PLING228 Semantics Research Seminar de re, de se, etc.

1 Varieties of 'de re': summary and open issues

Superficially three types of cases.

(1) Standard de re
Ralph believes Ortcutt to be a spy.

(2) De re restrictors (extensional)
John believes that someone in the room is guilty.

(3) "Intensional" de re
Mary thinks there's a building with 192 floors.

A unified phenomenon? Discussion last time suggested that one might try to treat all 3 with the general Kaplanian strategy for (1), of invoking a proxy mechanism.

1.1 Issues about a unified account

- Double vision for 2 and 3? For 2: Situation: Bill, Ted and Simon are in the room (unbeknownst to John). John has seen them all on the beach in disguise and thought that at least one of them must be a spy (though he wasn't sure which). He also knows them all individually and thinks none of them are spies.

  (1) John thinks someone in the room is a spy.

  (2) John thinks everyone in the room is not a spy.

  What are implications of this (for any account): not clear that the needed quantification over guises can be triggered by movement. Also about individual concepts/conceptual covers?

  For 3: Mary thinks Jane is the same religion as Bill who is a Mennonite (though she has never learned what religion Bill is, thinking just that it is something weird). She also mistakenly thinks that only men can be Mennonites.

  (3) Mary thinks Jane is a Mennnonite.

  (4) Mary thinks only men are Mennonites. So, Mary thinks Jane is not a Mennonite.

- Implementation

  As noted, not clear how to implement the cover strategy, and as apparent last time from Yasu's discussion, Kaplan's approach would need to be modified slightly for at least 3: an intension is not the "name of" another intension.

  In Schwager and Yasu's paper, the approach taken is to just to allow substitution of context

- A general account should explain a) why reading of type (1) and (2) are (apparently?) easier to get. b) why "extensional" reading appears to be possible only for quantifier restrictors [as Percus noted]

(5) John thinks: "A or B or C is Swiss." A, B and C, unbeknownst to John, are French. All are in the room (unbeknownst to John).
  a. John believes that someone in the room is Swiss.
  b. John believes that someone Swiss is in the room.

1.2 Yasu

Basic principle: contextually (extensionally) equivalent expressions can be substituted . De re as proxy de dicto – straightforwardly, without quantifying in. Note however that proposal comes with a caveat for empty expressions ("building taller than this one", "building with 192 floors"), that contextual equivalence *would* obtain in "nearest" context in which the expression were non-empty. Otherwise massive over generation from false beliefs

It is easy to see how this principle handles **intensional de re** case.

(6) example of how depressed i am

(7) example of why no woman can ever love me

Standard de re with names, descriptions analysed as involving substitution of a contextually equivalent **rigid designator**. Thus, they are just a special case of the above. Notice that, to actually say *which* designator this is would seem to require that the extension of the de re phrase be fixed/known. While a de re reading of 'John believes that the winner lost' clearly not require that any designator for the winner be identifiable since we might not know who he is. Not clear how much of a problem this is. For one because 'The actual winner' will always do the job.

Extensional de re reading are handled, in a sense by collapsing them to cases of standard de re. This means making a particular assumption of the logical syntax of quantifiers, as follows:

(8) John believes that someone in the room is guilty.
John believes that some x among [the people in the room] is guilty.

Basically, it is assumed that the quantifier restriction is represented as a type e expression, a (plural) definite description. It can thus be proxy, by the substiion principle above, for a rigid designator that has the same extension (actually and in every world).

What about the observation that we don't get the (extensional) de re reading in existential 'there' constructions?

(9) John believes that there is someone in the room who is guilty?

The thought I believe is that 'some' is ambiguous between the above kind of meaning and a more standard one, and only the latter can arise in existential there constructions. This move is not completely ad hoc: it lines up with the fact the 'some' normally presupposes its restrictor is not empty, but it (and other quantifiers) do not in the 'there' constructions.

Summary and discussion: Full explanation of asymmetry not offered, but at least restrictor de re cases are assimilated to standard de re, which also seem relatively more accessible. Double vision predicted for 2 and 3? But that's probably right?

