

Perspectival Content and Expressing a Mental State vs Asserting One Has It

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2. Defending the Distinction

(3) I am bored.

One can express boredom by using (3) and thereby asserting that one is bored. But that is not the only way. Pulling a face or yawning would be expressions of boredom that do not involve asserting that one is bored. (Ayer's defense)

Additional support: we also have to distinguish expression of belief from assertion that one believes:

(4) Paris is bigger than London.

(5) I believe that Paris is bigger than London.

If my utterance (5) is false, my utterance of (4) could still be true (though insincere).

(1) and (2) cannot be equivalent:

"I do not disapprove of stealing, even though it is bad." — coherent

("If st is bad, I disapprove of it."—not tautologous, "If st is bad, I do not disapprove of it." —coherent.)

[BTW: Ayer might still have a problem here, despite what he says: his theory predicts pragmatic incoherence, similar to "p and I don't believe p"]

1. Ayer on emotivism and subjectivism

we reject the alternative subjectivist view that a man who asserts that a certain action is right, ... , is saying that he himself approves of it, on the ground that a man who confessed that he sometimes approved of what was bad or wrong would not be contradicting himself. (1946, p. 107)

... whereas the subjectivist holds that ethical statements actually assert the existence of certain feelings, we hold that ethical statements are expressions and excitants of feeling which do not necessarily involve any assertions. (1946, 113)

Ayer distinguishes *expressing* a feeling from asserting that one has that feeling.

- (1) Stealing is bad.
- (2) I disapprove of stealing.

By uttering (1) S expresses her disapproval of stealing, but does not assert that she disapproves of it.

3. Perspectival Content

Classic contents meet the objectivity constraint:

If it is correct [incorrect] for one thinker to believe a content at some time, then it is also correct [incorrect] to believe it for any other thinker at any other time.

Perspectival contents are not subject to the objectivity constraint.

Types of Motivation:

1st "observe" same content but different correctness status (relativism, *de se*)

2nd observe shiftability under embedding (relativism, "unarticulatedness")

For simplicity, focus on an unstructured notion of perspectival content:

centred content: a function from "centred worlds" to extensions/TVs.

centred world: ordered pair $\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle$, such that a is a thinker, t is a time, w is a possible world.

For sentences: think of their contents in context as sets of centred worlds.

4. Examples

B1: Hume believes himself to have written the *Treatise*.

B2: Heimson believes himself to have written the *Treatise*.

U1: Hume: "I wrote the *Treatise*."

U2: Heimson: "I wrote the *Treatise*."

1st type of motivation: observe a similarity in content and difference in correctness:

$c1=c2=\{\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle \mid a \text{ has written } \textit{Treatise} \text{ by } t \text{ in } w\}$

B3: Hume believes vanilla to be better than chocolate.

B4: Heimson believes vanilla to be better than chocolate.

U3: Hume: "Vanilla is better than chocolate."

U4: Heimson: "Vanilla is better than chocolate."

1st and 2nd type of motivation: observe similarity in content and difference in correctness. Also: embeddings "For Hume ...", "Not for everyone ...".

$c3=c4=\{\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle \mid a \text{ prefers vanilla to chocolate at } t \text{ in } w\}$

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6. Quick Fix?

Precisify $c6$, e.g.:

$c6^* = \{\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle \mid a \text{'s standard at } t \text{ ranks vanilla higher than choc in } w\}$

But then there will be other sentences that create problems:

(8) My standard ranks vanilla higher than chocolate.

$c8=c6^*=\{\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle \mid a \text{'s standard at } t \text{ ranks vanilla higher than choc in } w\}$

Observation:

Once we have found the right content for (6), call it " $c6!$ ", we will be able to find a new sentence (9), which asserts that the speaker meets the condition of correctness specified in $c6!$. Then $c9 = c6!$.

It would never be the case that someone utters both (6) and (9) and be correct in one case but not in the other. (unlike the Ayer case of (1) and (2)).

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5. New Expression/Assertion Problem

(6) Vanilla is better than chocolate.

(7) I prefer vanilla to chocolate.

1st and 2nd type of motivation tell us:

$c6 = \{\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle \mid a \text{ prefers vanilla to chocolate at } t \text{ in } w\}$

1st type of motivation tells us:

$c7 = \{\langle\langle a, t \rangle, w \rangle \mid a \text{ prefers vanilla to chocolate at } t \text{ in } w\}$

So, our 1st motivation type for perspectival content leads us to assign the same content to (6) and (7), to say that they express the same mental state and assert the same content! Problem!

Also: embedding behaviour requires that $c6$ and $c7$ be different. Problem!

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7. Solutions

Bite the bullet:

Accept that the content of (6) and (7) is the same for some purposes (made possible by foregoing observation). E.g.:

A: belief contents are the same, but assertoric and/or semantic content are not.

B: belief content and semantic content the same, but explain difference in embedding and conversational behaviour by special rules concerning "I" and other indexicals.

Blame unstructured content:

Introduce finer-grained perspectival contents, e.g. structured. Explain the differences between (6) and (7) in this way:

$c6$ involves the perspectival *better*-concept, that makes it perspectival. $c7$ involves the perspectival *I*-concept, that's what makes $c7$ perspectival.

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