

Reasoning and Representing

I

I

One useful way of dividing up the broadly cognitive capacities that constitute our mindedness is to distinguish between our sentience and our sapience. Sentience is what we share with nonverbal animals such as cats--the capacity to be *aware* in the sense of being *awake*. Sentience, which so far as our understanding yet reaches is an exclusively biological phenomenon, is in turn to be distinguished from the mere reliable differential responsiveness we sentients share with artifacts such as thermostats and land mines. Sapience, on the other hand, concerns *understanding* or intelligence, rather than irritability or arousal. One is treating something as sapient insofar as one explains its behavior by attributing to it intentional states such as belief and desire as constituting *reasons* for that behavior. Sapient act as though reasons matter to them. They are rational agents in the sense that their behavior can be made intelligible, at least sometimes, by attributing to them the capacity to make practical inferences concerning how to get what they want, and theoretical inferences concerning what follows from what.

Besides thinking of sapience in terms of reasons and inference, it is natural to think of it in terms of truth. Sapient are believers, and believing is taking-true. Sapient are agents, and acting is making-true. To be sapient is to have states such as belief,

desire, and intention, which are contentful in the sense that the question can appropriately be raised under what circumstances what is believed, desired, or intended would be *true*. Understanding such a content is grasping the conditions that are necessary and sufficient for its truth.

These two ways of conceiving sapience, in terms of inference and in terms of truth, have as their common explanatory target contents distinguished as intelligible by their *propositional* form. What we can offer as a reason, what we can take or make true, has a propositional content, a content of the sort that we express by the use of declarative sentences and ascribe by the use of 'that' clauses. Propositional contents stand in inferential relations, and they have truth conditions.

Propositional contentfulness is only part of the story about sapience, however. When we try to understand the thought or discourse of others, the task can be divided initially into two parts: understanding what they are thinking or talking about and understanding what they are thinking or saying about it. My primary aim here is to present a view about the relation between what is *said* or *thought* and what it is said or thought *about*. The former is the propositional dimension of thought and talk, and the latter is its *representational* dimension. The question I will address is why any state or utterance that has propositional content also should be understood as having representational content. (For this so much as to be a question, it must be possible to characterize propositional content in nonrepresentational terms.)

The answer I will defend is that the representational dimension of propositional contents should be understood in terms of their *social* articulation--how a propositionally contentful belief or claim can have a different significance from the perspective of the individual believer or claimer, on the one hand, than it does from the perspective of one

who attributes that belief or claim to the individual, on the other. The context within which concern with what is thought and talked *about* arises is the assessment of how the judgements of one individual can serve as reasons for another. The representational content of claims and the beliefs they express reflects the social dimension of the game of giving and asking for reasons.

2

It may be remarked at the outset that it will not do just to think of the representational dimension of semantic contentfulness according to a designational paradigm--that is, on the model of the relation between a name and what it is a name of. For that relation is a *semantic* relation only in virtue of what one can go on to *do* with what is picked out by the name--what one can then *say* about it. Merely picking out an object or a possible state of affairs is not enough. What about it? One must say something about the object, claim that the state of affairs obtains or is a fact.

One of Kant's epoch-making insights, confirmed and secured for us also by Frege and Wittgenstein, is his recognition of the *primacy of the propositional*. The pre-Kantian tradition took it for granted that the proper order of semantic explanation begins with a doctrine of concepts or terms, divided into singular and general, whose meaningfulness can be grasped independently of and prior to the meaningfulness of judgements. Appealing to this basic level of interpretation, a doctrine of judgements then explains the combination of concepts into judgements, and how the correctness of the resulting judgements depends on what is combined and how. Appealing to this derived interpretation of judgements, a doctrine of consequences finally explains the combination of judgements into inferences, and how the correctness of inferences depends on what is combined and how.

Kant rejects this. One of his cardinal innovations is the claim that the fundamental unit of awareness or cognition, the minimum graspable, is the *judgement*. Thus concepts can only be understood as abstractions, in terms of the role they play in judging. A concept just is a predicate of a possible judgement¹, which is why

*The only use which the understanding can make of concepts is to form judgements by them.*²

For Kant, any discussion of content must start with the contents of judgements, since anything else only has content insofar as it contributes to the contents of judgements. This is why his transcendental logic can investigate the presuppositions of contentfulness in terms of the categories, that is, the "functions of unity in judgement".³ This explanatory strategy is taken over by Frege, for whom the semantic notion of conceptual content ultimately has the theoretical task of explaining pragmatic *force*--the paradigmatic variety of which is *assertional* force, which attaches only to declarative sentences. As the later Wittgenstein puts the point, only the utterance of a sentence makes a move in the language game. Applying a concept is to be understood in terms of making a claim or expressing a belief. The concept 'concept' is not intelligible apart from the possibility of such application in *judging*.

