
DON'T STOP THINKING ABOUT TOMORROW: ATTITUDES *DE SE* AND *DE MOTU*

BY

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Abstract: This paper argues that the classification of propositional attitudes into the *de re*, *de dicto*, and *de se* is incomplete. *De se* attitudes are widely agreed to be closely connected to *de re* attitudes. But there is a species of belief that is linked to agent-centered action in the way that *de se* beliefs are, but is also associated with entities, places, and especially times, *under a description*. These mark out a fourth kind. One way to think about what makes them distinctive is that, despite being ‘essentially indexical’ they can be retained across different contexts of evaluation without having diagonal content. The paper also discusses the connection between such beliefs and the kinds of utterances (like ‘Don’t put off for tomorrow what you can do today’) that are contested as examples of what David Kaplan called ‘monsters.’

Don't stop thinking about tomorrow
Don't stop, it'll soon be here
It'll be better than before
Yesterday's gone, yesterday's gone.

Christine McVie, Fleetwood Mac ‘Don’t Stop Thinking about Tomorrow.’
Song on *Rumours*, 1977

We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with *the fierce urgency of now*. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history there is such a thing as being too late. Procrastination is still the thief of time. Life often leaves us standing bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity. The ‘tide in the affairs of men’ does not remain at the flood;

it ebbs. We may cry out desperately for time to pause in her passage, but time is deaf to every plea and rushes on. Over the bleached bones and jumbled residue of numerous civilizations are written the pathetic words: 'Too late.'

Martin Luther King, Jr. Speech delivered April 4, 1967

1. *Introduction*

The phrases 'Don't stop thinking about tomorrow,' and 'The fierce urgency of now,' or, more precisely, the beliefs that they inspire, raise an interesting puzzle in the study of the perspectivity of representations. The puzzle can also be illustrated with the following joke:

Hans travels to Tibet to visit a spiritual guru. Upon his return home, Hans' friend Otto is eager to find out what Hans learned from the guru. 'What did he say?' Otto asks. 'He said 'enlightenment is now!'' Hans says. 'That's fascinating,' Otto says, 'when did he say it?'

The joke about the guru, after all, is that Otto mistakenly takes the guru to be identifying the time in question *de re* – he takes the guru to be expressing a *de re* propositional attitude. The joke, in other words, is that Otto thinks it is important to know what concrete particular moment the guru was referring to, so that he may know at what moment enlightenment occurred. But the guru is not singling out a particular moment. He is talking about whatever moment *happens* to be now. He is talking about whatever moment fits the description of 'now,' when the hearer contemplates the advice. And it would be to exhibit the same confusion that Otto is exhibiting if someone wanted to know when, exactly, Martin Luther King Jr., pronounced that *now* had a fierce urgency. (Indeed he also used that same phrase in his famous 'I have a dream' speech delivered 4 years earlier.) But as we will see, Otto's confusion is not straightforwardly a confusion between a *de re* and a *de dicto* belief being expressed by the guru. Nor would be the confusion of a person who thought that King's pronouncement was indexed to April 4, 1967.

That's because the attitudes that both King and the guru are urging their listeners to take up seem to have components we normally associate with '*de se*' attitudes. Equivalently, the guru's belief seems to have what John Perry (1979) called 'essential indexicality.' The King speech draws our attention even more starkly to a feature widely accepted to be central to *de se* beliefs: they are *centered* or *linked to agent-centered action* in a way that *de se* and Perry-type attitudes are generally uniquely thought to be. King makes this feature stark by referring to the now's 'urgency.' Only when beliefs about a moment in time share a feature with *de se* beliefs do they create this *urgency to act* that Perry noted in some of his examples, and which is

clearly being encouraged in King's speech. But the attitude that King is urging his listeners to have about themselves and the now is also not straight-forwardly *de se*. It has a character that combines features of the *de se* and the *de dicto*. In what follows, I will argue that the classification of propositional attitudes into the *de re*, the *de dicto* and the *de se* is incomplete. We ought to add a fourth member to this classification. For reasons that will become clear as we go, I suggest we call these attitudes *de motu*. We will see this in more detail as we go, but one clear sign that *de motu* beliefs have a different kind of content from ordinary *de se* beliefs is to observe what happens to their truth conditions as they are retained over time. A *de se* belief like 'The faculty meeting is today, not tomorrow'¹ cannot persist and remain true. But a *de motu* belief like 'Today is the best day for me to quit drinking, not tomorrow,' can be retained and continue to be true tomorrow.

It should also become clear as we go that the existence of this fourth class of propositional attitudes is entirely unsurprising, once we look at the logical relations that obtain between the other three. That is because *de se* attitudes are a species of *de re* attitudes with the special property of being linked to agent-centered action.² But there was never any reason to suppose that being linked to agent-centered action was a feature that only *de re*, as opposed to *de dicto*, attitudes could have. Indeed, whether a propositional attitude is linked to agent-centered action or not is completely independent of whether, loosely speaking, it is about an object itself or an object under a description. And if propositional attitudes are divided along two axes, then there should be four, rather than three, species.³

Two warnings before we proceed.