Though we seem to lose a generalised account of double vision in some sense. For Ortcutt cases presumably coherence of contradictory attributions is in terms of the fact that there are multiple, contextually equivalent substitutions available. But then what to say about:

(10) a. There is someone who Ralph believes to be a spy.
b. There is someone who Ralph believes not to be a spy.

Issues?: What about singular quantifiers, which allow extensional de re? What about intermediate readings – generalisation of substitution principle to "embedded contexts"? Shortest spy problems (?)? Over-generation in non-attitude contexts, e.g. metaphysical modals ("Necssarily, Aristotle is a philosopher")?

2 De re vs. De se

Conventional wisdom on *de se*:

Sentences like this are ambiguous between *de se* and *de re* readings:

(11) Nathan thinks his therapist could teach him about what he needs.

Two situations: a) Nathan reads a piece of non-fiction about himself, but doesn't know it's him, b) self-reflection.

Some linguistic forms require a *de se* reading:

(12) Nathan wants to see a therapist.

3 Lewis's analysis of *de se*

Lewis on *de se*: lack of reduction to neo-Kaplanian *de re*. There is no individual concept F such that we can analyze (12) as follows (where beliefs are just defined by possible worlds):

(13) Nathan = the F, and Nathan wants the F to see a therapist.

Candidate propositions:

- The singular proposition Nathan wants to see a therapist. Nathan might not know who he is (through amnesia), but reads a biography of himself and thinks he (the subject of the biography) doesn't want to see a therapist. So then (natural conclusion) he has the opposite

singular thought. [This can be denied, but let's bracket the denial for now to be considered below]

- Any descriptive proposition that does not pick out Nathan in every world as a person wanting to see a therapist (i.e. a non-singular proposition). Problem: Nathan might not know that he satisfies any given description (i.e. is standing the room right now) due to amnesia. Lewis omniscient object: two gods can know everything, but they need to know which god they are, and this goes beyond picking out the set of worlds.

> We can imagine a more difficult predicament. Consider the case of the two gods. They inhabit a certain possible world, and they know exactly which world it is. Therefore they know every proposition that is true at their world. Insofar as knowledge is a propositional attitude,they are omniscient. Still I can imagine them to suffer ignorance: neither one knows which of the two he is. They are not exactly alike. One lives on top of the tallest mountain and throws down manna; the other lives on top of the coldest mountain and throws down thunderbolts. Neither one knows whether he lives on the tallest mountain or on the coldest mountain; nor whether he throws manna or thunderbolts. [**?**]

Other problem: worlds that contain duplicates of themselves. How do we characterize Nathan's belief as one about himself and not about his duplicate if he knows no facts that differentiates himself from his duplicate.

Even if you're not convinced by amnesia/god argument. An ad hoc case-by-case method will not work even if you can ignore some bad cases. Quantificational argument:

(14) Everyone might think he is great.

Let's accept there is a *de se*-only reading of (14). Then, what are the properties that picks out each person's guise for thinking of himself under? If we quantify unrestrictedly over guises we get too many readings. But what restriction of guises assures we get only the right guises for every individual and every world? What is the predicate 'de se' that restricts guises to just those de se ones for each individual? We need a general answer to that question, not just some answers in some cases based on the particular facts. But there does not seem to be any particular worldy property that does that.

Lewis analysis: beliefs are self-predications of properties or rather centered worlds. Pair $\langle w, x\rangle$: is the world where w where self-location is at individual x. So (11) is true iff all world individual pairs $\langle w, x\rangle$ compatible with Nathan's belief are ones where x's therapist could teach him something about himself in w.

4 Two alternatives: true *de re* as *de se* and non-descriptive Fregean guise

de se as singular propositions

We earlier rejected the idea of treating the *de se* as just singular belief about the thinker. The grounds were effectively those of *double vision*, it seems like one might have a thought about exactly one self but lack the de se thought (e.g. one reads a biography of oneself but doesn't know it is about oneself.) But on a neo-Kaplanian picture *de re* thoughts generally are treated as under descriptive guises, so that it is not clear that singular thought is playing an important role at all. In this case we might adopt the following principle:

***De se* = singular** x believes the singular proposition that x has property F iff x believes that he has F in a de se manner.