The lesson is that the relation between designation and what is designated can only be understood as an aspect of judging or claiming *that* something (expressed by a declarative sentence, not by a singular term or predicate by itself) is so--i.e. is *true*. That is judging, believing, or claiming *that* a proposition or claim is true (expresses or states a

¹ *Critique of Pure Reason* (hereafter *KdrV*) A69/B94.

² *KdrV* A68/B93.

³ *KdrV* A69/B94.

fact), *that* something is *true of* an object or collection of objects, *that* a predicate is *true of* something else. Thus one must be concerned with what is said or expressed, as well as what it is said *of* or true *of*--the thought as well as what the thought is *about*.

3

Accordingly we start our story with an approach to propositional contents--what can be *said*, or *believed*, or *thought*, in general what can be *taken* (to be) *true*. The guiding idea is that the essential feature distinguishing what is propositionally contentful is that it can serve both as a premise and as the conclusion of *inferences*. Taking (to be) true is treating as a fit premise for inferences. This is exploiting Frege's semantic principle--that good inferences never lead from true premises to conclusions that are not true--not in order to define good inferences in terms of their preservation of truth, but rather to define truth as what is preserved by good inferences.

On the side of propositionally contentful *intentional states*, paradigmatically *belief*, the essential inferential articulation of the propositional is manifested in the form of intentional interpretation or explanation. Making behavior intelligible according to this model is taking the individual to act for *reasons*. This is what lies behind Dennett's slogan: "Rationality is the mother of intention". The role of belief in imputed pieces of practical reasoning, leading from beliefs and desires to the formation of intentions, is essential to intentional explanation--and so is reasoning in which both premise and conclusion have the form of believables.

On the side of propositionally contentful *speech acts*, paradigmatically assertion, the essential inferential articulation of the propositional is manifested in the fact that the core of specifically *linguistic* practice is the game of giving and asking for *reasons*.

Claiming or asserting is what one must do in order to give a reason, and it is a speech act that reasons can be demanded for. Claims both serve as and stand in need of reasons or justifications. They have the contents they have in part in virtue of the role they play in a network of inferences.

Indeed, the *conceptual* should be distinguished precisely by its inferential articulation. This is a point on which traditional empiricism needed instruction by traditional rationalism. What is the difference between a parrot or a thermostat that represents a light as being red or a room as being cold by exercising its reliable differential responsive disposition to utter the noise "That's red" or to turn on the furnace, on the one hand, and a knower who does so by applying the concepts *red* and *cold*, on the other? What is the knower able to *do* that the parrot and the thermostat cannot? After all, they may respond differentially to *just* the same range of stimuli. The knower is able to *use* the differentially elicited response in *inference*. The knower has the practical know-how to situate that response in a network of inferential relations--to tell what follows from something being red or cold, what would be evidence for it, what would be incompatible with it, and so on. For the knower, taking something to be red or cold is making a move in the game of giving and asking for reasons--a move that can justify other moves, be justified by still other moves, and that closes off or precludes still further moves. The parrot and the thermostat lack the concepts in spite of their mastery of the corresponding noninferential differential responsive dispositions, precisely because they lack the practical mastery of the inferential articulation in which grasp of conceptual content consists.

The idea, then, is to start with a story about the sayable, thinkable, believable (and so propositional) contents expressed by the use of declarative sentences and 'that' clauses

derived from them--a story couched in terms of their roles in *inference*.⁴ Conceptual content is in the first instance *inferentially* articulated. To approach the representational dimension of semantic content from this direction, it is necessary to ask about the relation between *inference* and *reference*. This is to ask about the relation between what is said or thought and what it is said or thought *about*. How can the representational dimension of conceptual content be brought into the inferential picture or propositional contents? The thesis to be elaborated here is that the representational dimension of discourse reflects the fact that conceptual content is not only *inferentially* articulated, but *socially* articulated. The game of giving and asking for reasons is an essentially *social* practice.

