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De Se Attitudes and Action*

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1 Introduction

Actions can often be explained by beliefs and desires. Why is Mary flapping her arms like that? Because she wants Sam to laugh, and she believes that he will laugh if she flaps her arms like that. Very often such explanations appeal, as this one does, to a ***de se*** belief, a belief that one would naturally express using the first-person pronoun. Mary, for example, would presumably express her belief by saying, *Sam will laugh if* ***I*** *flap my arms like this.* A persistent theme in the literature on *de se* attitudes is that such attitudes enjoy a special connection to action. Is this right? If so, what is the nature of this special connection?

Before we get to that, we should first say what a *de se* attitude is. Let's start with the more general category of *indexical attitudes*. To a first approximation, an indexical attitude is one that could be expressed or reported using an appropriate sentence containing an indexical such as *I*, *here*, or *now*. This is not intended as a definition, but merely as a gesture towards the class of attitudes that constitutes our object of study. My belief that I'm over five-feet tall is an indexical belief, as is my belief that it is now raining. My desire that I avoid harm is an indexical desire, as is my desire that it stop raining in the next few minutes. The indexical attitudes that tend to receive the most attention are of two kinds: (i) *de se* or *self-locating* attitudes, which are attitudes that could be expressed or reported using an appropriate sentence containing a first-person pronoun such as *I*, *me*, or *my*; and (ii) *de nunc* or *temporally self-locating* attitudes, which are attitudes that could be expressed or reported using an appropriate sentence containing a temporal adverbial such as *now*. For simplicity, I shall focus mostly on *de se* (i.e. first-person) attitudes in what follows, though much of what I say may well apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to the temporal case.

In what follows, I consider three proposals for what the special connection between action and *de se* attitudes is. In Section 2, I consider the claim that *de se* attitudes are, in a sense to be made precise, *essential* to the explanation of

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action. In Sections 3–4, I consider one of Perry's classic examples, along with his claim that such examples pose a problem for *the doctrine of propositions*, a traditional way of thinking about attitudes and their contents. For reasons I shall discuss, I don't think that either of these approaches reveals the distinctive connection between actions and *de se* attitudes. In Sections 5–8, I consider a third proposal. According to this proposal, the doctrine of propositions runs into trouble in connection with cases in which two agents can, in a certain sense, be said to "have all the same attitudes," but in which they are rationally motivated to perform different actions. Section 9 closes with a brief discussion of how two prominent theories (Lewis's and Perry's) accommodate the feature of *de se* attitudes that gives rise to this problem.

2 Essentiality

Consider the idea that *de se* attitudes are *essential* to the explanation of action. This may be understood as implying that, for any action A, there is some *de se* attitude that figures in the explanation of A. You can't explain an action without appealing to a *de se* attitude.[1] This might seem like an overly-strong claim, but one way to try to argue for it would be to argue that, according to the best regimentation of such explanations, they always advert to a *de se* attitude. For example, perhaps the canonical form of such explanations corresponds to the following schema of practical reason:

> If I ϕ, then p.
>
> I desire that p.
>
> So, I should ϕ.

The crucial idea here is that such explanations always rely on a belief that the agent could express by means of a 'means-end' conditional, *If I ϕ, then p*. And perhaps it is the nature of such beliefs that they are *de se* beliefs, the agent conceiving of the action as one that *she* might perform.

This broad idea strikes me as interesting, and not wholly implausible, but I won't pursue it further here. The reason is that the special connection between actions and *de se* attitudes is often thought to tell us something interesting about the nature of attitude *content*: about the objects of belief and desire. After all, it is questions about the contents of attitudes that dominate the literature on the *de se* (Frege, 1956; Perry, 1977, 1979; Lewis, 1979; Evans, 1981). But consider the claim that for any action A, a *de se* attitude figures in the explanation of A. Suppose it is true. What, if anything, follows concerning the nature of the objects of belief and desire? Would it show that the objects of *de se* attitudes are *private*, as Frege thought? Or would it show that the contents of such attitudes are *properties*, as Lewis thought? The answer to these questions is unclear, and the same goes if we suppose instead that the 'essentiality thesis' is false.

[1] For discussion of this thesis, see Cappelen and Dever (2013, Ch. 3), Bermúdez (2017), and Morgan (2019).

There is simply no obvious connection between this essentiality thesis and the questions about content that dominate the literature on the *de se*. Whether or not a certain type of attitude always figures in a certain type of explanatory context does not obviously imply anything about the contents of such attitudes. Note, for example, that if such folk-psychological explanations of action are best regimented in the manner described above, then they also always include a *conditional* belief (*If I ϕ, then p*). But reflecting on that fact would seem to tell us little about the contents of conditional beliefs.

3 The doctrine of propositions

The idea that there is a special connection between *de se* attitudes and action that reveals something important about the nature of attitude content is often associated with John Perry's seminal work on *de se* attitudes, or *self-locating attitudes*, as he styled them (Perry, 1977, 1979). Perry (1979) took such attitudes to pose a problem for what he called *the doctrine of propositions*, a series of claims about attitudes and their contents that he associated with traditional theories of attitudes.[2] Perry's doctrine consists of three theses, which I render as follows.

Thesis (I): Attitude relations, such as the relation of believing, are two-place relations between an agent and an abstract object called a *proposition*.[3] Given an attitude relation R and a proposition p, we have the property of bearing R to p. Such properties are *attitudes*, i.e. *attitude types*. So, for example, the property of bearing the relation of believing to the proposition that it is raining—the property of believing that it is raining—is an attitude; in particular, it is a *belief*, a *belief type*. If B is the property of believing p, then we say that p is the *content* of B.[4]

Thesis (II): Propositions are *absolute*, i.e. one and the same proposition cannot be true for one person and false for another. In this respect, propositional truth differs from sentential truth. The sentence *I am Italian* might be true as uttered by Laura, false as uttered by Lakshmi. According to the doctrine of propositions, propositions are not like that; if proposition p is true for person x, then it is true for all other persons as well.

