

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.

2 de se

Kinds of accounts:

- Descriptions associated with de se (ruled out though on various grounds)
- True *de re* = *de se*
- Centered possible worlds
- Neo-Fregean views

We didn’t get to discussion of this last view.

2.1 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.

SELF_x is a Fregean guise that picks out x according to the de se mode. We say taught SELF_x satisfies the higher-order concept SELF.

- (1) Everyone thinks he is great.
- (2) For all $x \exists g$ (g is a guise, g refers to x and $\text{SELF}(g)$) x believes $\ulcorner g$ is great $\urcorner$

2.2 *de re* and *de se*

We have seen one attempt at unifying the de re and de se fail: namely the descriptivist neo-Fregean programme based on Kaplan. What about other attempts:

Using the singular propositions to capture the *de se* seems to leave us with need for a need for neo-Kaplanian account of the regular *de re*.

Neo-Fregeanism with its mysterian conception of guises seems adequately to unify things, but only at the cost of any form of useful explanation. Living up to Quine’s epithet as ‘creatures of darkness’.

Centered possible world account of de se. But de re also covered by making guises relative to center. (E.g. the person seen by the centre in a tall hat) The trivial guise is just the person identical to the center.

3 Ninan’s challenge

The problem is that, once Ralph has a ‘cognitive fix’ on Ortcutt, he is able to consider scenarios in which he is not acquainted with Ortcutt in this way. For example, Ralph might imagine a scenario in which he sees Ortcutt flying a kite in an alpine meadow, rather than sneaking around on the waterfront. In such a scenario, the following sentence would appear to be true:

- (3) Ralph imagined that he did not see Ortcutt sneaking around on the waterfront.

On the standard approach to *de re* ascription, however, this sentence is true at world w and time t iff there is an acquaintance relation R meeting two conditions: $R(w, t, \text{Ralph}) = \text{Ortcutt}$, and every centred world $\langle w', t', x' \rangle$ compatible with what Ralph imagines at t in w is such that x' does not see $R(w', t', x')$ sneaking around on the waterfront at t' in w' .

What if we just say that Ralph imagines the actual person he saw to be sneaking around: double vision problem.

Seems like it can't be just problem of identifying acquaintance relation as Ninan argues because of examples like this:

- (4) Ralph imagine Ortcutt died as an infant.

Ninan also argues that the standard account will be too weak: it makes it too easy to imagine that Ortcutt is dumping a body: if you just imagine that someone bears the acquaintance relation you bear to Ortcutt and is dumping a body you are imagining *de re* of Ortcutt that he is dumping a body. This seems wrong.

4 Ninan's semantics: multi-centered worlds

What about using an actuality operator:

- (5) Ralph imagines that the actual person he saw sneaking around the waterfront was flying a kite instead.

Seems to face double vision problems.

5 Ninan's semantics

Note first the problem of counterfactual possibility does not seem to arise for *de se* attitudes.

- (6) Ralph imagined that he might not have been born.

Nina's suggestion is essentially to create a centre for each *de re* thought:

To handle attitudes towards more than two individuals we need to consider multi-centered worlds, i.e. possibilities with more than two tagged centers. If, for example, Ralph were to imagine that he was standing between Ortcutt and Jones, we could use the following sort of object to represent one of Ralphs potential imagination alternatives:

$$\langle w', t', \{(\text{Ralph}, x'), (\text{Ortcutt}, y'), (\text{Jones}, z')\} \rangle$$

We could then gloss the notion of what it is for a multi-centered world like this to be compatible with what Ralph imagines in the way one would expect given the above account of pair-centered compatibility, i.e. (30).

- (7) A pair-centered world world $\langle w', t', \{(\text{Ralph}, x'), (\text{Ortcutt}, y')\} \rangle$ is compatible with what Ralph imagines at t in w iff:
- x' has, at t' in w' , all the properties Ralph imagines that he himself has at t in w ;
 - y' has, at t' in w' , all the properties Ralph imagines that Ortcutt has at t in w ; and
 - x' and y' stand, at t' in w' , in all the relations that Ralph imagines that he and Ortcutt stand in at t in w .

