

Week 9 Handout
Ascriptions of Propositional Attitudes *De Dicto and De Re*

1. Tense: “The President of the United States will be a woman by 2021.”

Two readings, depending on the order in which we i) fix the referent of term ‘PotUS’ and ii) apply the tense operator to the claim.

If we focus on the underlying claim (*dictum*), “The PotUS is a woman,” apply the tense operator to get “(In 2021) The PotUS is a woman,” and then fix the referent (whoever is PotUS in 2021—possibly Elizabeth Warren), then we get a *de dicto* reading.

If we focus on the referent of the term ‘PotUS’ (the *res*), namely Donald Trump and compute the claim from that “Donald Trump is a woman,” and then apply the tense operator, we get

“(In 2021) Donald Trump is a woman.” This is the *de re* reading.

(Trump would be disappointed either way, but this one might be even more upsetting to him.)

2. “Henry Adams believed the inventor of the lightning rod did not invent the lightning rod.

“Henry Adams believed Bob’s favorite Philadelphian did not invent the lightning rod.”

De re: “Henry Adams believed *of* (the inventor of the lightning rod, Ben Franklin, Bob’s favorite Philadelphian) that *he* did not invent the lightning rod.”

3. Quine on referential *opacity* and referential *transparency*:

Can one intersubstitute coreferential terms *salva veritate*?

- a) Ortcutt believes whoever left the note is a spy.
- b) The mayor left the note.
- c) Ortcutt believes the mayor is a spy.
- d) *Ortcutt believes *that* the mayor is a spy.
- e) Ortcutt believes *of* the mayor that he is a spy.
- f) Ortcutt believes the shortest spy is a spy.
- g) Rosa Kleb is the shortest spy.
- h) Ortcutt believes Rosa Kleb is a spy.

True *de re*, false *de dicto*:

- i) Ortcutt believe *of* Rosa Kleb that *she* is a spy.
- j) *Ortcutt believes *that* Rosa Kleb is a spy.

4. Quantifying in and out of belief contexts:

- a) In-quantification: There is someone Ortcutt believes is a spy.

Quine claims neither the mayor nor Rosa is someone whom Ortcutt believes is a spy. For that to be true, to 'm to have that relation to the *res*, he must *know who* the spy is—and he doesn’t. If the inspector believes only that whoever left the footprints under the window is the murderer, then it is not the case that there is someone whom he believes is the murderer. He believes some sentences (identities) are

true, but is not connected to the *object (res)* in the way required to count as having a *de re* belief, a belief directed at the object in the special way required for this sort of *de re* description.

ICf. Kaplan (“On Quantifying In”) on “vivid names”: Must have demonstrative acquaintance, or a name anchored in demonstrative acquaintance.

Kaplan completes the conflation of denotational *de re* and epistemically strong *de re*.

b) Out-quantification (Edelberg):

Hob believes a witch cursed his cow, and Nob believes she blighted his sow.

Q: Could this be true

- i. even though there are no witches? and
- ii. even if Hob and Nob have never heard of each other?

A: Yes. If everyone believes there are 7 witches, and Hob and Nob both believe the purple one did it.

5. Botanization of possibilities:

There are three overarching choices to make, determining a flowchart:

- i) Focus on *denotational de re* (as above) or *epistemically strong de re*?
- ii) Does the *de re/de dicto* distinction most fundamentally distinguish kinds of *belief* or kinds of *ascription* of belief (saying...)?
- iii) If either of *de re* (of either kind) or *de dicto* (beliefs or ascriptions) is to be explained in terms of the other, which is more basic in the order of explanation?

Tradition and current conventional wisdom says:

- i) Focus on epistemically strong *de re*. Denotational *de re* ignored as trivial.
- ii) *De re* beliefs are a special kind of belief,
- iii) That kind of belief is basic in the order of explanation—a kind of nonconceptual content (by acquaintance) that is more fundamental a point of contact of our beliefs with the world of things than the conceptual content of *de dicto* beliefs.

MIE view:

- i) Denotational *de re* is basic phenomenon. Epistemically strong *de re* dealt with as a special, late-coming, optional phenomenon: expressing object-involving belief.
- ii) *De re/de dicto* distinguishes kinds of *ascription*.
 - Argument from iteration: not just two kinds, but a recursively generated indefinite multiplicity. See (12) below.
 - But there is a special kind of belief: object-involving belief (such that one cannot have that kind of belief unless the object exists and one is appropriately connected to it)
- iii) *De dicto* ascriptions more basic, *de re* ascriptions are formed from them.

6. Step 1: De Dicto Ascriptions

From Direct to Indirect Quotation:

Direct discourse, *oratio recta* (quotation):

Quine said “To be is to be the value of a variable.”

Wittgenstein said “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.”