Thesis (III): Attitudes are *fine-grained*. This idea is familiar, though it is not easy to express it in a precise and general way. But I take the following to be a consequence of this idea:

> If a rational agent x understands sentences ϕ and ϕ' and accepts ϕ and rejects ϕ', then the belief that (were she to have it) x could

[2] In particular, Perry associated the doctrine of propositions with Frege (1892).

[3] Perhaps what we often think of as two-place relations between x and y are really three-place relations between x, y, and a time or four-place relations between x, y, a time, and a possible world. I gloss over this subtlety for the most part in what follows.

[4] I introduce *attitude tokens* later in the chapter. When I speak of an *attitude* or a *belief* or a *desire* without qualification, I usually mean to speak of types or properties, things that different individuals may have at different times.

express by uttering ϕ is distinct from the belief that (were she to have it) x could express by uttering ϕ'.[5]

Since a rational agent can understand the sentences *Mark Twain was a writer* and *Samuel Clemens was a writer*, and accept the former while rejecting the latter, it follows that from this thesis that the belief B he could express by uttering the first sentence is distinct from the belief B' he could express by uttering the second (even though Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens). Note that when you put this part of the doctrine together with the first part of the doctrine you get the result that beliefs B and B' differ in their *content*. For if B and B' are distinct beliefs, and if beliefs are individuated (solely) by their content, then B and B' differ in their content. Thus, the doctrine of propositions is 'Fregean,' in a broad sense of this term.

Those are the three components of the doctrine of propositions, as I shall understand it. Note that my version of the doctrine of propositions has been conspicuously silent on issues concerning the proper analysis of *attitude ascriptions*. This is because our focus is on the attitudes—the mental states—themselves, not on how we attribute them to ourselves and others. But of course in order to pursue our topic of study, we will need a way of picking out attitudes and so we cannot avoid the topic of attitude ascriptions entirely. But we can skirt some controversial questions by ascribing attitudes not by using ordinary attitude ascriptions, but by using sentences like this:

(1) Al has a belief that he could express by saying, *I am being chased by a bear.*

(2) Betty has a desire that she could report by saying, *I want to visit Mark Twain's grave.*

Adopting this somewhat indirect manner of speaking allows us to avoid some of the controversies surrounding the semantics and pragmatics of attitude ascriptions. Furthermore, if what an ordinary attitude ascription conveys about a particular subject's state of mind often depends on the context in which it is used, it may aid clarity to describe attitudes using sentences like the ones displayed above, rather than by using ordinary attitude ascriptions.

4 The specification problem

What problem do *de se* attitudes pose for the doctrine of propositions? Much of the discussion in Perry (1979) concerns cases like the following (I paraphrase here, rather than quote):

The messy shopper

Perry once followed a trail of sugar along a supermarket floor, looking for the shopper with the torn sack to tell him that he was making

[5]Thanks to David Braun for suggesting a principle similar to this one. The principle should be interpreted as holding at an arbitrary fixed time.

> a mess. With each trip around the store, the trail became thicker, but there was no sign of the messy shopper. Finally, Perry realized that *he* was the shopper with the torn sack that he was trying to catch. Having realized this, Perry of course stopped following the trail and turned the torn sack upright. (Perry, 1979, 33)

The case reveals some sort of connection between action and *de se* attitudes, for it is Perry's coming to the *de se* realization that *he* is the one making the mess that leads to his change in behavior. But what problem does the case pose for the doctrine of propositions?

According to Perry, the trouble arise because the doctrine of propositions is committed to saying that Perry's coming to believe that he is the one making the mess is his coming to believe some absolute proposition. But it turns out to be rather difficult to say just which absolute proposition this is. And if it is difficult to say just which absolute proposition Perry comes to believe when he comes to believe that he is the one making a mess, that might seem to cast doubt on the idea, central to the doctrine of propositions, that beliefs are solely individuated by absolute propositions.

Why is it so difficult to say just just which absolute proposition it is that Perry comes to believe when he comes to believe that *he* is the one making the mess? Well, as Perry observes, there seems to be no purely qualitative property F such that Perry's believing that he is the one making the mess is his believing that the F is the one making the mess. For any choice of F, we can imagine Perry believing that he is the one making the mess without believing that the F is the one making the mess, since Perry may not realize that he is the F. Thus, the change in Perry's behavior cannot be explained by saying that he came to believe that the F is the one making the mess, for some qualitative property F.

Furthermore, it is not clear that we can characterize Perry's realization by saying that he came to believe the 'singular proposition' that John Perry is the one making the mess. For given standard accounts concerning what it takes to believe a singular proposition, Perry could come to believe this proposition without having the *de se* belief to the effect that he is the one making a mess. Perry might, for example, see a reflection of the messy shopper in a mirror, fail to realize that he is seeing himself, and come to believe that (as he would put) *that man is making a mess*. He would thereby believe the singular proposition that John Perry was making a mess (on standard accounts), but would still fail to believe *de se* that he was making a mess. So what Perry learned cannot simply be characterized by that singular proposition (according to this line of argument).

Perry can be seen as issuing a *specification challenge* to the advocate of the doctrine of propositions. If what it is for Perry to believe that he is the one making the mess is for him to believe an absolute proposition, then the advocate of the doctrine of propositions ought be in position to *specify* that proposition, i.e. to tell us which proposition it is that Perry comes to believe.

Now, a somewhat murky question is this: what must one do in order to count as meeting the specification challenge? For suppose the advocate of

the doctrine of propositions just said this: "The proposition we are looking for is simply that absolute proposition that Perry could have expressed by saying, *I am the one making the mess*." Isn't that a perfectly good way to specify a proposition?[6] If it is, then isn't it trivial to meet the specification challenge? If, on the other hand, this way of specifying a proposition is in some sense illegitimate, then what criteria must a description of a proposition meet in order to count as adequate answer to the specification challenge?

