions. Both the attributions

(16) Alfred believes that [[the_I [greatest_I [[pupil of]_I Plato_E]]] [wrote_I *De Interpretatione*_L]]

and

(17) Alfred believes that [[the greatest pupil of Plato]_E [wrote_E *De Interpretatione*_E]]

are true. Both truly say what Alfred believes, for he believes both things. The two beliefs clearly have different contents. For instance, the belief given by (16) would have been true if someone else than Aristotle had written *De Interpretatione*, provided that person were the greatest pupil of Plato, but that given by (17) would not. According to that belief, the relevant person is Aristotle, even with respect to the possibility that he was not Plato’s greatest pupil. Truth conditionally, the two beliefs are different, but both can truly be ascribed to Alfred. Alfred’s point of view is brought out by the *relation* between them. On this view, a belief attribution approximates a point of view better or worse, but if it is true, it nonetheless specifies the content of something the person does believe.

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