- 1 There is a literature in the philosophy of language on linguistic expressions like "Never put off for tomorrow what you can do today" and even (said on an answering machine) "I am not here right now."

This literature is *relevant* to our present topic, but it does not directly address it. King is offering us advice, and once we take it, our attitudes shift. We experience the fierce urgency of now. Now is urgent to us. More importantly, King's language is poetic. Our understanding of what it means to say that now is urgent to us comes from the context of King's speech, not from our semantic competence with the sentence 'now is urgent to us.' But as listeners to King's speech, we can nevertheless identify what would be involved in following his advice. What we are interested in here is the thought we have when we think that King's advice is good. This is quite different, as we will see, from having semantic competence in understanding sentences like 'I am not here right now.' As we will see, the literature on 'monsters' and 'displaced assertion' is related to what we discuss here, but does not *compete* with the story I want to tell.

- 2 There is some skepticism, in the literature, on the philosophical significance of *de se*, or agent-centered, propositional attitudes. Cappelen and Dever (2014), for example, argue that there is no special first-personal or *de se* mode of thought at all and that all appearances of it can be explained away.

Before we go on, then, let us distinguish between these classes of phenomena, and what goes into our explanatory theories of those phenomena. This paper is about identifying the phenomena – *insofar* as we distinguish between the *de se*, the *de re*, and the *de dicto*, we must also distinguish a fourth class of phenomena, the one I will call the *de motu*. People who hope to explain the *de se* away must, then, be expected to try to explain the *de motu* away. And people who say that the *de se* is a distinct kind of psychological attitude can presumably be expected to want to say that about the *de motu*. Similarly, people like Mark Schroeder (n.d.), who want to say that *de se* thought is real and distinct but want to give a highly deflationary characterization of what that amounts to, can be expected to want to try to do that with the phenomena I describe here, too. If the *phenomenon* of the *de se* is so important, no matter what the true theory of it is, the phenomenon that I am identifying is important too, regardless of what one's theory of the *de se* is. In what follows, I adopt some relatively conventional theoretical claims of these sorts for the sake of exposition, but these are not essential to the paper. People who favor other theories of the *de se* should still take the phenomena I identify to be important.

2. *Agent-centered action*

So what is the phenomenon in question? All of the concepts mentioned above: the concept of a *de se* attitude, of *essential indexicality*, of a belief creating *urgency*, and of a belief being *linked to agent-centered action*, are integrally connected. The idea can be illustrated with a simple example: If John believes that he is standing on thin ice, there are two thoughts he might be having. He might believe that the person who happens to be himself has that property, (not realizing, perhaps, that he himself is that person), or he might believe: 'I am standing on thin ice.' In the first case, he has a(n ordinary) *de re* attitude, and in the second, a *de se* one. One way of expressing the content of *de se* propositions is to say that the content of the sentence is best expressed as that John! thinks he has the property of standing on thin ice; that he! does. The second belief guides John's actions in a way that the first one does not. Only the second belief will lead him to carefully shuffle his feet towards the edge of the lake. Only the second belief creates urgency.

The point of the '!' after 'John' or 'he' is that it is an essential property of the thought that it is in some sense about the person who possesses the thought.⁴ Perry (1979) gives the following examples to illustrate this point. In the first example, Peter believes that the faculty meeting is Tuesday at noon. Come Tuesday at noon, he realizes that the faculty meeting is now. Because the second belief makes Peter act in a way that the first one did not, they are clearly not the same attitude, despite the fact that 'now' and 'Tuesday at noon' denote the same moment. In the second example, I believe that the yellow brick road leads to Oz. Then I come to realize that *this* road leads to Oz. This is a different belief than the first one, despite the fact that 'this road' and 'the yellow brick road' denote the same road. What all of Perry's examples, and all *de se* examples, have in common, is that they involve what Perry calls 'essential indexicals.' The first belief is not merely that the meeting will occur at the same time that I am having the thought. It is the belief that it will happen at the same time that I! am having the thought. And the second belief is not merely that the road in front of me is the yellow brick road. It is the thought the road in front of me! is the yellow brick road.

More recently, many, including Perry himself, have come to believe that indexicality is not what crucially identifies the relevant kind of propositional attitude. Perry, for example, believes that examples like 'Tarzan hungry' are *de se* beliefs that do not involve an indexical. What really seems to be the crucial feature of the kind of attitude that both Perry (1979) and David Lewis (1979) were identifying is that they are *linked to agent-centered action* in a special kind of way. 'The faculty meeting is now!' leads me to jump up out of my chair and go down the hall. 'This! road leads to Oz' leads me to walk down the road. 'I! am on thin ice' leads me to carefully work my way to shore. This also led Lewis to conclude that the semantics of such thoughts cannot just be about possible worlds, but that they must be about worlds *centered* around the thinker.

Dilip Ninan (2016, 2021) has a particularly apt way of explaining what it means to say that *de se* beliefs are linked to agent centered action. Consider that we normally subscribe to the five following theses regarding propositional attitudes.

