

‘Here’ is the Tip of the Iceberg – Generalised Location and Metaphysics

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- ① Indexicals
- ② Against metaphysics: the indexical case
- ③ Beyond the indexicals
- ④ Agency & causation

Brandom on ‘a somewhat fanciful example’

“As a somewhat fanciful example [of how a representational semantic paradigm can mislead us], consider someone who is puzzled about what is represented by indexical ... vocabulary. **Are there indexical ... *facts*, over and above those expressible in nonindexical terms?** If not, why aren’t indexical terms freely interchangeable with nonindexical ones (as [Perry’s] essential indexical ... shows they are not)? If so, what are these peculiar items? (One might imagine here some naturalistic analog of the theologians who worry that a deity who is not spatiotemporally located could not think the sort of indexical and demonstrative thoughts we express using ‘here’, ‘now’, and ‘this’.)” [Brandom, ‘Global Anti-Representationalism?’]

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Dispelling the puzzle

“The fact that we can formulate rules sufficient to specify the correct use of indexicals (**at least for ordinary, spatiotemporally located speakers**)—including the uses that are demonstrably not interchangeable with the use of any nonindexical terms—entirely in nonindexical terms should be enough to dispel any concern that there is something spooky or mysterious going on. ... If the practices themselves are all in order from a naturalistic point of view, any difficulties we might have in specifying the kind of things those engaged in the practices are talking about, how they are representing the world as being, ought to be laid at the feet of a Procrustean semantic paradigm that insists that the only model for understanding meaningfulness is a representational one.”

My project: To generalise this metaphysical-puzzle-dispelling line of thought, by generalising the feature – i.e., *locality* – on which the indexical case depends.

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Brandom on ‘the Anscombe-Perry thesis’

“Indexicals play a special role in the behavioral economies of their users. They can have a motivational significance that is not reproduced by non-indexical expressions ... That the meeting is starting *now*, that the bear is going to eat *me*, that the treasure is buried *here*, are sayings that can immediately move me to *do* things that I need not be similarly motivated to do by the realization that the meeting starts at noon, the bear is going to eat Bob, and the treasure is buried at $\langle x,y,z \rangle$, even if those are the non-indexical specifications of the very indices that characterize my utterance.”

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The wrong lessons?

“What does this meaning-use analysis tell us? It shows us that and how **anyone**¹ who knows how to use non-indexical vocabulary already knows how to do everything she needs to, in principle, ... to deploy indexical vocabulary. ... Even though what is expressed by [indexical vocabulary] cannot be fully expressed by [non-indexical vocabulary], there is nothing about the use of indexicals that must remain hidden from the view of one who professes to know his way around only the non-indexical fragment of a language.”

“It may be that no-one actually boggles at indexical vocabulary in a way that would make this analysis dispositive of an urgent problem rather than just generally enlightening. Indexical skepticism is certainly not widespread. (And it is hard for me to see how this account will help those theologians who really are worried about the apparent inability of a non-spatiotemporal deity to think indexical thoughts).”²

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²The interesting (imaginary) opponent isn't the indexical *skeptic*, but the indexical (big-R) *Realist*!

‘You had to be there’

- The meaning-use analysis specifies rules for the use of indexical vocabulary in terms of the “location” of the speaker, in three main modalities: *where*, *when* and *who* she is.
- Therefore, *pace* Brandom’s claim above, the analysis does not show how anyone “who knows how to use non-indexical vocabulary already knows how to do everything she needs to ... to deploy indexical vocabulary.” Anyone who has a location, in each of these three modalities, certainly – but we can imagine languages spoken by intelligences who do not (as the theological example indicates).

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Location-dependent vocabulary

- Imagine trying to teach use of indexicals to a speaker who lacks a temporal, spatial or personal location – it can't be done.
- Of course, one might teach such a speaker to speak *as if* it occupied a particular location, in each of these respects. But this is not be a genuine use “from nowhere” – it depends on an ability to imagine oneself in shoes located *somewhere*.
- So familiar indexical vocabulary already gives us three examples of classes of linguistic expressions that can only be used by creatures who are “located”, in some respect.

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Generalised location

- Without leaving the indexical case, we have generalised the notion of (spatial) location to two other modalities. I want to generalise it a lot further, by moving beyond the indexical case (as usually understood) – by finding other expressions which appear to be useable only by suitably “located” creatures; expressions which share with the ordinary indexicals the property of having a distinctive *pragmatic* significance.
- **Notation:** I’ll use the term *llocation* for “generalised location.”¹

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Generalised location: what we're looking for

Essential pragmatics We want to generalise the Anscombe-Perry thesis, by finding other cases in which we can't replace **located** vocabularies with **unlocated** ones, because the latter lack the practical associations of the former.

Inessential metaphysics We want to generalise the lesson that seems obvious in the indexical case, that the special role of the vocabulary in question is not be explained in terms of the idea that it tracks a distinctive kind of **fact**.

First task: Think some more about why metaphysics is the wrong approach, in the indexical case (so that we know what we're looking for, in other cases).

