

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE "HERE" AND NO TIME LIKE "NOW"

Albert Atkin

I. INTRODUCTION

Is it possible for me to refer to someone other than myself with the word "I"? Or somewhere other than where I am with the word "here"? Or some time other than the present with the word "now"? David Kaplan, who provides the best worked out semantics for pure-indexical terms like "I," "here," and "now" (1989) suggests, quite intuitively, that I could not. Put simply, "I am here now" looks as though I can never utter it and have it turn out false. But, intuitive as this seems, one need only hear the answering machine message, "Sorry! I am not here now," to see that there may be problems. If I can't fail to refer to where I am and when I'm there with "here" and "now," why is my apparently contradictory assertion so readily comprehensible?¹

Many have been quick to abandon Kaplan's account of pure-indexicals in the face of such problems. The focus of this paper, though, is those who develop sophisticated accounts of how we determine different contexts for applying pure-indexicals. The hope is that this handles problem cases while allowing us to retain most of Kaplan's theory. However, this paper introduces and examines some additional uses of pure-indexicals which pose an interesting problem for the context-determination adaptation of Kaplan's ac-

count. It is argued that context-determination theorists cannot explain these cases in the same way that they explain standard problem cases, and that any reason they can offer for denying the relevance of such cases to accounts of pure-indexicals will apply equally well to the cases that motivate their theories, thus rendering context-determination accounts superfluous.

In what follows, then, there is a brief summary of Kaplan's account, the problem cases that threaten it, and the context-determination theorist's response to these problem cases. The interesting and problematic uses of pure-indexicals that context-determination accounts cannot explain are then introduced, and an explanation is given of why there is no way for the context-determination theorist to exclude these cases from our accounts of pure-indexicals without also excluding the cases that motivate their own theory.

2. KAPLAN'S ACCOUNT

Famously, in his account of context-sensitive terms such as "I," "here," "now," "this," and "that," Kaplan (1989) identifies two kinds of indexical: *Pure-Indexicals* and *Demonstratives*. What motivates this division of indexicals into two types is a variation in the way the two refer. According to Kaplan, all indexicals have a *character* or linguistic

meaning which serves as a reference-determining rule when applied to the context of utterance. The linguistic meaning of a pure-indexical need only be applied to that context in order to determine a referent. The linguistic meaning of a demonstrative, on the other hand, is not enough to determine a referent; something additional, like a pointing or an intention, is required. According to this division, “I” “here” and “now” are pure-indexicals, since “the linguistic rules which govern their use fully determine the referent for each context” (Kaplan 1989, p. 491), and “this” and “that” are demonstratives since “[t]he linguistic rules which govern [their] use are not sufficient to determine their referent in all contexts of use” (Kaplan 1989, p. 490)—something extra is required. In this paper, the focus of interest is in pure-indexicals, and in particular, in one of the consequences of Kaplan’s distinction: because the linguistic meanings of pure-indexicals fully determine their reference when applied to a context, their reference is, so to speak, automatic. This means that any occurrence of “I” automatically refers to the speaker of the context, any occurrence of “here” automatically refers the location of the context, and any occurrence of “now” automatically refers to the time of the context. However, there are uses of the pure-indexicals which suggest that this is wrong. Consider the following two cases:

(1) I notice that students have been turning up to see my colleague all morning but he doesn’t appear to be in. Rather than leave the students hanging around, waiting to see if he answers the door, I pick up a Post-it note that I wrote yesterday for my own office door and stick it to his; the note says, “I am not here now.”²

(2) A historian giving a lecture on Napoleon in 2005 says, “It is 1796. Napoleon, now commander of the French army, marches on Austria.”³

There are many similar examples in the literature, but these two cases are largely

indicative of the difficulties facing Kaplan’s account. Now, why are these cases problematic? Well, in (1), if Kaplan is right and the reference for pure-indexicals is automatic, then the indexicals in the note I stick to my colleague’s door refer to me (since I wrote it), to my office (since that is where I wrote it), and to yesterday (since that is when I wrote it). However, the students appear to have no problem in taking the note to refer to my colleague, his office, and the time they read the note, as intended. Similarly for (2): Kaplan’s account suggests that “now” refers to the time the historian makes his utterance. But everyone in the lecture, quite rightly, takes “now” to refer to 1796. This is not as Kaplan predicts. We must conclude that something is wrong with his account of pure-indexicals.