4

The rationale for such a claim emerges most clearly from consideration of certain very general features of discursive practice. Here it is useful to start with another of Kant's fundamental insights, into the *normative* character of the significance of what is conceptually contentful. His idea is that judgements and actions are above all things that we are *responsible* for. Kant understands concepts as having the form of *rules*, which is to say that they specify how something *ought* (according to the rule) to be done. The understanding, the conceptual faculty, is the faculty of grasping rules, of appreciating the distinction between correct and incorrect application they determine. Judgings and doings are acts that have contents that one can take or make true and for which the demand for reasons is in order. What is distinctive about them is the way they are governed by rules. Being in an intentional state or performing an intentional action has a normative significance. It counts as undertaking (acquiring) an obligation or commitment; the content of the commitment is determined by the rules that are the

⁴ This idea is motivated and explored at greater length in "Inference, Expression, and Induction: Sellarsian Themes" *Philosophical Studies* 54 (1988) pp. 257-285.

concepts in terms of which the act or state is articulated. Thus Kant picks us out as distinctively normative or rule-governed creatures.

Descartes inaugurated a new philosophical era by conceiving of what he took to be the ontological distinction between the mental and the physical in epistemological terms, in terms of accessibility to cognition, in terms, ultimately, of certainty. Kant launched a new philosophical epoch by shifting the center of concern from *certainty* to *necessity*. Where Descartes' descriptive conception of intentionality, centering on certainty, picks out as essential our grip on the concepts employed in cognition and action, Kant's normative conception of intentionality, centering on necessity, treats their grip on us as the heart of the matter. The attempt to understand the source, nature, and significance of the norms implicit in our concepts--both those that govern the theoretical employment of concepts in inquiry and knowledge and those that govern their practical employment in deliberation and action--stands at the very center of Kant's philosophical enterprise. The most urgent question for Kant is how to understand the *rulishness* of concepts, how to understand their *authority*, *bindingness*, or *validity*. It is this normative character that he calls 'Notwendigkeit', necessity.

The lesson to be learned from this Kantian normative conceptual pragmatics is that judging and acting are distinguished from other doings by the kind of *commitment* they involve. Judging or claiming is staking a claim--undertaking a commitment. The conceptual articulation of these commitments, their status as distinctively *discursive* commitments, consists in the way they are liable to demands for *justification*, and the way they serve both to justify some further commitments and to preclude the justification of some other commitments. Their propositional contentfulness consists precisely in this inferential articulation of commitments and entitlements to those commitments.

Specifically *linguistic* practices are those in which some performances are accorded the significance of assertions or claimings--the undertaking of inferentially articulated (and so propositionally contentful) commitments.⁵ Mastering such linguistic practices is a matter of learning how to keep score on the inferentially articulated commitments and entitlements of various interlocutors, oneself included. Understanding a speech act--grasping its discursive significance--is being able to attribute the right commitments in response. This is knowing how it changes the score of what the performer and the audience are committed and entitled to.

One way of thinking about the claims by which discursive commitments are expressed is in terms of the interaction of inferentially articulated *authority* and *responsibility*. In making an assertion one lends to the asserted content one's *authority*, licensing others to undertake a corresponding commitment. Thus one essential aspect of this model of discursive practice is *communication*: the interpersonal, intracontent inheritance of entitlement to commitments. In making an assertion one also undertakes a *responsibility*, to justify the claim if appropriately challenged, and thereby to redeem one's entitlement to the commitment acknowledged by the claiming. Thus another essential aspect of this model of discursive practice is *justification*: the intrapersonal, intercontent inheritance of entitlement to commitments.

⁵ By this criterion, the 'Slab' Sprachspiel that Wittgenstein describes early in the *Investigations*, for instance, does not qualify as a genuinely *linguistic* practice. For further discussion of why this is a good way to talk, see "Asserting" *Nous*, XVII #4, November 1983, pp. 637-650.

II

I

One can pick out what is *propositionally* contentful to begin with as whatever can serve both as a premise and as a conclusion in *inference*--what can be offered as and itself stand in need of *reasons*. Understanding or grasping such a propositional content is a kind of know-how--practical mastery of the game of giving and asking for reasons, being able to tell what is a reason for what, distinguish good reasons from bad. To play such a game is to keep *score* of what various interlocutors are committed and entitled to. Understanding the content of a speech act or a belief is being able to accord the performance of that speech act or the acquisition of that belief the proper practical significance--knowing how it would change the score in various contexts. Semantic, that is to begin with, inferential, relations are to be understood in terms of this sort of pragmatic scorekeeping. Taking it that the claim expressed by one sentence entails the claim expressed by another is treating anyone who is committed to the first as thereby committed to the second. We typically think about inference solely in terms of the relation between premise and conclusion, that is, as a monological relation among propositional contents. Discursive practice, the giving and asking for reasons, however, involves both *intercontent* and *interpersonal* relations. The claim is that the representational aspect of the propositional contents that play the inferential roles of premise and conclusion should be understood in terms of the social or dialogical dimension of communicating reasons, of assessing the significance of reasons offered by others.