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- 1 Indexicals
- 2 Against metaphysics: the indexical case
 - The argument from worst explanation
 - The argument from variation
 - The irrelevance of local agreement
- 3 Beyond the indexicals
- 4 Agency & causation

No explanatory role for ‘indexical facts’

Explanatory redundancy The special character of the indexical cases – i.e., the Anscombe-Perry thesis, and the irreducibility of indexical language to nonindexical language – is fully explained **without** invoking any such additional facts: viz., by paying attention to the **practical significance** of location, in various respects.

Explanatory inefficacy And it is unclear, anyway, how metaphysics could **possibly** do the job. What kind of “special fact” could explain the practical relevance of indexical judgments? (A question for the “moving spotlight” view, for example: How do we know that it is now *now*? And why would it matter if it weren’t!?)

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Two kinds of inter-speaker variability

A metaphysical picture tends to have trouble accommodating two kinds of variability between speakers (one very evident, one less so, in the indexical case):

Intra-modal variation The case in which two speakers are both llocated in some respect, but **differ** in their llocations (in that respect) – e.g., they both have spatial positions, but **different** positions.

Extra-modal variation The case where two speakers differ in that one has a llocation in some respect, and the other has no llocation (in that respect) – e.g., a human and an intelligence that exists “in the cloud,” without a spatial location.¹

¹These two kinds of variation seem independent: (1) We have intra-modal without extra-modal variation if we find some feature necessarily possessed by any language user, but capable of different “settings” – the ordinary indexicals are at least close to this; (2) We have extra-modal without intra-modal variation if we find some contingent feature with only one possible “setting.”

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Why variation troubles metaphysics

Intra-modal variation By providing a source of no-fault disagreement between speakers, it renders implausible the idea that there is a single fact of the matter to be tracked. (A possible response: relativised, contextual facts. Response to the response: Isn't this the Procrustean paradigm at work?)

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Local factuality

- The indexical case demonstrates that among a group of speakers who share a llocation, *explicitated* llocation has the character of a factual matter.
- (Why ‘explicitated’? Because the issue doesn’t arise if the llocation in question simply remains in the background, as for Perry’s Z-landers, whose statements about the weather are always about the weather *in Z-land*, though they themselves have no word for ‘here’.)
- Why does this ‘local’ factuality matter? Because it alerts us to the possibility that variability can remain out of view, where speakers happen to share a llocation.
- This is important, because the appearance that there is a genuine fact of the matter is a major motivation for the metaphysical approaches to which the indexical analogy provides an alternative. (Indexicals are the *visible* tip of the iceberg in virtue, in part, of their *obvious* intra-modal variability.)

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 - Colour & taste
 - Probability
- ④ Agency & causation

The case of colour

Colour vocabulary as an example

- The link to something we *do*, a practical ability (in this case, our colour vision).
- Variation – both intra-modal (e.g., ‘colour-blindness’) and extra-modal (blindness).
- Intra-modal variation as a possible source of no-fault disagreement.
- Widespread but not universal suppression of this kind of disagreement *de facto*, due to a widespread shared location, consisting in normally-functioning human vision – i.e., ‘local factuality’, as above.
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Llocating Mr Jones

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A Sellarsian scene

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[Hirsute naturalist with loud tie.]

The familiar marks of llocation

- Thus for taste, as for colour, we have the familiar manifestations of llocation:
 - ① Variability, both intra- and extra-modal.
 - ② No-fault *disagreement*, but local *agreement*, given shared llocality.
 - ③ Links to practical abilities (in this case, perceptual & aesthetic sensibilities).
- Still, colour and taste are not perfect examples, for our purposes, in part because serious metaphysical realists about these matters are hard to find.
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Credence and probability

- Here to have a llocation is to be a decision maker under uncertainty – i.e., to have **credences**, where these are functionally defined in terms of their role in a subjective decision theory (to which the decision maker's behaviour conforms, at least under idealisation).
- More precisely, a fully-specified location would be a coherent assignment of credences to all of some range of propositions. Two agents differ in credal llocation if they assign different credences to the same proposition.
- If credal llocations are made explicit in the form “It is probable that P,” then inter-speaker agreement (i.e., shared credal llocation) supports a considerable degree of local factuality, as in the previous cases (with scope for Sellarsian objectification, as in the colour case).
- Thus we can find ourselves tempted to say that such judgements aim to keep track of some distinctive kind of fact: the probability, or chance, that P.
- But the reasons for resisting this temptation are much as in the indexical case: explanatory irrelevance and inefficacy, and the consequences of variation.

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- 4 Agency & causation
 - Cartwright and the Two-Boxers
 - Comparing Cartwright and Perry
 - Cartwright's distinction without metaphysics
 - Comparing causation and indexicals

The Cartwright–Two-Boxer thesis

Cartwright Strategic decision-making requires that agents represent their world in **causal** terms, rather than merely **probabilistic** terms. Without causal beliefs in addition to probabilistic beliefs, we lose a crucial distinction between effective and ineffective strategies for achieving our ends.