We then generalize beyond pairs to arbitrary numbers of centers in world (for multiple *de re* and *de se* belief).

Now problem with double vision. Consider this imagination set:

- (8) $\{ \langle w', t', \{(\text{Ralph}, x'), (\text{Ortcutt}, y'), (\text{Ortcutt}, z')\} \rangle : z' \neq y' \}$

What does this mean? Not clear contradictory, but doesn't distinguish between imaginings under different guises. For this reason Ninan generalizes away from individuals to pairs of individuals and acquaintance relations.

General theory:

Definition. A set A of individual-acquaintance relation pairs is agent x s acquaintance set at time t in world w iff A contains all and only those pairs (y, R) such that x bears R to y at t in w .

Definition. A function f is a tagging function iff the domain of f is an acquaintance set, and there is a world-time pair (w, t) such that the range of f is included in the set of individuals that exist at t in w .

Using this notion, we can say that a *multi-centered world* (w, t, f) is a triple consisting of a possible world w , a time t , and a tagging function f , where the range of f is included in the set of individuals that exist at t in w .

Ninan on primitives:

One way in which the present account differs from the centered worlds approach concerns what each account takes as its basic notion of belief (imagining, etc.). For Lewis, the basic notion of belief is belief *de se*. This is the basic notion in two (related) senses: First, this is the only notion of belief that one needs when assessing a potential doxastic alternative for compatibility with what an agent believes. Second, the notion of *de re* belief – believing something about someone relative to an acquaintance relation – is defined in terms of the notion of *de se* belief. . . . On the multi-centered approach, in contrast, the basic notion of belief is belief *de re*, or the notion of what an agent believes about an individual relative to an acquaintance relation, or, more generally, what an agent believes about a plurality of individuals-relative-to-acquaintance-relations. Again, this is the basic notion in two senses. First, it is this notion of belief that we use when we characterize the notion of doxastic compatibility. . . . Second, *de se* belief is understood as a special case of *de re* belief – it is a *de re* belief where the *res* is the agent and the relation of acquaintance is identity. Thus, we have not tried to reduce the notion of *de re* belief to something more basic; unlike Lewis, our account of the *de re* is non-reductive.

Once we have this account of imagining we might as well extend it to belief itself. Now we no longer need to believe of individuals we are acquainted with them that they are acquaintance relations, which might seem an advantage of neo-Kaplanian account. In this case clearly the standard issue of double vision is not a problem, though we are back to the need for rather special moves for belief. Do we need to extend to properties as well?

(9) John imagined everyone in the room was not in the room.

6 Yanovich

6.1 Counterfactual attitudes and belief

Counterfactual attitudes are, in some known respects, parasitic on belief. Heim 1990: presuppositions in counterfactual attitude contexts can be satisfied by beliefs, and in some cases prior counterfactual attitudes.

- (10) a. Ralph believes that Mary came, and he is imagining/wishing that Bill came **too**.
b. Ralph believes that France is a monarchy. He wishes that the King of France was here.

So semantics of counterfactual attitudes must be parasitic on belief (other attitudes?) somehow. Yanovich argues that this must include mechanism of (cross-attitude) “intentional identity”, which can then be applied to deal with Ninan’s problem while keeping a standard Kaplanian mechanism for *de re*.

6.2 “Specific *de dicto*” counterfactual attitudes (?)

- (11) a. Ralph believes that he saw a man in a brown hat.
b. Ralph is imagining him wearing a blue hat.
Ralph is imagining the the man in a brown hat wearing a blue hat.
c. Ralph wishes that he was wearing a blue hat.

- Content of these counterfactual attitudes appears to involve a particular (merely) doxastically possible individual.
- But not clear that the identification can be made by way of a “stand-in” description, for reasons parallel to those Ninan gives against extending standard accounts of the de re to counterfactual de re.