3. CONTEXT-DETERMINATION ACCOUNTS

There are a range of responses to such cases, but the focus here is on what we shall call the “context-determination” responses of Predelli (1998a, 1998b), Romdenh-Romluc (2002), and Corazza, Fish, and Gorvett (2002). There are important differences among these three accounts, but, crucially, all wish to retain the fundamental parts of Kaplan’s theory, and all agree on why Kaplan appears to have problems with cases like (1) and (2). The starting point for all context-determination accounts is to note that Kaplan is right that pure-indexicals determine reference automatically with respect to a context, but wrong to assume that the context to which linguistic meanings are applied is automatically the context of utterance. For example, it is quite clear that neither the historian in (2), nor his audience, identify the time of utterance as the referent for his use of “now.” But, if the linguistic meaning of “now” is automatically applied to the context of utterance, then it seems that determining the time of utterance as referent is unavoidable, even though such a result offends our intuitions. The context-determination theorist, then, thinks that Kaplan’s theory must be

amended, by rejecting the assumption that the appropriate reference-determining context is automatically the context of utterance, and instead, finding a different method for determining the appropriate context in any given case. The benefit of this is that the linguistic meaning for pure-indexicals stays fixed and stable from case to case, and still determines a referent automatically when applied to a context. The trick for dealing with problem cases is to work out which context is appropriate for applying linguistic meaning.

So, how do context-determination accounts work? The key idea, as stated above, is that since there can be no automatic assumptions about where to apply linguistic meaning, an alternative method for determining which context is appropriate must be found. Once such a method is to hand and has been used in some case to determine a context, matters proceed, by and large, as Kaplan suggests—by applying the linguistic meanings of pure-indexicals to that context, thereby determining reference automatically. For instance, Predelli (1998a, 1998b) identifies the appropriate context in any given case as the *intended* context of *interpretation*. If this method is applied to (1) above, then the context of interpretation I intend for my note is that context where students gather around my colleague's door, and not the context where I produce the note. By applying the linguistic meanings of "I," "here" and "now" to the intended context of interpretation the referents seem to come out right, and in the automatic manner that Kaplan suggests.⁴ It looks, then, as though by dropping the assumption that the appropriate context is automatically the context of utterance, and instead adopting a context-determination account, it is possible to overcome problems like (1) and (2) without difficulty, and keep the fundamentals of Kaplan's account. As stated above, however, there are other cases which context-determination theorists cannot deal with, and cannot exclude from accounts

of pure-indexicals without rendering their own theories superfluous.

4. NEWER PROBLEM CASES

Consider the following two cases:

(3) At the local concert hall I listen to a performance of a Mozart Divertimento. As the music proceeds, a friend whispers, "listen how the second couplet and third refrain are repeated back-to-back." He then pauses and says, "*Here* Mozart gives the line of the refrain to the oboe."

(4) I watch a TV program where someone hikes while giving a commentary on his journey. As he begins to walk down a mountainside, he pauses and says to camera, "The Mountain *now* descends steeply to the sea."

Clearly, these cases use pure-indexicals in unusual ways, but then, so do (1) and (2). So why do (3) and (4) represent problems for context-determination accounts? The difficulty becomes clear when the results of applying context-determination theories to these cases are examined in more detail.