Fortunately, we can sidestep these difficult questions, and focus on a simpler observation, one that a number philosophers have made.[7] The observation is that, although Perry's example and argument concern a *de se* belief, the *de se*-ness of that belief seems to play no essential role in the argument. Consider, for example, Cappelen and Dever's structurally similar case of 'messy Superman':

> *Messy Superman*
>
> Pushing my cart down the aisle I was looking for Clark Kent to tell him he was making a mess. I kept passing by Superman, but couldn't find Clark Kent. Finally, I realized, Superman was Clark Kent. I believed at the outset that Clark Kent was making a mess... But I didn't believe that Superman was making a mess. That seems to be something that I came to believe. And when I came to believe that, I stopped looking around and I told Superman to clean up after himself. My change in beliefs seems to explain my change in behavior. (Cappelen and Dever, 2013, 33)

The similarity between this case and Perry's *de se* case makes one wonder what problem the *de se* case raises that Superman case does not. One can bolster this thought by noting that one can use the Superman case to construct an argument against the doctrine of propositions that parallels Perry's argument (Ninan, 2016, 95). Thus, the case of messy Superman suggests that *de dicto* attitudes also raise a specification challenge for the doctrine of propositions, a challenge does not appear to be substantially different from the one raised by *de se* attitudes.[8] We will have to look elsewhere if we want to find a special connection between action and *de se* attitudes.

5 Expanding the doctrine of propositions

Perry (1977) briefly discusses another type of case:

[6]Perry considers this possibility at one point (Perry, 1979, 45–46), but assumes that it requires us to say that the proposition Perry comes to believe is one that only he can believe, and he goes on to argue against the idea of 'private propositions.' But it is unclear why this view would require us to say that the proposition Perry comes to believe is one that only he can believe. A fellow shopper might come to believe that same proposition, and might express the corresponding belief by saying to Perry, *You are the one making the mess*.

[7]See, for example, Boer and Lycan (1980, 450-453), Tiffany (2000, 38-41), Spencer (2007, 183-184), Cappelen and Dever (2013, §3.1), Magidor (2015), and Ninan (2016).

[8]By a *de dicto attitude*, I simply mean an attitude that is not *de se*.

> When you and I both apprehend the thought that I am about to be attacked by a bear, we behave differently. I roll up in a ball, you run to get help. (Perry, 1977, 23)

Perry uses this case not to press a problem for the doctrine of propositions, but as a means of illustrating his preferred theory. But I think that such cases do pose a problem for the doctrine of propositions, at least if two other plausible theses about the nature of attitudes are accepted.[9] And I think that the resulting problem is indeed particular to the *de se*. I shall try to substantiate these claims in what follows, and then try to say what it is about *de se* attitudes that gives rise to this problem.[10]

Let's start with the two additional theses about the nature of attitudes. The first thesis concerns the role of attitudes in the explanation and prediction of action. Let me build up to the first thesis by discussing a version of Perry's 'bear attack' case. Imagine that Al and Betty are hiking in the woods when a bear begins to chase Al. Al and Betty both realize that this is what is happening, and they both want the bear to leave. Neither suffers from any sort of identity confusion; the case is not a 'Frege case.'

Let's focus on Al's attitudes for the moment, and let us suppose that Al has the following attitudes:

> *I'm being chased by a bear.*
>
> *If I roll up in a ball, the bear will leave.* B
>
> *I want the bear to leave.* D

Here, we pick out Al's attitudes via the sentences he would use to express or report them. We use B to denote Al's *de se* belief that if he rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave, and we use D to denote Al's desire that the bear leave.

Now, given that Al has these attitudes, what would we expect Al to be motivated to do? Well, I take it that we'd expect Al to be motivated to roll up in a ball, all else being equal. Furthermore, I take it that it is Al's having B and D that would motivate Al to do this. It isn't simply that Al happens to have these attitudes and Al happens to be motivated to roll up in a ball, with no connection between these facts. It's his having these attitudes that would motivate him to act in that way.

Note that our prediction that this pattern of attitudes will motivate Al to roll up in a ball (if all else is equal) does not reflect any special knowledge we have of *Al*, for we have no such special knowledge; *Al* is essentially an arbitrary name for someone who has a certain pattern of attitudes. Thus, our prediction about what Al would do is presumably based on a *generalization* that links having certain attitudes to performing certain actions. Since our prediction is

[9] Stalnaker (1999, 19–21) seems to have been the first to observe that what is distinctive about the *de se* is revealed most clearly by cases with the structure of Perry's 'bear attack' case.

[10] For discussion of arguments similar to the one presented here, see Ninan (2016), and Torre (2018).

based on the fact that Al has belief B and desire D, the relevant generalization could presumably be expressed as folows:

($\star$) Necessarily, for all individuals y, if y has B and D, then, if all else is equal, y's having B and D will motivate y to roll up in a ball.

Our first additional thesis generalizes this point:

> Thesis (IV): Law-like generalizations that link attitudes with actions play a central role in the explanation and prediction of rational action.

For simplicity, I shall focus on the role of such generalizations in *predicting* rational action. And I shall interpret thesis (IV) as implying the following:

> The normal way of arriving at the prediction that agent x will perform action ϕ is as follows:
>
> - The predictor knows a **particular claim**:
> (a) Agent x has attitudes $A_1, ..., A_n$.
> - The predictor knows a **law-like generalization**:
> (b) Necessarily, for all y, if y has attitudes $A_1, ..., A_n$, then, if all else is equal, y's having attitudes $A_1, .., A_n$ will motivate y to perform action ϕ.
> - And from these two things, the predictor infers:
> (c) If all else is equal, x's having attitudes $A_1, .., A_n$ will motivate x to perform ϕ.

The law-like generalizations in question contain a wide-scope necessity operator. The type of necessity is something like nomological necessity; the operator may be understood as quantifying over all the psychologically possible worlds.

Note also that these law-like generalizations are '*ceteris paribus* laws': the consequent says that *if all else is equal*, then the the agent's attitudes will motivate her to perform the action in question. It is notoriously difficult to specify the content of these clauses in an informative way. For our purposes, it will suffice to note that all else is not equal if: the agent is suffering from some form of practical or theoretical irrationality; or the agent is weak-willed; or an alternative action that would achieve the same end is more suitable for the agent in question.