- 1 Two place relation
- 2 Frege Constraint
- 3 Absoluteness
- 4 Agreement
- 5 Explanation

1. says that a propositional attitude is a two place relation between an agent and a content. For me to believe snow is white is for the relation of belief to obtain between me and the content of the belief that snow is white. 2. says

that the contents of beliefs, desires and the like are fine grained enough to accommodate Frege cases. I can believe Superman can fly without believing Clark Kent can fly. 3. says that propositions are either true or false simpliciter in possible worlds. The truth of a proposition is not relative to anything within a possible world. 4. says that agreement is a two-place relation between a group of individuals and a content. If you and I agree about some belief, namely, Superman, then we both token the same belief. A similar claim (with some irrelevant technical differences) can be mapped out for desires and the like. 5. says that (speaking very loosely) behaviors are explained by beliefs and desires.

We can see right away that a belief like 'I! am on thin ice' puts pressure on this set of theses. And so does 'Today is the best day for me to quit drinking.' You and I might agree with the content of 'I am on thin ice' and with the desire for me not to freeze to death, and yet those beliefs and desires explain actions on my part that are different than the actions they explain on your part. (I get down onto my hands and knees and slowly start inching my way to the edge of the lake; You run for help.) I can adopt your belief that 'Enlightenment is now (for me)' without myself believing that 'Enlightenment is now (for me).' You will smell the roses more and stop looking at your 401 k. I will buy roses for you and hide your 401 k papers.

We can say that beliefs and desires that put pressure on the five theses this way (without committing ourselves to which of the five we want to give up) are beliefs that are 'linked to agent centered action.'

The belief that Martin Luther King, Jr. is urging us to adopt in the speech – to believe 'there is a fierce urgency to now' – is similarly *linked to agent-centered action*, and its psycho-semantics is similarly centered around the thinker. The belief 'the faculty meeting is now!' imparts an urgency that 'the faculty meeting is now,' lacks. King's speech is trying to impart the same urgency, but to a different kind of 'now!'. King wants his listeners to *act*, and to act now!, in the same way that I want Peter to act if I tell him that the faculty meeting is now! The difference is that King want his listeners to take up the thought not centered around some 'now' picked out *de re*, but centered around the thinker *whenever he or she contemplates the thought*. The 'now' is picking out a moment under a description, not referentially. The same can be said of the belief that the guru wants to impart onto Hans. And indeed it is that very difference that drives the joke. The guru wants Hans to change the way his lives his life. He no longer wants Hans to be thinking about the performance of his 401 k account. He wants Hans to focus his attention on the now!, and to act in whatever ways one is inclined to act when one! is in the presence of enlightenment. He who believes that enlightenment is now! will behave differently than someone who merely believes that enlightenment is Tuesday, unless the second someone happens also to realize that today is Tuesday.⁵

3. *Combining elements of de se and de dicto attitudes*

We have seen that the kind of thought inspired by King's speech and the Guru are linked to agent-centered action. In this respect, they are like *de se* thoughts. But ordinary *de se* thoughts are widely regarded to be a species of *de re* attitudes, or to give rise to *de re* attitudes – they are about a thing qua thing, not about a thing under a description. McVie's thought in 'Don't stop thinking about tomorrow', however, seems to be about a thing under a description (being about whatever day happens to be after today), while also linked to agent-centered action.

McVie, we are sometimes told, wrote the song shortly after her divorce, when she came to realize she was living her life in a way that focused too much on the past. The song urges herself, and her listeners, to change their behavior. A website devoted to lyric interpretations says that the lyric means 'you need to count your blessings rather than dwell on the past.' So a person who believes 'I should not stop thinking about tomorrow!' will act differently than someone who merely believes 'I should not stop thinking about March 3rd' – even if today is March 2nd.

The guru joke makes the difference between ordinary *de se* beliefs and the ones we are discussing here especially clear. Otto's confusion has nothing to do with the agent-centeredness of the thought the guru wants him to take up. His confusion is precisely that he thinks the guru's advice was to take up a *de re* belief. His confusion is that he thinks the advice is to take up the attitude about a particular moment in the history of the world. But it is not. The guru is not urging Hans to have an attitude about some specific moment, and this is exactly Otto's confusion. We can make the same point about 'Don't stop thinking about tomorrow.' Let us suppose that it is July 6, 1977, and Christine McVie is having the thought that one should never stop thinking about tomorrow. As we have seen with the first example, this thought is not *de re*. She is not thinking: one should never stop thinking about July 7, 1977. And disambiguating whether she is having that thought in a centered way – one that is linked to agent-centered action, does not solve the problem. It is simply not a *de re* thought, centered or otherwise. It seems, relevantly, to be a *de dicto* one.

What this shows is that in as much as *de se* beliefs are a species of *de re* beliefs, *de motu* beliefs are a species of *de dicto* beliefs. But they are *de dicto* belief with a link to agent-centered action. And so the four kinds of attitudes make a nice box. *De se* attitudes are a kind of essentially indexical variant on attitudes *de re*, and *de motus* are a kind of essentially indexical variation on *de dictos*. Indeed, one might even think that this is an argument for the existence of *de motu* attitudes. Without them, there is an obvious lacuna in the box. Why, a priori, should we think that *de re* attitudes can come in the Perry flavor and not *de dicto* attitudes?