Taking Predelli (1998a, 1998b) as the best example of context-determination accounts, the appropriate context for reference determination in these cases, as identified by the intended context of interpretation, happens to be the context of utterance.⁵ However, applying the linguistic meanings for "here" and "now" to this context determines the wrong referents. In (3), applying the linguistic meaning for "here" to the appropriate context, the context of utterance, determines the concert hall, (the location of the context), but the referent is clearly the time when the oboe begins to play the refrain. In (4), applying the character for "now" to the appropriate context, the context of utterance, determines the time of utterance (whenever that may have been), but the real referent is the location on the mountain where the descent to the sea begins. Following context-determination theorists, then, will lead us to apply linguistic

meaning to the context of utterance in (3) and (4), but it is clear that this will not determine the right referents. Something has gone wrong for context-determination accounts in these cases.⁶

What is immediately obvious is that context-determination theorists cannot allow these cases to feature in their account of pure-indexicals. If they do, then there are clear uses of pure-indexicals for which they do not get the referents right and so their account does not give a full and adequate explanation of pure-indexicals. Cases such as (3) and (4), then, are damaging unless the context-determination theorist has a principled reason for excluding them from accounts of pure-indexicals. However, the two most promising reasons for excluding (3) and (4), that is, to treat them as either demonstratives, or as idiomatic uses, apply equally well to cases like (1) and (2). If the context-determination theorist exploits these grounds for exclusion, they effectively explain away the cases that motivate their account.

5. RULING OUT SIMPLE RESPONSES

Although, as mentioned above, the two most promising responses to (3) and (4) are to suggest that “here” and “now” either function as demonstratives, or are idiomatic—and these cases are examined in more detail shortly—there are other less fruitful, although immediately intuitive, responses that are worth pausing for if only to rule them out quickly. The obvious response to these cases is that, first, sentences like (3) and (4) are awkward, contrived, at best marginal, and not something that any theory should want to include; and, secondly, that sentences like (3) and (4) are literally true: that is, in (3) “here” picks out a place (and not a time), and in (4) “now” picks out a time (and not a place). What should be said about these simple responses? After all, if such responses are available and effective, the context-determination has no need to engage

with cases like (3) and (4) at all, let alone find a good reason to exclude them.

The clear response to the claim that (3) and (4) are contrived, awkward or marginal is to point out that such cases are far more commonplace and mundane than might initially be suspected, and that, as odd as such uses of indexicals may look, speakers really have little difficulty using and understanding them. Take for example, that I frequently watch films with my partner who constantly tells me bits of information like “Here’s where that stunt I was telling you about happens,” or “Here’s where Jody discovers that Jack is really Jim!” Such instances are quite common. My partner has no qualms about using “here” in this way, and I have no problems in understanding her when she makes such utterances. But most importantly, these common uses are just like (3); they are uses of “here” where the referent is not locational. Similarly, I mark numerous student essays each year that use sentences such as “having established the *Cogito*, Descartes now argues that we clearly and distinctly perceive God,” or even, “having shown X, I will now show that Y follows.” When I read such sentences, I don’t find myself disturbed by how uncommon they are. Nor do I find myself struggling to get to grips with what the student means. Rather, sentences like these which, in the manner of (4), use “now” with a non-temporal referent, are just straightforward to use, and straightforward to understand. So, far from being contrived, awkward or marginal, such utterances are common, and fit neatly alongside more “normal” uses of “here” and “now.”

As for the second claim, that sentences like (3) and (4) are literally true, the idea is that in (3) “here” picks out a *place* or *position* in the musical score, as if we are identifying a particular spot on a sheet of music, and in (4), “now” picks out a time in the journey, as if we are following a list of instructions about the temporal sequence of the journey. But

when they are judged in light of speakers' and hearers' communicative intentions and understanding, it is clear that these literal readings of (3) and (4) are not correct.

In (3), if I ask my friend to be clearer about *where* he means (assuming of course he doesn't think my question too odd), he will likely clarify with "just then," a response with clear temporal intent, rather than by finding sheet music and pointing to the bar where the oboe takes the refrain. It seems obvious that my friend intends to identify a time with his use of "here," and it is equally obvious that I pick out a time by attending to his utterance. For our exchange, the presence or otherwise of a score is simply irrelevant. And of course, when my partner tells me what is about to happen in the film we are watching, at no point does she intend to tell me anything about a place or location in a script, and at no point do I take her to be doing anything but telling me what is going on in the film at the particular *time* she speaks.