So Thesis (IV), interpreted in the way just indicated, is my first additional thesis. Now for the second.

> Thesis (V): Propositions are *shareable* or *public* in the following sense: if an agent x can bear attitudes towards a proposition p, then, generally speaking, so can any other agent y.

The "generally speaking" qualification is needed for the following sorts of cases. Suppose p is a singular proposition about z. Then perhaps in order to entertain p, one needs to stand in a certain relation of acquaintance to z. If x is stands in that relation to z, but y does not, then x may be able to entertain p while y cannot. Another type of case is where, in order to entertain p, one must possess a certain concept c. Then if x possesses c but y does not, x may be able to entertain p, while y cannot. Neither of these qualifications will be particularly relevant in what follows.

6 The problem

Let *the expanded doctrine* refer to the conjunction of the doctrine of propositions with these two additional theses, i.e. the expanded doctrine consists of Theses (I)–(V). I claim that *de se* attitudes pose a distinctive problem for the expanded doctrine. The problem takes the form of a *reductio* against the expanded doctrine.

Return to our bear attack scenario. Assume, as before, that Al has attitudes B and D:

<u>Al's attitudes</u>

If I roll up in a ball, the bear will leave. B

I want the bear to leave. D

According to the Thesis (I) of the expanded doctrine, belief B is the property of believing p, for some proposition p. According to Thesis (V), proposition p is shareable, which means Betty can believe it (assume Betty satisfies the requisite acquaintance and concept-possession requirements). But if Betty can believe p, she can have belief B, since belief B is just the property of believing p. The same goes for desire D: Betty can have desire D. Let us suppose that she has belief B and desire D.

What did we just suppose? What is it for Betty to have these attitudes? According to thesis (II), propositions are absolute, i.e. propositions are true or false *simpliciter*. This means that we can also say that *beliefs* are true or false *simpliciter*: a belief is true iff its content is true. And we can say that desires are satisfied or not satisfied *simpliciter*: a desire is satisfied iff its content is true. Since B is a belief that Al can express by saying, *If I curl up into a ball, the bear will leave*, B is presumably true iff: if Al curls up into a ball, the bear will leave. Thus, for Betty to have belief B is for Betty to have a belief that is true iff: if Al curls up into a ball, the bear will leave. Parallel reasoning shows that for Betty to have desire D is for Betty to have a desire that is satisfied iff the bear leaves.

But knowing the conditions under which belief B is true doesn't tell us exactly what it is for Betty to have belief B. To see this, we can consider some beliefs that Betty could have that have these truth-conditions. We pick out the beliefs via the sentences Betty could use to express them (were she to have them):

(i) *If **you** curl up into a ball, the bear will leave.* (speaking to Al)

(ii) *If **Al** curls up into a ball, the bear will leave.*

(iii) *If **the actual man in the red hat** curls up into a ball, the bear will leave.*

... ...

Given thesis (III) (fine-grainedness) of the expanded doctrine, these are all distinct beliefs. Betty could have one without having the others. So which one is B?

From the point of view of the expanded doctrine, I think the most plausible answer to this question is that what it is for Betty to have B is for Betty to have belief (i) on the above list, the *you*-belief. I will start off by assuming this, but my argument does not actually depend on this assumption. And the fact that it doesn't depend on this assumption turns out to be an extremely important fact, one that reveals something distinctive about *de se* attitudes and their relationship to action. I return to this point below, but for the moment, let us proceed with the assumption that what it is for Betty to have B is for Betty to have belief (i) on the above list, the *you*-belief.

I will also assume that for Betty to have D is for her to have a desire she could report by saying, *I want the bear to leave*. So we assume that Betty has attitudes B and D:

Betty's attitudes

If you curl up into a ball, the bear will leave. B

I want the bear to leave. D

Note that here we've described B and D via the sentences *Betty* would use to express and report them. We introduced B and D above by describing them via the sentences that *Al* would use to express and report them.

Now recall our generalization ($\star$), the generalization we used to arrive at the prediction that, if all else is equal, Al's attitudes will motivate him to roll up in a ball:

($\star$) Necessarily, for all individuals y, if y has B and D, then, if all else is equal, y's having B and D will motivate y to roll up in a ball.

I take it that the expanded doctrine is committed to ($\star$). For we were able to predict, based on the fact that Al has attitudes B and D that if all else is equal, Al's having B and D would motivate him to roll up in a ball. According to thesis (IV), such predictions are standardly arrived at by inferring them from a particular fact about the agent's attitudes and a law-like generalization linking attitudes to actions. And given the nature of the particular fact (Al has attitudes B and D), what could that generalization be other than ($\star$)? So I assume that the expanded doctrine is committed to ($\star$), given the facts about the bear attack case.

But ($\star$) is false. For ($\star$) implies that in every world compatible with our description of the bear attack scenario, the following holds:

> If Betty has belief B and desire D, then if all else is equal, Betty's having B and D will motivate her to roll up in a ball.

But this is implausible. For given what it is for Betty to have B and D, the above claim is equivalent to the following:

> If Betty has a belief she could express to Al by saying, *If you roll up in a ball, the bear will leave*, and Betty wants the bear to leave, then if all else is equal, Betty's having this belief and this deisre will motivate her to roll up in a ball.

But it is easy to imagine the bear attack scenario in such a way that Betty has this pattern of attitudes, all else is equal, but in which Betty's having these attitudes does not motivate her to roll up in a ball. Indeed, in any normal version of the bear attack scenario, Betty's having this pattern of attitudes will not motivate her to behave in that way. Why would *she* roll up in a ball simply because she thinks that if *Al* rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave? That would be bizarre given that she knows that she is not Al. Since the expanded doctrine is committed to ($\star$), and since ($\star$) is false, the expanded doctrine is likewise false.