Obviously ‘the man in the brown hat’ won’t work. Though Ralph may have other qualitative ways of thinking of the (presumed) man, not clear that any will do:

Consider a slightly different scenario: as above, except that Ralph imagines that [the believed man in the hat] died as an infant (cf. Kripke 1980). In this case, there may be no interesting similarities between the physical appearance of the man Ralph [thinks he] sees on the waterfront and the unfortunate infant of Ralph’s imagining. In such a case, (20) would be true, but it’s unclear how its truth could be accounted for by the standard approach.

(20) Ralph [wished/] imagined that [he] died as an infant.

What this version of the case seems to show is that the [possible individual] with whom Ralph [believes he] is acquainted at t in w and the individual who represents [that individual] in an arbitrary one of Ralph’s imagination alternatives need not be qualitatively similar in any interesting respect. (Ninan’)

How then to represent the content of these attitudes? How about:

(12) $\{ \langle x, w \rangle : \exists y, \langle zw' \rangle \text{ such that } \langle z, w' \rangle \text{ is an (actual) doxastic alternative for Ralph and } y \text{ is the man in the brown hat in } w' : y \text{ died in infancy in } w \}$

Problem (?): Ralph’s doxastic alternatives might vary as to which (possible) individual is the man in the brown hat. But then more than one of those individuals can inhabit a (centred) world in the above set. In such a world, which one corresponds to “the man in the brown hat” (even more acutely, if both of them die in infancy). Thus not clear that we capture the (aboutness) of Ralph’s beliefs.

Similarly, consider:

- (13) a. Ralph believes that there are unicorns.
b. He is imagining a unicorn playing in a field.

Yanovich says that (13-b) has a reading which reports a specific act of imagination, one about a specific doxastically possible-for-John unicorn. The set of (centred) worlds in which a unicorn is playing in a field is not rich enough to represent that. Standard de re reading obviously problematic. (How about a Schwager-Sudo de re reading?).

Conclusion (of Yanovich): semantics for counterfactual attitudes needs to be relativized to a given/primitive method, for the attitude holder, of identifying the correspondents of believed-in individuals in the relevant counterfactual alternatives. Then contents of the counterfactual attitudes can unproblematically be about those correspondent individuals.

6.3 Implementation

Here is my reconstruction, not completely faithful, of Yanovich’s idea.

Let f be a function that maps an individual denoting expression g and world w to its *correspondent* x in w for the attitude holder, of the g in (the subset of) his *actual* doxastic alternatives (that correspond to w for him).

Presumably, the simplest way to apply this to the case of (11-a) is to treat the pronoun as standing for a description, ‘the man in the brown hat’ (or consider the variant of it with that description overtly present). Then we have the content:

(14) $\{ \langle x, w \rangle : f(\text{the man in the brown hat})(w) \text{ died in infancy in } w \}$

Presence of f and its world relativity now encodes that *the* (correspondent of the) doxastically-possible man in a brown hat dies, as Ralph imagines.

Note: May need to be generalised beyond the doxastic case.

- (15) John imagined that he was in a room looking at a woman.
Then he imagined that she had died infancy.

6.4 Analysis of counterfactual de re

- (16) a. Ralph imagined Ortcutt having died in infancy.
 b. Ralph imagined Ortcutt being a spy.

De re semantics is assumed – as on standard Kaplanian theory – to provide a vivid name of Ortcutt for Ralph. But f applies to it so that the content ends up being about imagined correspondent(s) directly. For (16):

- (17) a. $\{ \langle x, w \rangle : f(\text{the man in the brown hat})(w) \text{ died in infancy in } w \}$
 b. $\{ \langle x, w \rangle : f(\text{the pillar of the community})(w) \text{ is a spy in } w \}$

In this way Ninan's problem – an apparent need to keep descriptive guises out of counterfactual attitude content – is averted.

References