Similarly, in (4), if a hiking-companion of the presenter asks "*when* does the path descend?" again, assuming the presenter is charitable and doesn't think his companion rather misunderstood what he said, the presenter will likely clarify with "just there"; a locational utterance. Indeed, the time in the journey is simply irrelevant to the presenter's reference. The hikers could take a route which does not include the steep path (but passes close by say) yet still point out its sudden descent to the sea. The only constraint on the presenter being able to make this utterance is that he be near the path, again emphasizing the locational referent. And of course, when my students tell me that "Descartes *now* argues . . ." I don't take them to mean that Descartes began to set out his position at the time they inscribed that sentence. Rather, I take them to refer to a *place* in the overall structure of Descartes's philosophy where he argues for our clear and distinct perception of God.⁷

Overall, then, these immediate responses to sentences like (3) and (4) are not enough to dispel the problems they pose, and context-determination theorists will have to challenge these cases on different grounds. And of course, as will be shown, although these grounds may well be a good way to handle sentences like (3) and (4), context-determination theorists cannot use them without undermining their own theories.

6. EXAMINING MORE PROMISING RESPONSES

As suggested earlier, the two most promising arguments for excluding (3) and (4) are to claim either that they function as demonstratives, or that they are idiomatic. The argument given below, though, suggests that although either response may well explain (3) and (4), neither response is open to the context-determination theorist.

The first of these promising responses, then, is to claim that (3) and (4) are what are commonly called "demonstrative uses."⁸ For example, although "here" is usually treated as a pure-indexical, there are occasions when it is used with some essential extra-linguistic clue, as when I point at a place on a map and say, "Next week I shall be here." Kaplan is aware of such uses (1989, p. 491), but thinks they can be excluded from our account of pure-indexicals. For Kaplan (and others), it is acceptable to treat such uses as though they are demonstratives since chief in determining their reference is an accompanying clue to saliency. Consequently, there is no need to let such cases infect standard treatments of pure-indexicals.

Now, if it is possible to employ this strategy against cases like (3) and (4) and treat them as demonstrative uses, then, so the argument goes, there is a principled reason for excluding them and they need not threaten the context-determination account. It is only when these cases are treated as pure-indexicals that

they fail to determine the referent expected of them. But can the context-determination theorist employ this strategy and exclude such cases as demonstrative uses? The answer is no, and for two reasons. It is not so clear cut that cases like (3) and (4) are like demonstrative readings by any usual standards. But, most importantly, even assuming the context-determination theorist can make a case for treating (3) and (4) as demonstratives, this strategy applies equally well to cases such as (1) and (2). Thus the strategy renders context-determination theories obsolete. Let's look at these two reasons in more depth.

First then, is it clear that cases like (3) and (4) *are* demonstrative uses? The nearest thing to a standard criterion for distinguishing normal uses from demonstrative uses is that the latter can be read as paraphrases of normal demonstratives.⁹ For instance, when I point at a map and say, "Next week I shall be *here*," I might be understood as saying "Next week I shall be *there*"; it seems as though "there" is the obvious paraphrase for "here." However, applying this technique to (3) and (4), the obvious paraphrase is *not* a demonstrative. In (3), the obvious paraphrase for "here" is "now," and in (4) the obvious paraphrase for "now" is "here"; these are pure-indexicals. It is not clear, then, that (3) and (4) are best explained as demonstrative uses of pure-indexicals, and it is not clear that the context-determination theorist can use such a claim to deflect these new cases.