Before moving on, let me return to the assumption I made earlier about what it is for Betty to have belief B. I assumed above that for Betty to have B is for Betty to have a belief that she could express by saying to Al, *If you roll up in a ball, the bear will leave*. But, as I noted above, the expanded doctrine *per se* isn't committed to that; it is only committed to the claim that what it is for Betty to have B is for Betty to have a belief that is true iff: if Al rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave. And, as I noted above, there are many beliefs like that:

(i) *If **you** roll up in a ball, the bear will leave.* (speaking to Al)

(ii) *If **Al** rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave.*

(iii) *If **the actual man in the red hat** rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave.*

... ...

But although I was assuming that what it is for Betty to have B is for her to have the first of these beliefs, the foregoing argument against the expanded doctrine doesn't actually depend on that assumption. To see this, pick any belief on this list—pick any belief that Betty could have that is true iff: if Al rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave. If you combine the fact that Betty has *that* belief with the fact that Betty wants the bear to leave, we'll run into the same problem. For that pattern of attitudes would not normally motivate Betty to roll up in a ball, and so we will still have our counterexample to ($\star$). Betty's believing that *if Al rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave* will not, in conjunction with her desire that the bear leave, motivate her to roll up in a ball. Betty's believing that *if the actual*

man in the red hat rolls up in ball, the bear will leave will not, in conjunction with her desire, motivate her to roll up in a ball. And so on and so forth.[11]

So our argument against the expanded doctrine does not depend on any highly specific assumption about what it is for Betty to have belief *B*. It relies only on the assumption that for Betty to have *B* is for Betty to have a belief that is is true iff: if Al rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave. As I said, this fact about our argument turns out to be quite important, as we shall see below.

7 Is the problem specific to the *de se*?

My argument against the expanded doctrine relied on claims about Al's *de se* belief that if he rolled up in a ball, the bear would leave. But is the *de se*-ness of his belief essential to this argument? Could the same problem be raised without appealing to a *de se* attitude at all? Let us approach these issues by imagining a dispute between two characters: the *de se skeptic* thinks that essentially the same problem can be raised without appealing to *de se* attitudes; the *de se exceptionalist* denies this. The *de se* exceptionalist thinks the *de se*-ness of Al's belief essential to the role it plays in the above argument.

It is not straightforward to argue for the skeptical claim that essentially the same problem can be raised without appealing to *de se* attitudes. This is because it is difficult to come up with an uncontroversial case in which an agent's action is explained solely by her *de dicto* attitudes (this is connected to the issues discussed in Section 2). So we shall have to proceed somewhat indirectly.

Let us imagine that the dispute between the skeptic and the exceptionalist plays out as follows. In response to the above problem, the *de se* exceptionalist proposes an alternative theory, which I shall call the *revised theory*. According to the exceptionalist, the revised theory is the minimal way of revising the expanded doctrine so that it avoids the problem posed by *de se* attitudes, the problem revealed by the Al-Betty case. The skeptic then tries to argue that she can run essentially the same argument against the revised theory that we ran above against the expanded doctrine. If the skeptic is right about this, then the exceptionalist should concede that the problem raised by the Al-Betty case was not specific to the *de se* after all. For by her own lights, the revised theory solves whatever problem in this vicinity is raised by *de se* attitudes *per se*. So if the revised theory faces essentially the same problem, it must be *de dicto* attitudes that are causing the trouble this time. And in that case, the *general* problem here is presumably not specific to the *de se*.

The exceptionalist's revised theory consists of all the theses of the expanded doctrine, save for thesis (II), the claim that the contents of attitudes are absolute. In place of thesis (II), it opts for the following:

[11] Recall our stipulation that, in the bear attack case, Betty is not suffering from any form of identity confusion. So she knows that she is not Al, she knows that she is not the actual man in the red hat, etc..

> Thesis (II′): The contents of *de dicto* attitudes are *absolute*, but the contents of *de se* attitudes are *relative*, things that vary in truth value across individuals.

The revised theory is thus closely related to the *property view* of attitudes, the view according to which the content of an attitude is a *property* or a *relative proposition* (Loar, 1976; Lewis, 1979; Chisholm, 1981).[12] Take Al's *de se* belief that he is being chased by a bear. The content of this belief, according to the revised theory, is the property of being chased by a bear. To believe this property is to have a belief that one could express by saying, *I am being chased by a bear*.

If we say that a property is *true at an individual* just in case the individual has the property, then we can say that properties are things that (potentially) vary in truth value across individuals. The property of being chased by a bear is true for some people (those being chased by a bear), false for others (those not being chased). Of course, not *all* properties have this feature which means that the contents of *de dicto* attitudes may be identified with properties that do not vary in truth value across individuals. For example, take Al's *de dicto* desire that the bear leave. The content of this desire may be identified with the property of being an x such that the bear leaves. This property is absolute: if Al has it, then so does Betty, and so does everyone else. Properties like this do not vary in truth value over individuals.

Here is how the revised theory avoids the problem for the expanded doctrine discussed above. The problem took the form of a *reductio*, where one of the premises of the *reductio* was the claim that what it is for Betty to have belief B is for her to have a belief that is true iff: if Al rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave. The revised theory blocks the *reductio* by rejecting this premise, for this premise is false according to the revised theory.

Belief B is, by definition, the belief Al can express by saying, *If I roll up in a ball, the bear will leave*. According to the revised theory, the content of B is the property p of being an x such that if x rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave. For an agent x to believe this property is for x to have a belief she could express by saying, *If I roll up in a ball, the bear will leave*. Given Thesis (V) (shareability), Betty can believe p too, and so can have belief B. But what it is for Betty to have belief B is for her to believe that if *she* rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave. In that case, if we suppose that Betty has belief B and desire D, it is not at all implausible to think that, if all else is equal, that belief and desire will motivate her to roll up in a ball. Thus, the argument to the effect that ($\star$) is false is blocked. So the fact that the revised theory is committed to ($\star$) is no knock against it.