In fact, seen this way, it should not be terribly surprising that the literature has been missing a species of propositional attitude. Once we realize that there are two independent characteristics that propositional attitudes display: (1) whether they are about an object in itself or about an object under a description and (2) whether or not they are linked to agent-centered action, the surprising fact is only that we should not have been puzzled by the appearance of an odd number of species. The following chart makes the point clear:

| A propositional attitude | About an object in itself | Under a description |
|-------------------------------------|---------------------------|---------------------|
| Not linked to agent-centered action | de re | de dicto |
| Linked to agent-centered action | de se | de motu |

This helps us to resolve what might have seemed to be a *prima facie* puzzle. We have seen that the ‘now’ component of the belief ‘enlightenment is now!’ refers to different days when the belief occurs on different days; but we have also seen that it is the same belief being held continuously.

This has led some people to raise the following objection:

Objection: You say that McVie has a single belief that she retains throughout her life. But this cannot be true. If the belief were about a series of different days then it would not be a retained belief – it would be a series of different beliefs, differentiated by their different truth conditions.

Reply: This argument makes precisely the mistake of thinking that McVie’s belief picks out the day *de re*. After all, I can have the continuous belief that the president of the United States is powerful. And this can be a continuous, single belief even as ‘the president of the United States’ changes the person that it picks out. I can have that continuous belief so long as the belief is *de dicto*. Ordinary *de dicto* thoughts can shift their referent while continuing to be the same thought, and so can agent-centered ones. I can continue to have the belief that the now is urgent, even as ‘the now’ shifts its referent from moment to moment.

The thought that is expressed with the statement ‘Enlightenment is now!’ has, for its truth conditions, each moment at which the thought is contemplated, rather than the moment at which the sentence is spoken. The content of the belief is indexed to the moment to which the thought is meant to apply, and that index moves as the belief persists continuously through all the points in spacetime to which the thought applies. This is why I propose to call these kinds of thought, and indeed all propositional attitudes of this kind, attitudes ‘*de motu*.’ I propose this name because, as far as I can tell, they all involve something that might be described as moving indexicals.

Here is a test that *de motu* beliefs should pass that can help us distinguish them from ordinary quantificational beliefs like ‘I should remember to drink water every time I think about it.’ (A belief my trainer, much like my guru,

might inspire me to have.) I can believe 'The present is more important than any other moment' and I can rationally desire to have that belief persist. I can believe 'Enlightenment is today, not tomorrow' and rationally desire for that belief to persist. But I cannot have (at least on its ordinary interpretation) the belief 'I should remember to drink water now but not at any other moment' and rationally desire to have that belief persist.

Brian Rabern (2021) mentions the following line from *Through the Looking Glass*: 'The rule is, jam tomorrow and jam yesterday – but never jam today.' 'It must come sometimes to 'jam today', Alice objected.⁶ Here, Alice seems to have the sensible view, because the White Queen seems to be saying something ordinary and quantificational, which is incoherent – Just as the rule 'Drink water now but not yesterday or tomorrow' is incoherent. But its noteworthy that the incoherent line from Carroll can be turned into a *de motu* expression of advice:

'Healthy diet tomorrow but not today' is a bad attitude to adopt if you want to make progress toward your weight loss goal.

4. *Leaving the basic de se framework intact*

In this section, I want to make clear the ways in which the main contribution of this paper is independent of various debates about the nature of *de se* beliefs. Consider, first, the claim that I have been making that *de se* beliefs are a species of the *de re*. Not everyone endorses this claim. But I think people should agree that *de se* thoughts entail corresponding *de re* thoughts. At least, that is what Perry and Lewis are both committed to, and I cannot see how to reject it. But Lewis's descriptivist account of *de re* thought in 'Attitudes *de dicto* and *de se*' is designed to get this out of the claim that all attitudes are fundamentally *de se*, rather than out of the claim that *de se* attitudes are just a special case of *de re* attitudes. So, even though it should be clear above that I am sympathetic to the claim that *de se* beliefs are a species of *de re* beliefs, I also want to make clear that this is not essential to my argument here. It suffices for the purposes of this paper to characterize the relationship between the *de se* and the *de re* more minimally, in terms of the entailment rather than in terms of genus/species.

As I made clear in the introduction, I think the contribution of this paper is also independent of how philosophically 'thick' one's conception of the *de se* is. No matter how inflationary, deflationary, or even eliminativist one would like to be about the *de se*, there is still, it is widely agreed, a phenomenon here. And if there is one phenomenon here, then, I argue, there are in fact two: the *de se* and the *de motu*. And any deflationism or eliminativism about the *de se* owes, if I am right, a deflation or elimination of the *de motu* as well.

Finally, to see how *de motu* beliefs put no real pressure on the general frameworks (either Lewisian or Perry-ite) of our understanding of the *de se*, it is worth looking at each one in turn.

First let us make the following point:

A key difference between ‘The faculty meeting is now!’ and ‘Enlightenment is now!’ is that the latter expresses a mirror image of what Frege and Evans (1985) called ‘continuous belief’ or what some called ‘retained belief.’ Such a belief state is able to stay constant as the belief-content changes precisely as a result of the combination of continuous belief and essential indexicality.