The context-determination theorist could claim, of course, that the paraphrase criterion is not the best way to determine when a pure-indexical is being used as a demonstrative, but this leads to the second, and arguably more crucial, reason why this strategy is not open to the context-determination theorist. The clearest grounds that the context-determination theorist has for claiming that (3) and (4) are demonstrative uses of pure-indexicals is that in such cases following the rule for the pure-indexical gets us nowhere, and instead

some clue to saliency (for example, pointing or prominence) is required. The exact nature of the clue to saliency is, of course, controversial, but it seems clear that in (3) and (4) linguistic meaning isn't enough, and clues to saliency do most of the work. So for instance, it is by standing on the spot where the mountain begins to descend to the sea that the utterer in (4) indicates the location to which he refers, despite using a temporal term. And similarly, it is in virtue of the obviously careful temporal placing of "here" that the utterer in (3) indicates the time to which he refers, despite using a locational term. This is the clearest case for thinking that (3) and (4) are demonstrative uses; they may fail the obvious paraphrase test, but they clearly use some extra-linguistic clue to saliency to determine their referents, just as demonstratives.

Now, it may be that this is the best way to treat these cases and there is some mileage in this claim. This option, however, is not open to the context-determination theorist. Using this argument may prove effective against cases like (3) and (4), but if they use such an argument, the context-determination theorists are, so to speak, poisoning their own well. The reason is simply that the claim that cases like (3) and (4) rely on clues to saliency and so are demonstratives applies equally well to the cases that motivate the context-determination account, e.g., cases like (1) and (2). For instance, in (1), it is by placing the note on the office door that I indicate to students who, where, and when the note refers to; the door the note is stuck to provides a clue to saliency. And in (2), it is in virtue of the preparatory statement, "It is 1796," that the historian is able to use "now" to refer to that time. Such a statement serves as a clue to saliency. But this has to be a problem for the context-determination theorist. If it is also possible to explain (1) and (2) as demonstrative uses, then the motivation to put right what's wrong with Kaplan's account of pure-indexicals with context-determination is

lost; *all* such problem cases are demonstrative uses and can, in principle, be excluded from our considerations about pure-indexicals. There is no longer a problem, and no longer any need for a solution. It seems, then, as though the context-determination theorist cannot exclude cases like (3) and (4) in this way without rendering his own account of pure-indexicals superfluous. In short, if the context-determination theorist has found a reason not to worry about (3) and (4), then he seems to have found a reason for Kaplan not to worry about (1) and (2).¹⁰

The second potential response to such cases is to treat them as idioms. For instance, Corazza (2004, p. 166) says, "When 'now' and 'here' are not used to pick out a time and location they belong to the idiomatic use of language."¹¹ If, the context-determination theorist may argue, cases like (3) and (4) can be dismissed as idiomatic, then there is no reason to be concerned by them. After all, the word "bucket" in the idiom "kick the bucket" fails to refer to a bucket, but literal reference failure in idiomatic contexts does not color our theory about how "bucket" refers in non-idiomatic contexts. If (3) and (4) are idiomatic uses, then the context-determination theorists have a principled reason to exclude them from their account of pure-indexicals. As with the demonstrative reading response, however, two reasons rule out such a move. It is not altogether clear that cases like (3) and (4) behave as idioms by any usual standards. But, more importantly, any workable case the context-determination theorist can make applies equally well to cases like (1) and (2), again rendering their theories obsolete.

First then, are (3) and (4) obviously idiomatic? By any standard interpretation, (3) and (4) do not behave as idioms. Take, for example, the idiom "kick the bucket" in the following sentence:

(5) John kicked the bucket

This may have a literal reading (where John actually kicks a bucket) or an idiomatic reading (where John dies). On its idiomatic reading, (5) is resistant to re-ordering and interruption.¹² For instance:

(5a) The bucket John kicked

(5b) John kicked the leaky old bucket

are topicalized, and modified versions of (5). But, (5a) and (5b) only make sense on a literal, non-idiomatic reading of (5). Idioms, then, cannot be re-ordered or modified and still retain their idiomatic meaning. Now, if (3) and (4) are also idiomatic, they too should be resistant to such re-ordering and interruption. It seems, however, that (3) and (4) are *not* resistant to re-ordering and interruption. For instance:

(3a) To the oboe Mozart here gives the refrain.