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Cartwright's argument

- Cartwright begins with Russell's claim that, as she puts it, 'laws of association are all the laws there are, and that causal principles cannot be derived from the causally symmetric laws of association'; and argues 'in support of Russell's second claim, but against the first.' She agrees with Russell that '[c]ausal laws cannot be reduced to laws of association', but maintains that 'they cannot be done away with.'
- Her case for the latter claim turns on the thesis that causal laws are needed to ground a distinction between effective and ineffective strategies:

causal laws cannot be done away with, for they are needed to ground the distinction between effective strategies and ineffective ones. ... [T]he difference between the two depends on the causal laws of our universe, and on nothing weaker.

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Comparing Perry and Cartwright

Analogy

- Perry and Cartwright both argue that beliefs of one sort are not reducible to beliefs of another sort.
- In both cases, the argument turns on the role that beliefs of the former (irreducible) sort play in action.

Disanalogy

- The intended conclusions are quite different: in one case, an argument for *realism* about causation, in the other, a point about the cognitive prerequisites of agency.

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- Can we make Cartwright look more like Perry, in the last respect?

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The epistemics of deliberation

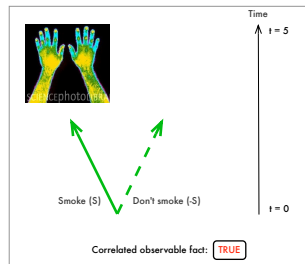
- Consider a simple decision, typically correlated with some pre-existing state of affairs (observable, in principle).
- From the agent's point of view, her action and its consequences are unpredictable, as she deliberates. ("Deliberation screens prediction." Why? Because choice is an "epistemic trump.")
- If the correlation still held, it would provide a "window" behind the deliberative screen – so it must fail, from the agent's point of view. (Cf. the bilking argument.)
- Conclusion: The epistemics of deliberation already break the spurious correlations on which Cartwright's thesis depends ... and we don't need causal facts to do the job!

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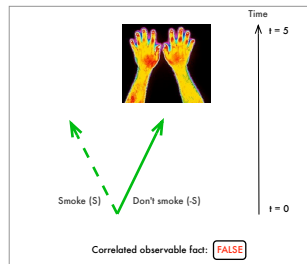
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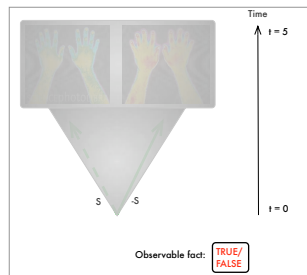
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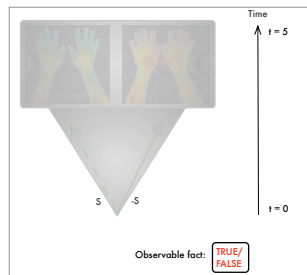
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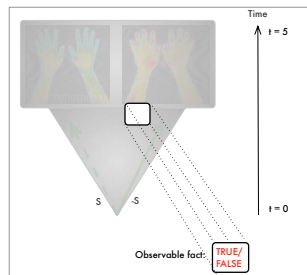
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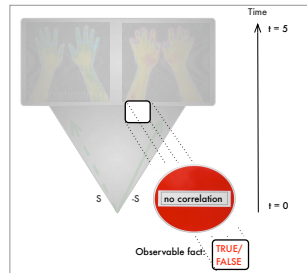
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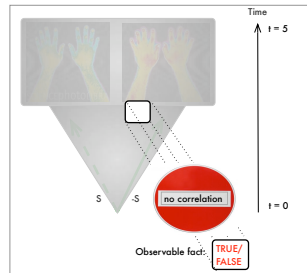
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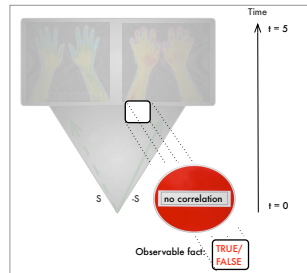
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Using this to explain Cartwright's data

- An agent's credences about her own future actions differ from those of an otherwise similarly-informed third person, because deliberation is an epistemic trump. (The agent must think of her own actions as generated *ab initio*, relative to everything of which she might in principle have knowledge, before she acts.)
- Roughly, the causal dependencies are the probabilistic dependencies that survive, from this perspective.
- The practical link: causation is tied to deliberation. This is essentially Cartwright's datum, and the question is, which approach gives the better explanation of it?
- I say: The pragmatic approach, which starts with practice, rather than with metaphysics.

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Against metaphysics: comparing causation and indexicals

Explanation and metaphysics This shows the *redundancy* of metaphysics in this case. To complete the parallel with indexicals we also need to show *inefficacy* of metaphysics. A reason for optimism: The fact that as they themselves admit, two-boxers can't offer a decisive argument against one-boxing. ("It's a standoff" – Lewis.)

Two kinds of variation *Extra-modal* variation is easy to see in the causal case – we can imagine creatures who are not agents – but *intra-modal* variation is harder. The easiest way to imagine it is imagine creatures with the opposite temporal orientation to ourselves – for them, the causal arrow goes the other way.

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