If whatever plays a suitable role in inference is propositionally contentful, and whatever is propositionally contentful therefore also has representational content, then nothing can deserve to count as specifically *inferential* practice unless it at least implicitly involves a representational dimension. Nonetheless, one can give sufficient conditions for a social practice to qualify as according *inferentially articulated* significances to performances, that is, to be a practice of making claims that can serve as reasons for others, and for which reasons can be demanded, without using any specifically representational vocabulary. That is what the model of discursive practice as keeping score on commitments and entitlements does. The story I want to tell is then how the implicit representational dimension of the inferential contents of claims arises out of the difference in social perspective between *producers* and *consumers* of reasons. The aim is an account in nonrepresentational terms of what is expressed by the use of explicitly representational vocabulary.

The connection between *representation*, on the one hand, and *communication* or the *social* dimension of inferential practice, on the other, is sufficiently unobvious that I want to start with a quick point that may help show why one could so much as think that representation could be understood in these terms. The claim is that assessment of what people are talking and thinking *about*, rather than what they are saying about it, is a feature of the essentially *social* context of *communication*. Talk about representation is talk about what it is to secure communication by being able to use each other's judgements as reasons, as premises in our own inferences, even just hypothetically, to assess their significance in the context of our own collateral commitments.

One way to get a preliminary taste for how one could think that representational semantic talk could be understood as expressing differences in social perspective among

interlocutors, consider how assessments of *truth* work. Perhaps the central context in which such assessments classically arise is attributions of *knowledge*. According to the traditional *JTB* account, knowledge is justified true belief. Transposed into a specification of a normative status something could be taken to have by interlocutors who are keeping score of each others commitments and entitlements, this account requires that in order for it to be *knowledge* that a scorekeeper takes another to have, that scorekeeper must adopt three sorts of practical attitude: First, the scorekeeper must *attribute* an inferentially articulated, hence propositionally contentful *commitment*. This corresponds to the *belief* condition on knowledge. Second, the scorekeeper must *attribute* a sort of inferential *entitlement* to that commitment. This corresponds to the *justification* condition on knowledge.

What is it that then corresponds to the *truth* condition on knowledge? For the scorekeeper to take the attributed claim to be true is just for the scorekeeper to endorse that claim. That is, the third condition is that the scorekeeper himself *undertake* the same commitment attributed to the candidate knower.

Undertaking a commitment is adopting a certain *normative stance* with respect to a claim; it is not attributing a property to it. The classical metaphysics of truth properties misconstrues what one is doing in endorsing the claim as *describing* in a special way. It confuses *attributing* and *undertaking* or *acknowledging* commitments, the two fundamental social flavors of deontic practical attitudes that institute normative statuses. It does so by assimilating the third condition on treating someone as having knowledge to the first two. Properly understanding truth talk in fact requires understanding just this difference of social perspective: between *attributing* a normative status to another, and

undertaking or adopting it oneself.⁶ It is the practice of assessing the truth of claims that underlies the idea that propositional contents can be understood in terms of truth conditions. What I want to do is to show how this idea of *truth* claims as expressing differences in social perspective can be extended to representation more generally.

2

The prime explicitly representational locution of natural languages is *de re ascriptions of propositional attitudes*. It is their use in these locutions that make the words 'of' and 'about' express the intentional directedness of thought and talk--as distinct from their use in such phrases as "the pen of my aunt" and "weighing about five pounds". Thus in order to identify vocabulary in alien languages that means what 'of' and 'about' used in this sense do, one must find expressions of *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes. It is these ascriptions that we use to *say* what we are talking and thinking *about*. My strategy here is to address the question of how to understand what is expressed by representational vocabulary by asking how expressions must be *used* in order to qualify as *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitudes.

The tradition distinguishes two readings of or senses that can be associated with propositional attitude ascriptions. Ascriptions *de dicto* attribute belief in a *dictum* or saying, while ascriptions *de re* attribute belief about some *res* or thing. The distinction arises with sentential operators other than 'believes'; consider to begin with the claim:

The President of the United States will be black by the year 2000.

⁶ There are a myriad of technical details that need to be cleared up in order to make an analysis of truth talk along these lines work. I've addressed those difficulties elsewhere--that is where the prosentential or anaphoric account of truth comes in. See "Pragmatism, Phenomenalism, and Truth Talk", *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* vol. XII: Realism; 1988 pp. 75-93. For present purposes, those details can be put to one side.