In fact, there is a whole literature on so-called continuous beliefs, beginning with Frege:

If someone wants to say the same today as he expressed yesterday using the word ‘today’, he must replace this word with ‘yesterday’. Although the thought is the same, its verbal expression must be different in order that the change of sense which would otherwise be affected by the differing times of utterance may be canceled out. (Frege 1956, p. 296)

A *de motu* belief is when someone wants to express the same thought today as she expressed yesterday, but wants to violate Frege’s dictum. She wants to say ‘Enlightenment is today’ both on Thursday and on Friday. In fact, she even wants to say ‘Enlightenment is today, not tomorrow’ on both Thursday and Friday and have it be true both days.

Now let us return to Lewis and Perry’s frameworks.

For Lewisians, what marks off (interestingly) *de se* attitudes as special is that they distinguish between positions within a world - they draw a line through logical space that does not just cut at the boundaries between worlds. To have the *de se* belief at time *t* that ‘enlightenment (for me) is now’ is to locate oneself at a time *t* such that enlightenment is at *t*. So the content would be: $\{(w,t): \text{enlightenment is at } t \text{ in } w\}$. But a *de se* belief like that will not normally stay true over time if it is retained. For example, the following two *de se* beliefs cannot both be retained and remain true: ‘The faculty meeting is today’ and ‘The faculty meeting is not tomorrow.’ If those two beliefs are true, then ipso facto at least the first one will be false tomorrow if it is retained. This is why Lewis is a relativist⁷ about the truth value of *de se* propositions. But a *de motu* belief is centered in the same way a Lewisian belief is, but we expect it to be retained and to stay true over time under different circumstances. It is incoherent to hold the two *de se* beliefs above and retain them. But the *de motu* beliefs ‘The present is more important (to me) than any other moment’ and ‘The moment that will be 24 h from now is not more important (to me) than any other moment’ *can* both be retained for 24 h and remain true. Oddly, *de motu* propositions in the Lewisian framework are *both* centered and non-relativistic.

(Or more precisely, they are non-relativistic with respect to one indexical aspect. So ‘Enlightenment is now’ is temporally non-relativistic despite having a temporal indexical. ‘I’m a nomad, here! is where I make my home’ might inspire a belief that is spatially non-relativistic despite having a spatial indexical. ‘My home is here, not there’ could express a belief that is retained even as I travel from here to where I pointed. But of course they are all relativistic with respect to the agent who tokens them. That’s what makes them linked to agent-centered action. ‘Here is where I make my home’ is true no matter where I token it, but it’s not necessarily true when you token it.)

For Perry-ites, there are two important components of believers’ overall doxastic states that it’s important to keep track of: there’s what they believe, and there’s the belief-states that they are in, in virtue of which (together with their circumstances) they believe the things they do. For Perry, it is belief states that map possible worlds onto truth values, not beliefs tout court. A puzzle for Perry-ites is to say what happens in communication when the content of a *de se* belief is communicated from one person to another. A standard answer, first associated with Stalnaker, is that the content of such a belief is the diagonal proposition (see Weber 2016, and the references therein, and Brown 2016). The same should be said of what’s retained if I retain the contents of the ordinary *de se* (or *de nunc*) belief ‘The faculty meeting is now.’ The content that is communicated when I said ‘The faculty meeting is today’ is a function from belief, circumstance of evaluation, and possible worlds to truth values that looks something like this:

BELIEF CONTENT is true iff utterance happened on day X and the faculty meeting is on day x.

| The proposition: the faculty meeting is today | Evaluated on Monday | On Tuesday |
|---|---------------------|------------|
| The meeting is Monday | T | F |
| The meeting is Tuesday | F | T |

But the content of the belief communicated by the guru can be both communicated and retained without being diagonal. One (extremely pedantic) way to understand the guru joke is that Otto is a Perry-ite (of the Stalnaker variety) who thinks the guru’s utterance has diagonal content. That’s why he wants to know when the guru uttered it. But the content of the belief the guru wants Hans and Otto to take up is not diagonal. It just looks like this:

| Enlightenment is today, not tomorrow | Evaluated on Monday | On Tuesday |
|---|---------------------|------------|
| The single way the guru thinks the world is | T | T |
| The single way a nihilist thinks the world is | F | F |

Mutatis mutandis with respect to everything we said about relativism for Lewisians. For Perry-ites, the content of *de motu* beliefs will not be diagonal with respect to time or space, but they will of course be diagonal with respect to the belief tokener. The nomad proposition looks like this (assume it's being said or thought and evaluated in Cleveland while pointing at Tampa on the map and the non-nomad one of us lives permanently in Tampa).

| Home is here not there | Evaluated by me | Evaluated by you |
|----------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| I'm a nomad and you aren't | T | F |
| You're a nomad and I'm not | F | T |

| Home is here not there | Evaluated here | Evaluated there |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| I'm a nomad | T | T |
| I'm homeless | F | F |

Notice that the first table, which moves from agent to agent, is diagonal. The second chart, which moves from place to place, is not diagonal, because the belief is *de motu*.