Note that, according to the revised theory, *belief types* cannot be said to be true or false *simpliciter*. To see this, suppose otherwise, and consider the property of believing q, where q is the property of being chased by a bear. Suppose I believe q, and I am being chased by a bear. Suppose you believe q, and you are not being chased by a bear. Let B^* be the property of believing q. Is B^* true or

[12] See also Lewis (1983a, 1986). Unlike Lewis, I continue to use the term *proposition* interchangeably with *content*. So according to the revised theory, propositions are properties.

false? Well, I believe that I am being chased by a bear, and I am being chased by a bear. So my belief is true. If "my belief" picks out B^*, then B^* is true. But you believed that you are being chased by a bear, but you are not being chased by a bear. So your belief is false. If "your belief" picks out B^*, then B^* is false, and so not true. Contradiction.

What has gone wrong? According to the expanded doctrine, a belief type is true iff its content is true. This claim makes sense in the context of the expanded doctrine since contents, according to that doctrine, are absolute, true or false *simpliciter*. But that claim no longer make sense in the context of the revised theory since the revised theory holds that contents are *relative*, true or false *relative to individuals*. Since q, the property of being chased by a bear, is true for me, the belief type B^* is true for me. Since q is false for you, B^* is false for you. The contradiction is avoided by relativizing the truth values of belief types.

Of course, we should still like to make sense of the idea that 'my belief' is true and 'your belief' is not. According to the revised theory, we can make sense of this by thinking of these descriptions as picking out *belief tokens* rather than *belief types*. What is a belief token? Consider the token *event* of my believing that I'm being chased by a bear, my believing q. We can identify token beliefs with token events of this sort. We might further identify token events like this with a pair consisting of a believer and a belief type, e.g. $\langle$DN, the property of believing $q\rangle$.[13] And we could say that a token belief $\langle x$, the property of believing $p\rangle$ is true iff x has p. Thus, in our example above, my token belief is true and your token belief is false, even though their content is the same. For that content is true for me (I have property q), but false for you (you lack property q).

So the exceptionalist claims, quite plausibly, that the revised theory solves the problem posed by *de se* attitudes, the problem revealed by the Al-Betty case. (This is not, of course, to say that the revised theory is *true*, only that if it is false, it is not because of *this* problem.) Thus, if the skeptic could show that *de dicto* attitudes pose essentially the same problem for the revised theory that *de se* attitudes posed for the expanded doctrine, that would seem to show that the underlying problem here is not specific to the *de se*. Let's consider the prospects of such an argument

Start by again imagining two agents, Carl and Diane. Carl has the following attitudes:

<u>Carl's attitudes</u>

Mark Twain is buried in Elmira. B'

I want to visit Mark Twain's grave. D'

As before, we pick out Carl's attitudes via the sentences he would use to express or report them.

Now according to the revised theory, Diane can have belief B' and desire D'. That Diane can have belief B' follows from theses (I) and (V) of the revised

[13] If we were attending to temporal matters, we would include times in our token beliefs. See Kim (1976) for a more general theory of token events along these lines.

theory. From thesis (I), it follows that there is a proposition p' such that one has belief B' just in case one believes p'. From thesis (V)—the shareability of propositions—it follows that Diane can believe p' (assume Diane satisfies the requisite acquaintance and concept-possession requirements). And from that it follows that she can have belief B'. A parallel argument shows that Diane can have desire D'.

But what is it for Diane to have belief B' and desire D'? Start with the latter. Desire D' is a *de se* desire. Thus, its content is a property—presumably it is the property of visiting Mark Twain's grave. What it is for an agent x to have D' is for x to have a desire that x could report by saying, *I want to visit Mark Twain's grave.* Thus, what it is for Diane to have D' is for her to have a desire that she could report by saying, *I want to visit Mark Twain's grave.*

Belief B', on the other hand, is a *de dicto* attitude, and so, according to the revised theory, its content is absolute. In that case, it makes sense to treat the belief type B' as true or false *simpliciter*, and not merely true or false relative to an individual. Given that B' is the belief Carl could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*, B' is presumably true iff Mark Twain is buried in Elmira. So, according to the revised theory, what it is for Diane to have B' is for her to have a belief that is true iff Mark Twain is buried in Elmira.

But, as before, knowing the conditions under which belief B' is true doesn't tell us exactly what it is for Diane to have belief B'. For there are many beliefs that Diane could have that are true iff Mark Twain is buried in Elmira:

(i′) ***Samuel Clemens*** *is buried in Elmira.*

(ii′) ***Mark Twain*** *is buried in Elmira.*

(iii′) ***The actual author of*** **Huckleberry Finn** *is buried in Elmira.*

... ...

Here we pick out the relevant beliefs via the sentences Diane could use to express those beliefs, were she to have them. Note that, given thesis (III) (fine-grainedness), these are all distinct beliefs, since Diane could have one without having the others.

So it is consistent with the revised theory that what it is for Diane to have B' is for her to have belief (i′) on the above list, a belief she could express by saying, *Samuel Clemens is buried in Elmira*. For this belief has the appropriate truth-conditions: it is true iff Mark Twain is buried in Elmira. So we may assume that this is what it is for Diane have B'. (We shall question the legitimacy of this assumption below, but let us carry on with it for the moment.)

Thus, Diane has the following attitudes:

<u>Diane's attitudes</u>

Samuel Clemens is buried in Elmira. B'

I want to visit Mark Twain's grave. D'

Here we pick out the attitudes via the sentences *Diane* would use to express or report them.

Let's return to Carl. What will Carl be motivated to do, given what we've said about his beliefs and desires? Well, if all else is equal, he will be motivated to visit Elmira. For Carl believes that Mark Twain is buried in Elmira, and he wants to visit Mark Twain's grave. Now, how did we arrive at that prediction? Given Thesis (IV), we must have inferred it from the particular claim that Carl has belief B' and desire D', together with the following generalization (†):

(†) Necessarily, for all y, if y has belief B' and desire D', then if all else is equal, y's having B' and D' will motivate y to visit Elmira.

I take it that, given Thesis (IV) and the facts of the case, the revised theory is committed to (†).