Read *de dicto*, this means that the dictum or sentence

The President of the United States is black.

will be true by the year 2000. Read *de re*, it means that the *res* or thing, the present President of the United States, namely Bill Clinton, will be black by the year 2000. Our concern here is with how this distinction applies to ascriptions of propositional attitude--though it is a criterion of adequacy on the account offered here that it can be extended to deal with these other contexts as well.

In ordinary parlance the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* readings is the source of systematic ambiguity. Sometimes, as in the case above, one of the readings involves a sufficiently implausible claim that it is easy to disambiguate. It is best, however, to regiment our usage slightly in order to mark the distinction explicitly. This can be done with little strain to our ears by using 'that' and 'of' in a systematic way.

Consider:

Henry Adams believed the popularizer of the lightning rod did not popularize the lightning rod.

It is quite unlikely that what is intended is the *de dicto*

*Henry Adams believed **that** the popularizer of the lightning rod did not popularize the lightning rod.*

Adams would presumably not have endorsed the *dictum* that follows the 'that'. It is entirely possible, however, that the *de re* claim

*Henry Adams believed **of** the popularizer of the lightning rod **that** he did not popularize the lightning rod.*

is true. For since the popularizer of the lightning rod is the inventor of bifocals (namely Benjamin Franklin), this latter claim could be true if Henry Adams had the belief that would be ascribed *de dicto* as

*Henry Adams believed **that** the inventor of bifocals did not popularize the lightning rod.*

Quine emphasizes that the key grammatical difference between these two sorts of ascriptions concerns the propriety of *substitution* for singular terms occurring in them. Expressions occurring in the *de re* portion of an ascription--within the scope of the 'of' operator in the regimented versions--have in his terminology *referentially transparent* uses: coreferential terms can be intersubstituted *salva veritate*, that is, without changing the truth value of the whole ascription. By contrast, such substitution in the *de dicto* portion of an ascription--within the scope of the 'that' operator in the regimented versions--may well change the truth value of the whole ascription. Syntactically, *de re* ascriptions may be thought of as formed from *de dicto* ones by *exporting* a singular term from within the 'that' clause, prefacing it with 'of', and putting a pronoun in the original position. Thus the *de dicto* form

S believes that $\hat{O}(t)$,

becomes the *de re*

S believes of t that O(it).

The significance of Quine's fundamental observation that the key difference between these two sorts of ascription lies in the circumstances under which the substitution of coreferential expressions is permitted was obscured by considerations that are from my point of view extraneous:

1. Quine's idiosyncratic view that singular terms are dispensable in favor of the quantificational expressions he takes to be the genuine locus of referential commitment leads him to look only at quantified ascriptions, embroils his discussion in issues of existential commitment, and diverts him into worries about when 'exportation' is legitimate.
2. This emphasis led in turn--Kaplan bears considerable responsibility here--to ignoring the analysis of ordinary *de re* ascriptions in favor of what I call *epistemically strong de re* ascriptions, which are used to attribute a privileged epistemic relation to the object talked or thought about. This detour had fruitful consequences for our appreciation of special features of the behavior of demonstratives (and as a result, of proper name tokenings anaphorically dependent on them), particularly in modal contexts. But from the point of view of understanding aboutness in general--my topic here--it was a detour and a distraction nonetheless.

The important point is, as the regimentation reminds us, that it is *de re* propositional attitude ascribing locutions that we use in everyday life to express what we are talking and thinking *of* or *about*. One way of trying to understand the representational dimension of propositional content is accordingly to ask what is expressed by this fundamental sort of representational locution. What are we *doing* when we make claims

about what someone is talking or thinking *about*? How must vocabulary be used in order for it to deserve to count as expressing such *de re* ascriptions? Answering that question in a way that does not itself employ representational vocabulary in specifying that use is then a way of coming to understand representational relations in nonrepresentational terms.

3

The rest of this essay is about the expressive role of *de re* ascriptions. I'm going to present it in the technical vocabulary I prefer, which is in some ways idiosyncratic; but the basic point about the way the use of this paradigmatic representational locution expresses differences in social perspective does not depend on the details of that idiom.⁷

Recall that I think we should understand discursive practice in terms of the adoption of practical attitudes by which interlocutors keep score on each other's commitments (and entitlements to those commitments, but we can ignore them here). Claiming (and so, ultimately, judging) is *undertaking* or *acknowledging* a commitment that is propositionally contentful in virtue of its *inferential* articulation. The large task is to show what it is about that inferential articulation in virtue of which claimable contents are therefore also *representational* contents. This is to move from propositional contents introduced as potential premises and conclusions of inferences, via the social dimension of inferential articulation that consists of giving and asking for reasons of each other in

⁷ The approach pursued here (including both a treatment of *de dicto* ascriptions, and of epistemically strong *de re* ascriptions) is presented at length in my *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment* (hereafter *MIE*), forthcoming from Harvard University Press, especially in Chapter Eight "The Social Route From Reasoning to Representing".

communication, to propositions as talking of or about objects, and saying of them how they are. [I'll give short shrift here to the *objectivity* part of the claim, but think about how assessments of *truth* were presented above as distinct from assessments of *belief* and *justification*.]