Are there beliefs that are linked to agent centered action but that are undiagonal with respect to agents? This would be weird. The closest thing I can come up with by way of example is this: Imagine we are playing a game where anyone who thinks of spaghetti has to hold up their hand and admit that they are out of the competition.⁸ 'I am thinking of spaghetti' would then be *de motu* because as soon as I contemplate the thought that you are thinking of spaghetti, I am ipso facto thinking of spaghetti and I have to raise my hand. This is quite different than when I contemplate the thought that you are on thin ice.

The things that are supposed to be intimately connected with action in that distinctive way according to Perry are the belief-states. Normally, the things about which questions of *de re*-ness arise are the objects of belief. The difference between a *de motu* belief and an (ordinary) *de se* belief is that in a *de motu* belief, the belief content can be retained without being diagonal. Using Ninan's terminology, what makes this propositional attitude linked to agent centered action is that you and I can grasp the same content, and have the same desires, but if I have the *de motu* belief about myself and I merely share it with you, it will explain my behavior of pitching a tent where I am, but not yours. And this will happen no matter where we are.

Interestingly, diagonality is closely related to the difference between *de re* and *de dicto* belief. Suppose I believe, 'The president of the United States is always Orange.'

If that belief is *de re*, then its content is diagonal. To know whether the belief is true (under a Stalnaker-type understanding) you need to know both the content of the belief, and the time when it was tokened. If it was tokened

in 2018, then it is true, but if it was tokened as I write this, then it is false. Like a *de se* belief, under a Stalnaker-type understanding, the content of the belief is a diagonal proposition.

It looks like this.

| The proposition: POTUS is always orange | Evaluated in 2018 | Evaluated in 2021 |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| Trump orange, Biden not | T | F |
| Trump not orange, Biden orange | F | T |

But if I believe it *de dicto*, the content is not diagonal.

It just looks like this.

| The proposition: POTUS is always orange | Evaluated 2018 | Evaluated in 2021 |
|---|----------------|-------------------|
| The Constitution requires an orange POTUS | T | T |
| The Constitution does not require an orange POTUS | F | F |

This again illustrates the Miller Analogy that *de re*: *de dicto*::*de se*: *de motu*.

In sum, what's important is that there are two different ways in which essential indexicality can function, as the box above illustrates, and that's because indexicality, or centeredness, is independent of whether a belief is attached to a time, place or object under a description, or fixed referentially. I take the general frameworks of Perry and Lewis to be preserved, and to simply be open to a hitherto unnoticed application.

5. *Monsters*

In the introduction, we noted that the phenomenon we are interested is not, first and foremost, a linguistic one. Our understanding of what it means to say that now is urgent to us comes from the context of King's speech, not from our semantic competence with the sentence 'now is urgent to us.' Still, readers might be interested in knowing what the relationship is between the belief states urged on us by poetic phrases like 'The fierce urgency of the now' and the semantic content of phrases that actually have indexicals in them that do not seem to be evaluated in the ordinary way. One such expression that bears an obvious similarity to 'Don't stop thinking about tomorrow.' is the piece of advice: 'Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.' David Kaplan mentions the phrase in a footnote to his work (Kaplan 1989). Kaplan was not discussing propositional attitudes, however.

He was discussing the structure of the public language expressions themselves. He raised it as a possible counter-example to his claim that *natural languages* do not contain something he dubbed ‘monsters.’ Kaplan’s basic idea was that no piece of language can manipulate the context of evaluation of any indexical. A monster, in other words, is a piece of language that makes an indexical inside its scope evaluate to something other than whatever it would have given the actual context against which it’s being judged. Though Kaplan denied their existence, it is far less controversial to maintain that they exist than it used to be.⁹

‘We are confronted with the fierce urgency of the now’ obviously does not contain a monster. But some people seem to think ‘Never put off for tomorrow ...’ does contain a monster. And they might be inclined to take ‘Don’t stop thinking about tomorrow’ to also contain a monster. Perhaps more interestingly, there is a literature that aims to show that ‘Never put off for tomorrow ...’ does not contain a monster, and tries to analyze it in terms of the concept of displaced assertion (Predelli 1995). The relationship between *de motu* and so-called multiple displaced assertion is interesting, and so we develop it here. We start with a brief introduction to monsters.

Suppose I say ‘It is now hot.’ The context that gives this utterance its content is the moment it occurs. If the proposition [There is heat] is a set of <world,time> pairs, then the utterance ‘It is hot now’ is going to be true just in case the pair consisting of the world in which the utterance occurred and the time it was uttered is in that set. But even if I say ‘Later on tomorrow, you will realize that it is now hot,’ I have done nothing to change that context that gives the content to the part of the utterance that goes ‘it is now hot.’ Even though I start talking about the future, as soon as I use the word, ‘now,’ it automatically pops out of that future circumstance and just evaluates the way it would on its own. So it is not a monster, but it illustrates monsterhood by what it fails to do: it fails to make an indexical inside its scope evaluate to something other than whatever it would have evaluated to given the actual context against which it’s being judged. Alice’s ‘It must come sometimes to ‘jam today’ arguably involves a monster because the ‘today’ does not pop out of the quantification ‘sometimes.’ Alice is not talking about the day of her utterance (see Rabern 2021). Monsters seem to be able to work on the indexical ‘I’ as well as temporal indexicals like today and now. ‘Only I ordered a drink I like.’ and ‘I am traditionally allowed to order whatever I like for my last meal.’ seem to both contain monsters. In both cases, the word ‘I’ does not refer to the speaker (see Rabern for both of these examples).