Tom said "Your best friend is hungry."

Ben said "I am angry."

Varieties of quotation (McDowell: "Quotation and Saying That"):

Little Richard said "Wopbopaloobopawopbamboom."

Tarski said "Ja."

If $\lceil p \rceil$ then it is true that $\lceil p \rceil$. Quinean corner quotes.

"Scare" quotes. (Treated semantically in (11) below.)

Indirect discourse, *oratio obliqua* (paraphrase):

Quine said that to be is to be the value of a variable.

Wittgenstein said that about that of which we cannot speak, we must remain silent.

Tom said that John is hungry.

Ben said that he himself is hungry. (Indirect reflexives. Castaneda's *he**.)

Attributing use of token-reflexives generally.

7. Step 2: Denotational *De Re*

Proposal: Think in scorekeeping terms. In making an ascription that specifies content *de re* one is doing two things: *attributing* one commitment (an assertional one) and *undertaking* another commitment (an identificatory, substitutional commitment).

S: Φt .

A: S claims *that* Φt . (*De dicto*)

A: $t=t'$

A: S claims *of* t' that $\Phi(it)$. (*De re*)

Compare: Scorekeeping version of JTB account of attributions of knowledge: one *attributes* assertional commitment (belief condition), *attributes* entitlement to the commitment (justification condition, and *undertakes* assertional commitment to that content (truth condition).

8. Sly prosecutor: "Defense counsel claims an habitual liar is a credible witness."

Defense Counsel: "I claim N.N. is a credible witness. *You* claim N.N. is an habitual liar."

Perspicuous *de re*: "Defense counsel claims *of* an habitual liar that *he* is a credible witness."

This makes clear who is committed to and responsible for what aspects of the claim attributed.

9. Claim: The home language-game of 'of' and 'about' when they express intentional directedness (as opposed to their other uses) is their use to form (denotational) *de re ascriptions* of propositional attitude—as in our light disambiguating regimentation of *de re* and *de dicto* ascriptions. This is what distinguishes representational uses: the 'of' of "I'm thinking *of* a number" from "the pen *of* my aunt," "I'm talking *about* numbers," from "The book is *about* 800 pages long. Talk of *de re* ascriptions in terms of social perspectives is a *pragmatic metavocabulary* for representational vocabulary. It is *saying* what one is *doing* in *saying* what one is talking *about*.

10. Specifying the content of another's belief in *de re* terms is how we extract *information* from it, that is, put it in a form where *we* can use it as a premise in *our* inferences (those *we* use to form our own beliefs). *De re* specifications depend on what is *really* (according to us) coreferential, and what is *true*. In *de re* ascriptions, *interpersonal* anaphora is made propositionally explicit in *ascription-structural* anaphora. That is *why* they are critical to navigating across social differences in doxastic perspective.

11. **Scare quotes** are the expressive dual of *de re* specifications of content: one *undertakes* the doxastic commitment and *attributes* the identificatory one.

A: The lawful authorities re-established order in the rebellious village.

B: Those ^slawful authorities^s executed half the inhabitants.

B asserts that someone executed half the village inhabitants, and that it is whoever A referred to as "lawful authorities." Responsibility for picking them (the *res*) out that way (substitution-inferential commitment) is attributed to A, while assertional responsibility for the *dictum* is undertaken by B.

12. Iterated mixed *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions:

a) *<de dicto, de dicto>* S: S' believes that S'' believes that $\Phi(t'')$.

S: S': S'': $\Phi(t'')$

b) *<de dicto, de re>* S: S' believes that S'' believes of t' that $\Phi(it)$.

S: S': S'': $\Phi(t'')$

S: S': $t'=t''$

c) *<de re, de dicto>* S: S' believes of t that S'' believes that $\Phi(it)$.

S: S': S'': $\Phi(t'')$

S: $t=t''$

d) *<de re, de re>* S: S' believes of t that S'' believes of it that $\Phi(it)$.

S: S': S'': $\Phi(t'')$

S: S': $t'=t''$

S: $t=t'$

Can compute the commitments underlying *arbitrary* iterated mixed *de dicto/de re* ascriptions: e.g.,

<de re, de dicto, de re> A: S believes of t that S' believes that S'' believes of it that $\Phi(it)$.

13. Two perspectives on *agency*:

i) S intends *that* she shoot a deer.

ii) S intends *of* a cow that she shoot it.

(i) Predicting/explaining what agent will *try* to do: *De dicto*.

(ii) Predicting/explaining what agent will *succeed* in doing: *De re*.

Both of these correspond to important senses of "explaining behavior."

14. "Theories of Meaning and Hermeneutic Practices":

De dicto readings and *de re* readings of texts.

Hegel believed of Kripkenstein's skeptical puzzle that he had a straight solution to it.