Undertaking a commitment is doing something that makes it appropriate for others to *attribute* it. This can happen in two different ways. First, one may *acknowledge* the commitment, paradigmatically by being disposed to *avow* it by an overt assertion. Or one may acknowledge it by employing it as a premise in one's theoretical or practical reasoning. This last includes being disposed to *act* on it *practically*--taking account of it as a premise in the practical reasoning that stands behind one's intentional actions. Second, one may undertake the commitment *consequentially*, that is, as a conclusion one is committed to as an inferential consequence entailed by what one *does* acknowledge. These correspond to two senses of 'believe' that are often not distinguished: the sense in which one only believes what one takes oneself to believe, and the sense in which one believes willy nilly whatever one's beliefs commit one to. [The fact that people often move back and forth between belief in the empirical sense, which does not involve inferential closure, and belief in the logical or ideal sense that does, is one of the reasons that when being careful I prefer to talk in terms of commitments rather than beliefs--I don't officially believe in beliefs.] The second sense is the one in which if I believe Kant revered Hamann, and I believe Hamann was the Magus of the North, then whether the question has ever arisen for me or not, whether I know it or not, I in fact believe Kant revered the Magus of the North.

Attributing beliefs or commitments is a practical attitude that is *implicit* in the scorekeeping practices within which alone anything can have the significance of a claim or a judgement. *Ascribing* beliefs or commitments is making that *implicit* practical

attitude *explicit* in the form of a claim. In a language without explicit attitude ascribing locutions such as the 'believes that' or 'claims that' operator, attributing commitments is something one can only *do*. Propositional attitude ascribing locutions make it possible explicitly to *say* that that is what one is doing: to express that practical deontic scorekeeping attitude as a propositional content--that is, as the content of a claim. In this form it can appear as a premise or conclusion of an inference; it becomes something which can be offered as a reason, and for which reasons can be demanded. The paradigm of the genus of *explicitating* vocabulary, of which propositional attitude ascribing locutions are a species, is the conditional. The use of conditionals makes explicit as the content of a claim, and so something one can *say*, the endorsement of an *inference*--an attitude one could otherwise only manifest by what one *does*. Ascriptional vocabulary such as 'believes' or 'claims' makes *attribution* of doxastic commitments explicit in the form of claimable contents.

4

In asserting an ascriptional claim of the form

S believes (or is committed to the claim) that $\dot{O}(t)$,

one is accordingly doing two things, adopting two different sorts of deontic attitude: one is *attributing* one doxastic commitment, to $\dot{O}(t)$, and one is *undertaking* another, namely a commitment to the ascription. The explicitating role of ascriptional locutions means that the content of the commitment one *undertakes* is to be understood in terms of what one is doing in *attributing* the first commitment.

The ascription above specifies the content of the commitment attributed by using an unmodified 'that' clause, which according to our regimentation corresponds to an ascription *de dicto*. A full telling of my story requires that quite a bit be said about how these ascriptions work, but I'm not going to do that here. Roughly, the ascriber who specifies the content of the attributed commitment in the *de dicto* way is committed to the target being prepared to *acknowledge* the attributed commitment in essentially the terms specified--that is, to endorse the *dictum*.⁸

I want to take an appropriate account of *de dicto* ascriptions of propositional attitudes for granted, and show what is different about *de re* ascriptions, those that are regimented in the form:

S claims of t that Ò(it).

I think that the beginning of wisdom in this area is the realization that (once what I have called "epistemically strong *de re* ascriptions" have been put to one side) the distinction between *de dicto* and *de re* should not be understood to distinguish two kinds of *belief* or belief-contents, but two kinds of *ascription*--in particular two different *styles* in which the *content* of the commitment ascribed can be *specified*.⁹ (Dennett is perhaps the most prominent commentator who has taken this line.¹⁰)

⁸ Obviously, such an account requires emendation to handle the cases where the one to whom a propositional attitude is ascribed would use indexicals, or a different language, to express that attitude. See *MIE*, Chapter Eight.