It also appears that we can play this game with what one might think is a particularly difficult case: the shifty operator, ‘actually.’ Consider the phrase: ‘Whatever you may ever be planning, take into account what has actually happened, rather than imagined might-have-beens!’ It appears, at

least, that the context for the word 'actually' in that sentence is manipulated by being placed inside the right bit of language.

6. *Displaced assertion vs de motu belief*

Is 'Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today,' a monster after all? And if it is or is not, what does that teach us about the belief it is meant to inspire? (Note that it does not directly express a belief, because it is in an imperative.) In his work (1995), Stephano Predelli argues that 'Never put off ...' does not contain a monster. And in so doing, he seems, at least, to be providing an analysis of some of the phrases that I claim urge us to take up *de motu* beliefs.

One difference between Predelli's analysis and mine is that he is focused on the semantics of utterances, whereas our focus is on the structure of the thoughts that the utterances revolve around. It is telling that *de motu* beliefs are not usually directly expressed in language. What we find is people urging us to have those beliefs using commands that are expressed poetically or with idioms. On my account, *de motu* content is rarely if ever the semantic content of a sentence, nor even picked out by anything like an 'automatic' pragmatics. The *de motu* content, moreover, of 'We are confronted with the fierce urgency of the now' might very well be the same as 'Don't put off for tomorrow the political struggles that are urgent today' despite the fact that their syntax and surface semantics are entirely different. This is a good clue that what we are interested in is not the way these sentences function – it's the structure of the thoughts they inspire. Predelli, on the other hand, is concerned with the semantics and pragmatics of natural language sentences like 'I'm not here right now' and 'Never put off for tomorrow what you can do today.'

Still, it is worth looking carefully at Predelli's account to see what exactly the relationship is between these two kinds of phenomena. Predelli argues that the right analysis of these sentences depends on something he calls the force of 'displaced assertion' (DA). Look at the previous sentence of this paper. You might think the present tense in 'Predelli argues' indexically picks out the time of utterance. But it does not. Predelli says that such a sentence, and others like it (i.e. 'Here, it is raining cats and dogs', spoken by a weatherman in New York but speaking about California while pointing at the map), is spoken with a force of DA. Hence, it is a matter of pragmatics that the context of interpretation of the sentence is not its ordinary one. So far so good.

Predelli then moves on to sentences that are spoken with a force of 'multiple displaced assertion' (MDA). His example is a sign on my door that says 'I am not here today' and which I leave up for multiple days. He has in mind that the act of writing the sign is an utterance whose force is displaced

to all the possible times that the sign might be seen. If I put up the sign on a Monday, and you come by on Wednesday and Thursday, then my utterance's force is displaced from the day I made it (Monday), to multiple other days (at least Thursday and Friday.) But while the forces of DA that apply to my sign are indeed multiple, they are a relatively short list. The MDAs are restricted to set of perhaps 7 days (if I am gone for a week.)

An utterance can also have the force of unrestricted MDA. An utterance has the force of unrestricted MDA if it 'expresses the contents conveyed by S at any context c^* , differing from c under some respect or other.' Predelli then suggests that 'Never put off ...' is made with the force of unrestricted MDA. Unrestricted MDA, in other words, involves some kind of Universal Quantifier. 'For all x , if x is some context that differs from c in some respect, than the utterance conveys what the utterance S would convey in that context x .' In sum, Predelli thinks that a statement like 'I am not here right now' and one like 'Don't put off for tomorrow ...' have much in common – as do finite conjunctions and universally quantified statements. The first makes a finite number of claims, while the second makes a set of claims quantified over a range of contexts.

I do not want to quibble with the details of Predelli's analysis of particular sentences. Rather, I want to insist that he is tackling an entirely different problem. Unlike Predelli, we are interested in analyzing the structure of beliefs and other propositional attitudes. More importantly, we are interested in *continuous* beliefs. This is quite different from utterances – which clearly happen at a moment. 'I am not here right now' (when it is a sign on a door left for several days) arguably quantifies over a range of contexts, I do not think that is the nature of a belief like 'enlightenment is now' that it is quantificational. A belief like 'enlightenment is now' and 'the now is fiercely urgent' do not *quantify* over a range of contexts – they continue or persist over a range of contexts. This is a point we have already seen with the example of the trainer who urges me to drink water. *De motu* beliefs are quite different. A persisting belief only applies to one context at time, a quantification applies to all the contexts at once. 'I am not here right now but I will be here tomorrow' cannot persist until tomorrow and remain true. But 'Enlightenment is now, not later' can persist until 'later' and remain true. And something that quantifies over a range of contexts cannot be essentially linked to agent-centered action. To be linked to agent-centered action, a thought has to, at any particular moment, be about that particular moment – not about all the moments that fall under some domain.