This, then, might allow us to maintain a possible worlds semantics for belief, while still giving a satisfactory treatment of singular thought.

Lewis (and Ninan) criticize this idea based on the argument that we would then need to attribute any essential properties of thinker to his de se beliefs. So if essential to come from a sperm and egg then de se belief requires believing you come from a sperm and egg.

> But there is another objection to the singular proposition proposal that is more difficult to evade. To see the problem, note that Lingens's origins presumably involve a certain sperm and egg. Moreover, the property of originating from a

> sperm and an egg is presumably a necessary property of Lingenss, one he has in every possible world in which he exists. Now, since Lingens believes de se that he has a mustache, he believes de se that he exists. So every possible world compatible with what he believes is, on the singular proposition view, a world in which Lingens exists. Since every world in which Lingens exists is a world in which Lingens comes from a sperm and an egg, every world compatible with what Lingens believes is a world in which Lingens comes from a sperm and an egg. But on the present proposal, this means that Lingens *believes de se* that he comes from a sperm and an egg. But surely Lingens can believe *de se* that he has a mustache even if he is convinced, for example, that "the myth of sperm and eggs is scientistic tommyrot and that a rival hypothesis is correct" (Lewis 1983a: p. 385).
>
> This line of reasoning is quite general. Suppose the singular proposition view of the de se is correct, and let F be an arbitrary essential property of Lingens's. Then if Lingens believes *de se* that he exists, he will, on this proposal, count as believing de se that he has F. Since this holds for an arbitrary essential property of Lingens's, it holds for them all. But surely Lingens can believe de se that he exists without possessing a comprehensive set of true beliefs about his essence. Call this the *problem of essential properties*. The problem appears to sink the singular proposition view of the de se. [**?**]

But isn't this a more general problem with believing metaphysically impossible propositions? Do we really need to assume that belief worlds respect essences?

Related problem with more basic metaphysical necessities (idea from Rieppel): consider Perry's madman Heimson:

(15) Heimson thinks he is Hume (/is identical to Hume).

This cannot be a singular thought about Hume if it is a singular thought about Heimson, since no world where Hume = Heimson. Assuming if one can think a singular thought about x one can also think one is (de se) x, then we need to extend our principle to the idea that the only person you can have a singular thought about is yourself. Now we are not very far from centered worlds.

neo-Fregean de se

Many neo-Fregeans believe that guises cannot be reduced to descriptions, so Fregean senses are not uniquely associable with definite descriptions. In this case we can specify certain Fregean sense as essentially *de se*, and restrict their application to *de se* cases.

Attitudes, then, cannot be understood as simple relations to possible worlds, but rather relations to Fregean sense that have as their constituents potentially *de se* guises.

$\textsc{self}_x$ is a Fregean guise that picks out x according to the de se mode. We say taught $\textsc{self}_x$ satisfies the higher-order concept SELF.

(16) Everyone thinks he is great.

(17) For all x $\exists g$ (g is a guise, g refers to x and $\textsc{self}(g)$) x believes $\ulcorner$ g is great $\urcorner$

5 Extension to *de re* and Ninan's problem

Lewis's treatment of *de re* is essentially Kaplanian. Except now we can formulate descriptions in terms of *de se* properties not just *de re* ones. E.g. the person I am looking at now, etc.

? presents a very general problem

(18) a. Ralph believes that Ortcutt is not a spy [qua man in the brown hat].
b. Ralph imagined Ortcutt (at the civic ball) wearing a red hat.

Obviously, Ralph would have to be able to conceive of Ortcutt under some other guise (too) – one known to be contextually equivalent – in order for the latter to come out non-contradictory.

Ninan's solution: multi-centered worlds?

Beliefs are now sets of words, and a string of variable to individual mappings. To deal with double vision Ninan expands this to variable, guise, individual mappings.

Or we can have Quine's polyadic treatment of *de re* belief. Neo-Fregeanism seems of no help here.