⁹ One way to see that this is right is that the ascription-forming operators can be *iterated*: S' can claim of t that S claims of it that Ò(it). Thus there would in any case not be *two* different kinds of belief (*de dicto* and *de re*), but an infinite number.

¹⁰ In "Beyond Belief" in A. Woodfield, *Thought and Object* [Oxford University Press, 1982]

In specifying the content of the claim that is attributed by an ascription, a question can arise as to who the ascriber takes to be responsible for this being a way of *saying* (that is, making explicit) what is believed, the content of the commitment. Consider the sly prosecutor, who characterizes his opponent's claim by saying:

The defense attorney believes a pathological liar is a trustworthy witness.

We can imagine that the defense attorney hotly contests this characterization:

Not so; what I believe is that the man who just testified is a trustworthy witness.

To which the prosecutor might reply:

Exactly, and I have presented evidence that ought to convince anyone that the man who just testified is a pathological liar.

If the prosecutor were being fastidious in characterizing the other's claim, he would make it clear who is responsible for what: the defense attorney claims that a certain man is a trustworthy witness, and the prosecutor claims that that man is a pathological liar. The disagreement is about whether this guy is a liar, not about whether liars make trustworthy witnesses. Using the regimentation suggested above, the way to make this explicit is with a *de re* specification of the content of the belief ascribed. What the prosecutor *ought* to say (matters of courtroom strategy aside) is:

*The defense attorney claims **of** a pathological liar that he is a trustworthy witness.*

This way of putting things makes explicit the division of responsibility involved in the ascription. That someone is a trustworthy witness is part of the commitment that is *attributed* by the ascriber, that that individual is in fact a pathological liar is part of the commitment that is *undertaken* by the ascriber.

Ascription always involves attributing one doxastic commitment and, since ascriptions are themselves claims or judgements, undertaking another. My suggestion is that the expressive function of *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude is to make explicit which aspects of what is said express commitments that are being *attributed* and which express commitments that are *undertaken*. The part of the content specification that appears within the *de dicto* 'that' clause is limited to what, according to the ascriber, the one to whom the commitment is ascribed would (or in a strong sense should) *acknowledge* as an expression of what that individual is committed to. The part of the content specification that appears within the scope of the *de re* 'of' includes what, according to the *ascriber* of the commitment (but not necessarily according to the one to whom it is ascribed) is acknowledged as an expression of what the target of the ascription is committed to. (This is what the target should, according to the ascriber, acknowledge only in a much weaker sense of 'should'.) Thus the marking of portions of the content-specification of a propositional attitude ascription into *de dicto* and *de re* portions makes explicit the essential deontic scorekeeping distinction of *social* perspective between commitments attributed and those undertaken.

The difference expressed by segregating the content specification of a propositional attitude ascription into distinct *de re* and *de dicto* regions, marked in our regimentation by 'of' and 'that', can be thought of in terms of *inferential* and *substitutional*

commitments. According to the model I started with, propositional, that is, assertible, contents are inferentially articulated. Grasping such a content is being able to distinguish in practice what should follow from endorsing it, and what such endorsement should follow from. But the consequences of endorsing a given claim depends on what other commitments are available to be employed as auxiliary hypotheses in the inference. The ascriber of a doxastic commitment has got two different perspectives available from which to draw those auxiliary hypotheses in specifying the content of the commitment being ascribed: that of the one to whom it is *ascribed* and that of the one *ascribing* it. Where the specification of the content depends only on auxiliary premises that (according to the ascriber) the target of the ascription *acknowledges* being committed to, though the ascriber may not, it is put in *de dicto* position, within the 'that' clause. Where the specification of the content depends on auxiliary premises that the *ascriber* endorses, but the target of the ascription may not, it is put in *de re* position.

More particularly, the use of expressions as singular terms is governed by *substitution*-inferential commitments.¹¹ The rule for determining the scorekeeping significance and so the expressive function of *de re* ascriptions that I am proposing is then the following. Suppose that according to *A*'s scorekeeping on commitments, *B* acknowledges commitment to the claim $\dot{O}(t)$. Then *A* can make this attribution of commitment explicit in the form of a claim by saying

B claims that $\dot{O}(t)$.

¹¹ This line of thought is worked out in detail in "What Are Singular Terms, and Why Are There Any?", which is Chapter Six of *MIE*.

If in addition *A* acknowledges commitment to the identity $t=t'$, then whether or not *A* takes it that *B* would acknowledge that commitment, *A* can also characterize the content of the commitment ascribed to *B* by saying

B claims of t' that $\dot{O}(it)$.