But (†) is false. For (†) implies that in any possible situation in which Diane has belief B' and desire D', and in which all else is equal, Diane's having those attitudes will motivate her to visit Elmira. But this is false. To see this, just imagine a scenario in which Diane has the following attitudes:

Samuel Clemens is buried in Elmira. B'

I want to visit Mark Twain's grave. D'

Mark Twain is buried in Poughkeepsie.

If the case is a normal one, having these attitudes will motivate Diane to visit Poughkeepsie, not Elmira. If this is right, then (†) is false. Since the revised theory is committed to (†), the revised theory is false.

Furthermore, since Carl's *de dicto* belief poses essentially the same problem for the revised theory that Al's *de se* belief posed for the expanded doctrine, it seems the general problem here is not specific to the *de se*.

That is the skeptic's argument. I think this argument fails, and it will be instructive to see just where it fails. It will also be instructive to see why our earlier argument against the expanded doctrine *does not fail* in the same way.

Where does this argument against the revised theory go wrong? The problem is with what the argument assumes about what it is for Diane to have belief B'. Belief B', recall, was introduced as a belief that Carl could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*. The argument assumes that what it is for Diane to have B' is for her to have a belief she could express by saying, *Samuel Clemens is buried in Elmira*. It is true that this assumption appears, at least as first glance, to be *consistent* with the revised theory, but it is hardly entailed by the revised theory. What the revised theory is committed to is the claim that there is a belief (n') on the following list such that for Diane to have belief B' is for her to belief (n'):

(i') ***Samuel Clemens*** *is buried in Elmira.*

(ii') ***Mark Twain*** *is buried in Elmira.*

(iii′) ***The actual author of*** **Huckleberry Finn** *is buried in Elmira.*

... ...

So it is open to the advocate of the revised theory to say that what it is for Diane to have B' is for her to belief (ii)′, the belief she could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*. And this move blocks the argument against the revised theory.

For together with (†), these claims imply that having belief B' and desire D' will motivate Diane to visit Elmira, all else being equal. But this consequence is not implausible. For on this version of the revised theory, what it is for Diane to have B' and D' is for her to believe that Mark Twain is buried in Elmira, and to desire to see Mark Twain's grave. It is not at all implausible to suppose that that pattern of attitudes will motivate Diane to visit Elmira, all else being equal. So the defender of the revised theory has a fairly straightforward reply to this argument.

In contrast—and this is important—the defender of the expanded doctrine has no parallel reply to our earlier argument against that view. When we initially presented that argument, we assumed that what it was for Betty to have belief B is for her to have a belief she could express by uttering sentence (i) on the following list (repeated from above):

(i) *If* ***you*** *roll up in a ball, the bear will leave.* (speaking to Al)

(ii) *If* ***Al*** *rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave.*

(iii) *If* ***the actual man in the red hat*** *rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave.*

... ...

We then noted that if this is what it is for Betty to have belief B, then Betty's having belief B and desire D will not motivate her to roll up in a ball, if all else is equal. And this contradicts (⋆), a claim to which the expanded doctrine is committed.

But unlike the skeptic's argument against the revised theory, one cannot defeat *this* argument by simply making an alternative assumption about what it is for Betty to have belief B. For the expanded doctrine is committed to the claim that there is a belief (n) on the above list such that what it is for Betty to have belief B is for her to have belief (n). But as we noted before, there is simply no belief (n) on the above list such that Betty's having belief (n) will combine with desire D to motivate her to roll up in ball, if all else is equal.

8 Truth and motivation

Thus, the skeptic's attempt to show that the problem facing the expanded doctrine isn't specific to the *de se* fails. The problem really does seem to reveal a difference between *de se* and *de dicto* attitudes. Let us try to zero in on what that difference consists in.

It will help to introduce some terminology at this point. Let us say that a pair of token beliefs b, b' are *truth-conditionally equivalent* just in case, necessarily, b is true iff b' is true. And let us say that a pair of token beliefs b, b' are *motivationally equivalent* just in case:

> necessarily, for any attitude type A, action ϕ, and agents x and x':
>
> x's having b and A will motivate x to perform ϕ (all else being equal) iff x''s having b' and A will motivate x' to perform ϕ (all else being equal).

Let b_1 be Al's token *de se* belief that he could express by saying, *If I roll up in a ball, the bear will leave*. If all else is equal, then Al's having belief b_1 and desire D will motivate him to roll up in a ball. Let b_2 be Betty's token belief that she could express by saying to Al, *If you curl up in a ball, the bear will leave*. Note that Betty's having belief b_2 and desire D will *not* motivate her to roll up in a ball, if all else is equal. Thus, although b_1 and b_2 are *truth-conditionally equivalent*—both are true iff: if Al rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave—they are *motivationally distinct*. Beliefs b_1 and b_2 differ in their capacity for motivating action in conjunction with other attitudes.

What's interesting is that the point generalizes beyond Betty's belief b_2. To see this, take *any* token belief b^* that *anyone distinct from Al* could possess. If b^* is truth-conditionally equivalent with Al's token belief b_1, b^* will not be motivationally equivalent to b_1. To see this, let x be any agent distinct from Al, and let b^* be any token belief that x could possess that is truth-conditionally equivalent to b_1. Then b^* will be a token belief that, were he to have it, x could express by uttering one of the sentences on the following list:

(i) *If **you** roll up in a ball, the bear will leave.* (speaking to Al)

(ii) *If **Al** rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave.*

(iii) *If **the actual man in the red hat** rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave.*

... ...

But no token belief (n) on that list is such that x's having token belief (n) and desire D will motivate x to roll up in a ball, if all else is equal. Thus, b^* is motivationally distinct from b_1. Since this holds for an arbitrary token belief that could be possessed by someone distinct from Al, it holds for them all. There is no token belief that someone distinct from Al could possess which is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to Al's token *de se* belief.