A thought that quantified over a range of contexts could not have the urgency (another way of characterizing the link to agent-centered action) that a thought like 'The faculty meeting is now!' or 'the now! has a fierce urgency' seem to have. So thoughts that persist over a range of contexts are quite different than thoughts that quantify over a range of contexts. Only the former could be linked to agent-centered action. So whatever one thinks

of Predelli's analysis of a statement like 'I am not here right now' or a phrase like 'Never put off until tomorrow what you can do today', his analysis will not work for the beliefs that King, the guru, and McVie (and even Kaplan's imagined speaker) are urging their listeners to have. That's because the thoughts that the statements urge their listeners to take up persist in a way that the statements do not. And as the thoughts persist, they are always about the moment during which they are persisting, not all the moments through which they will persist. Quantification and moving persistence are quite different.

So is Predelli right to analyze 'Never put off ...' as an assertion with unrestricted MDA? The question is made somewhat tricky by the fact that the sentence does not in fact make an assertion. It is an imperative. One can of course transform it into an indicative: 'You should never put off until tomorrow what you can do today.' If we do that, then plausibly Predelli has the right analysis.

But I think it is not entirely incidental that phrases such as these usually appear as imperatives. Or as poetic allusions like 'We are confronted with the fierce urgency of the now.' That's because I think they should really be understood as invitations (or stronger) to take up *de motu* beliefs that are hard to express semantically. And the reason, in these cases, that we prefer to issue commands 'Don't stop thinking about tomorrow' – rather than to announce normative indicatives – 'You should always think about tomorrow' or 'You should always treat right now as an urgent moment.' – is that these latter do in fact sound quantificational. And that's not what King or McVie wants to convey. King wants to convey an urgency about the present moment – whatever that moment happens to be at the time the thought is being contemplated. Not about all future moments. McVie wants to keep thinking about the singular day after the day that she is doing the thinking. Not about all future days. Straightforward indicatives do not do this kind of work. The kinds of thoughts King and McVie are urging us to have cannot be expressed in straightforward, non-poetic, non-guru-speak indicatives. So we either resort to commands, or if we are gurus or inspirational public speakers, to slightly poetic expressions like 'the fierce urgency of now' or 'enlightenment is now.'¹⁰

7. Conclusion

Propositional attitudes come in four different varieties, associated with two different pairs of attributes that are independent of each other. They can be about entities, times and places under a description – or not. And they can either be, or not be, linked to agent-centered action. The independence of the link to agent-centered action from the distinction between *de re* and *de dicto* should always have clued us in to the existence of a missing kind of

propositional attitude. These beliefs and attitudes, which I have called ‘*de motu*,’ have the urgency and link to agent-centered action of *de se* beliefs like Perry’s ‘The faculty meeting is now!’ but the urgency is not fleeting. The attitude is linked to a continued and prolonged sense of urgency; the urgency to end war and racial segregation before life leaves us bare, naked and dejected with a lost opportunity; the urgency to put the past behind ourselves and live life to the fullest; the urgency to embrace spiritual fulfilment as something to achieve in the present rather than as something to plan to achieve in the future. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of the now. Do not stop thinking about tomorrow. Enlightenment is now.

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NOTES

¹ Beliefs that are like *de se* beliefs but where the indexical is ‘now’ rather than ‘I’ are sometimes called *de nunc*, rather than *de se*. As best as I can tell, nobody talks about ‘*de locus*’ beliefs, but they can be just as essentially indexical as *de se* and *de nunc* beliefs. (This of the belief ‘This is the yellow brick road’ or (said to a travelling companion on a train) ‘We are here.’ In fact beliefs linked to agent-centered action usually have at least two if not three of these components. The travelling companion is really saying ‘WE are HERE, NOW!’ As we will see in Section 4, the *de nunc* and *de locus* aspects of essentially indexical beliefs are more apt to be subject to the phenomenon of the this paper, though I would hesitate to rule out the possibility of them applying to the strictly *de se* elements.

² As we will see in Section 4, not everyone believes this exactly, but they believe something similar enough, so this is good enough for our purposes for now.

³ See Section 3 for more details and a diagram

⁴ We use the ‘!’ notation because natural languages like English do not seem to have generally available words that unambiguously read as *de se* indexicals. I say ‘generally available’ because there do seem to be some expressions that have this characteristic, like ‘John wants to be rescued.’ That phrase appears to contain a silent ‘!’ which is unambiguously *de se*. But not all *de se* thoughts can be so expressed.

⁵ I’m not enough of a guru to say exactly what this behavior will consist in – but we can imagine for the sake of argument that it involves smelling the roses, attending carefully to one’s aura, or whatever we like to think the simultaneous presence of enlightenment makes you do.

⁶ Rabern mentions this line to focus on Alice's reply, because it is an example of a semantic monster. We come back to Monsters in Section 5. Here, I am more interested in what the Queen says.

⁷ In a sense that is precisely the opposite of Ninan's 'absoluteness.'

⁸ There is in fact a game called 'The Game' which works a bit like this.

⁹ See Rabern (2021) for a recent discussion of Kaplan's Monsters.

¹⁰ Suppose that a student came up to me as asked when graduation was and I replied 'Graduation is now!'. They would have no idea what I was talking about. But if I said 'Never forget that studying hard today is the key to your successful graduation,' they might better understand me to be urging her to adopt a *de motu* belief. (And not just urging them to study hard only on the day that I said it.)

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