Again, the question just is whose substitutional commitments one is permitted to appeal to in specifying the consequences someone is committed to by acknowledging a particular doxastic commitment. Where in characterizing the commitment the ascriber has exfoliated those consequences employing only commitments the ascriptional target would acknowledge, the content specification is *de dicto*. Where the ascriber has employed substitutional commitments he himself, but perhaps not the target, endorses, the content specification is *de re*.

Understood in this way, what is expressed by *de re* specifications of the contents of the beliefs of others are crucial to *communication*. Being able to understand what others are saying, in the sense that makes their remarks available for use as premises in one's own inferences, depends precisely on being able to specify those contents in *de re*, and not merely *de dicto* terms. If the only way I can specify the content of the shaman's belief is by a *de dicto* ascription

He believes malaria can be prevented by drinking the liquor distilled from the bark of that kind of tree,

I may not be in a position to assess the truth of his claim. It is otherwise if I can specify that content in the *de re* ascription

He believes of quinine that malaria can be prevented by drinking it,

for 'quinine' is a term with rich inferential connections to others I know how to employ. If he says that the seventh god has just risen, I may not know what to make of his remark. Clearly he will take it to have consequences that I could not endorse, so nothing in my mouth could *mean* just what his remark does. But if I am told that the seventh god is the sun, then I can specify the content of his report in a more useful form:

He claims of the sun that it has just risen,

which I can extract *information* from, that is, can use to generate premises that I can reason with. Again, suppose a student claims that

The largest number that is not the sum of the squares of distinct primes is the sum of at most 27 primes.

He may have no idea what that number is, or may falsely believe it to be extremely large, but if I know that

17163 is the largest number that is not the sum of the squares of distinct primes,

then I can characterize the content of his claim in *de re* form as:

The student claims of 17163 that it is the sum of at most 27 primes,

and can go on to draw inferences from that claim, to assess its plausibility in the light of the rest of my beliefs. (It is true, but only because *all* integers are the sum of at most 27

primes.) Identifying what is being talked about permits me to extract information across a doxastic gap.

We saw originally in the treatment of truth assessments the crucial difference between *attributing* a commitment and *undertaking* or acknowledging one. We now see what is involved in moving from the claim that

It is true that Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals,

which is the undertaking of a commitment to the effect that Benjamin Franklin invented bifocals, via the undertaking of a commitment to the claim that Benjamin Franklin is the popularizer of the lightning rod, to the claim that

It is true of the popularizer of the lightning rod that he invented bifocals.

(It is through this 'true of' locution that the earlier remarks about the essentially social structure of truth assessments connects with the account just offered of the social structure that underlies propositional attitude ascriptions *de re*.) Extracting information from the remarks of others requires grasping what is expressed when one offers *de re* characterizations of the contents of their beliefs--that is to be able to tell what their beliefs would be true *of* if they were true. It is to grasp the *representational* content of their claims. The point I have been making is that doing this is just mastering the *social* dimension of their inferential articulation.

Conclusion

I have claimed that the primary representational locution in ordinary language, the one we use to talk about the representational dimension of our thought and talk, to specify what we are thinking and talking *about*, is *de re* ascriptions of propositional attitude. It is the role they play in such ascriptions that gives their meanings to the 'of' or 'about' we use to express intentional directedness. I have also claimed that the expressive role of these locutions is to make explicit the distinction of social perspective involved in keeping our books straight on who is committed to what. The social dimension of inference involved in the communication to others of claims that must be available as reasons both to the speaker and to the audience, in spite of differences in collateral commitments, is what underlies the representational dimension of discourse.

Beliefs and claims that are *propositionally* contentful are necessarily *representationally* contentful because their inferential articulation essentially involves a *social* dimension. That social dimension is unavoidable because the inferential significance of a claim, the appropriate antecedents and consequences of a doxastic commitment, depend on the background of collateral commitments available for service as auxiliary hypotheses. Thus any specification of a propositional content must be made from the perspective of some such set of commitments. One wants to say that the *correct* inferential role is determined by the collateral claims that are *true*. Just so; that is what *each* interlocutor wants to say--each has an at least slightly different perspective from

which to evaluate inferential proprieties. Representational locutions make explicit the sorting of commitments into those attributed and those undertaken--without which communication would be impossible, given those differences of perspective. The *representational* dimension of propositional contents reflects the *social* structure of their *inferential* articulation in the game of giving and asking for reasons.

Robert B. Brandom
University of Pittsburgh