Contrast this with the *de dicto* case. Let b'_1 be Carl's token *de dicto* belief that he could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*. In this case, it does seem plausible to suppose that there is a token belief b'_2 that someone other than Carl could have that is both both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to Carl's token belief b'_1. Just take b'_2 to be the token belief Diane could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*. Just as having b'_1 and

desire D' will motivate Carl to visit Elmira (all else being equal), having b'_2 and D' would likewise motivate Diane to visit Elmira (all else being equal). And b'_1 and b'_2 have the same truth-conditions: both are true just in case Mark Twain is buried in Elmira. So there is a token belief that someone distinct from Carl could possess which is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to Carl's token *de dicto* belief.

This feature of Carl's token *de dicto* belief seems to be a general feature of *de dicto* beliefs. It seems that for any token *de dicto* belief b held by agent x, we can find a token belief that someone x' distinct from x can possess which is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to b. Here's a recipe that will work, at least for token beliefs that can be expressed in a natural language. Find a sentence S that x could use to express her token belief b. The token belief b' that x' can express by uttering S is very likely to be both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to b. For example: take Carl's token belief that he could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*. We found a token belief that Diane could possess which is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to this belief simply by considering the token belief that (where she to have it) Diane could express by saying, *Mark Twain is buried in Elmira*.

So we may hypothesize the following difference between *de se* attitudes and *de dicto* attitudes. For a great many ordinary token *de se* beliefs b, if x is the holder of b, there is no token belief b' that someone other than x can possess that is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to b. But for *all de dicto* beliefs b, if x is the holder of b, then there will be a token belief b' that someone other than x can possess that is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to b. Although the arguments of this chapter could not be said to have established this hypothesis, they have, I hope, rendered it plausible. And the hypothesis itself may serve as a useful guide for further inquiry into the special connection between action and *de se* attitudes.

9 Conclusion

One way a pair of token beliefs can be similar is in respect of their truth-conditions. Another way a pair of token beliefs can be similar is in respect of their capacity to motivate action in conjunction with other attitudes. What *de se* attitudes reveal is that these respects of similarity come apart in a particular way. As we saw, no token belief (held by someone distinct from Al) is both truth-conditionally and motivationally equivalent to Al's token *de se* belief. And this would seem to hold not just for Al's token *de se* belief, but for many other ordinary *de se* beliefs.

The practice of individuating beliefs via propositions permits us to capture certain similarities between token beliefs. On the orthodox view, propositions have their truth-values absolutely. This means that if a pair of token beliefs are of the same type, then they have the same truth-conditions. But given the shareability of propositions, this has the consequence that certain token *de se* beliefs b are treated as type-equivalent to certain token *de dicto* beliefs b', even

though b and b' have very different motivational profiles. And this, in turn, leads to difficulties in formulating law-like generalizations that link attitudes to actions, as we have seen.

Two responses to this situation dominate the literature.

One response—most closely associated with Lewis—is that of the "revised theory" discussed above. This denies the traditional assumption that if a pair of token beliefs are of the same type, then they have the same truth-conditions. Beliefs are still individuated by contents, but contents are no longer absolute propositions. Instead, contents are properties or relative propositions, things that vary in truth value across individuals. The principal advantage of this move, as I see it, is that it allows us to preserve Thesis (IV), the idea that law-like generalizations linking attitudes and actions have a central role to play in our practice of predicting and explaining action. For example, on this approach our generalization ($\star$) would be equivalent to the following plausible-sounding generalization:

> Necessarily, for all individuals y, if y believes *de se* that if he rolls up in a ball, the bear will leave, and y wants the bear to leave, then, if all else is equal, y's having these attitudes will motivate y to roll up in a ball.

A second response—most closely associated with Perry—maintains the traditional assumption that propositions are absolute. As I understand Perry's view, a belief type is a property that consists in believing an absolute proposition. So if a pair of token beliefs are type equivalent, then they have the same truth-conditions. Perry then introduces another kind of psychological property to play the role traditionally thought to be played by attitudes in the explanation and prediction of action. Let us call such properties *attitudes**, *beliefs**, etc.. Like Lewis's beliefs, Perry's beliefs* are individuated by properties (or what Perry variously calls *senses* or *relativized propositions*), and so do not have absolute truth-conditions. It is beliefs*, rather than beliefs, that figure in the explanation of action. Although Perry doesn't put the point this way, we might say that folk-psychological generalizations link attitudes*, rather than attitudes, to actions. Perry (1977) puts the point in Fregean terminology:

> We use senses [i.e. properties] to individuate psychological states, in explaining and predicting action. It is the sense entertained and not the thought [i.e. absolute proposition] apprehended that is tied to human action. When you and I entertain the sense of "A bear is about to attack me," we behave similarly. We both roll up in a ball and try to be as still as possible. Different thoughts apprehended, same sense entertained, same behavior. When you and I both apprehend the thought that I am about to be attacked by a bear, we behave differently. I roll up in a ball, you run to get help. Same thought apprehended, different sense entertained, different behavior. (Perry, 1977, 23)

Both Lewis and Perry can be seen as agreeing that certain psychological properties have a central role to play in the explanation and prediction of action. Furthermore, both agree that the psychological properties in question do not consist in standing in a relation to an absolute proposition. Lewis takes the psychological properties in question to be *attitudes*, and so denies that attitudes are individuated by absolute propositions. Perry does not identify the psychological properties in question with ordinary attitudes—belief, desires, and the like. Instead, he identifies the psychological properties in question with what I called *attitudes** above. This leaves him free to maintain that beliefs and desires are individuated by absolute propositions. How to choose between these closely-related approaches is a question we must leave as a matter for future inquiry.[14]

Suggestions for further reading

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[14] A more comprehensive discussion would also consider the view—closely associated with Frege and his followers—that the contents of *de se* beliefs are *private*. On this approach, no one other than Al can believe the proposition that serves as the content of his *de se* belief that he is being chased by a bear. See Frege (1956), Evans (1981), Peacocke (1981), McDowell (1984), Forbes (1987), Heck (2002), Kripke (2008), Stanley (2011, Ch.3), and Ninan (2016) for further discussion.

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