(3b) Here Mozart gives the refrain to the versatile oboe.

(4a) To the sea the mountain now descends steeply.

(4b) The rugged mountain now descends steeply to the cold sea.

Although these changes sound awkward, it does not alter the meaning of (3) and (4). Clearly, then, these cases are not resistant to re-ordering and modification, and so are not idiomatic if judged by the standard behavior of idioms.

Of course, the context-determination theorist may respond here by pointing out that although cases like (3) and (4) do not behave as idioms, describing them as "idiomatic uses" is merely meant to highlight the non-standard nature of such cases rather than to suggest any parallels with phrases like "spill the beans" or "hit the books." As those working on idioms point out, an idiom is "a phrase (or sentence) which is conventionally used with a meaning different from its literal

constructed meaning” (Davis 1983, p. 68). Such a consideration applies to (3) and (4); the literal reading of these sentences treats “here” as locational and “now” as temporal, but this differs from the conventional reading where, as we have seen, “here” is treated as temporal and “now” as locational. Indeed, some time has already been spent above arguing against the literal reading of (3) and (4). It seems, then, that if a loose reading of “idiomatic uses” is allowed, then cases like (3) and (4) *are* idiomatic. Thus these cases can be excluded from our accounts of pure-indexicals. However, even though there may be mileage in this approach it is clearly not open to the context-determination theorist. Again, if they adopt such an approach to exclude (3) and (4), they poison their own well and exclude cases like (1) and (2).

In conventional use, the meaning of (1) “I am not here now,” where it is written by me and placed on my colleague’s door some time later, is that my colleague is not in his room at the time the students read the note. But the literal meaning is that I am not at the place where I wrote the note at the time when I wrote the note.¹³ Clearly, then, the literal meaning of (1) differs from the conventional meaning in this case, and, by the standards used to exclude (3) and (4), must therefore count as idiomatic and should also be excluded from our accounts of pure-indexicals. And of course, similar considerations hold for (2);

conventional meaning allows “now” to refer to 1796, but in a strict literal sense, “now” refers to the time when the historian makes the utterance in question. Obviously, this is a problem for context-determination theorists. If their means for excluding (3) and (4) also exclude (1) and (2) from accounts of pure-indexicals, then they have explained away the very cases that motivate their theories; the context-determination theorists’ reasons for excluding (3) and (4) become Kaplan’s reasons for excluding (1) and (2).

7. CONCLUSION

What, then, does this all mean for context-determination accounts of pure-indexicals?

On the one hand, Predelli et al. cannot allow cases like (3) and (4) to stand, since their accounts systematically fail to get the reference right. On the other hand, the clearest grounds for excluding (3) and (4) are options that the context-determination theorist cannot take, since these grounds also exclude the cases which motivate their account. Without any need to explain these cases within an account of pure-indexicals, there is no need for a context-determination account. The problem facing the context-determination theorist, at least with respect to problem cases, is clear. Either they must find a reason for excluding these cases that does not undermine their account; or they must accept that their account is flawed.¹⁴

University of Glasgow

NOTES

1. As it turns out, answering machine messages are not the only place where pure-indexicals are used to refer to counter-intuitive times, places, and agents. Cases will be introduced below, but for examples, see, among others, Vision (1985), Smith (1989), Sidelle (1991), and Salmon (1991).
2. This example is adapted from Corazza, Fish, and Gorravett (2002).
3. This example is adapted from Predelli (1998a).
4. Other context-determination theorists identify the appropriate context differently. Romdenh-Romluc (2002) determines the appropriate context via to the context identified by a competent and attentive audience using cues from a speaker. Corazza, Fish, and Gorravett (2002) determine the appropriate context via the conventions surrounding the "setting" in which the pure-indexical is used.
5. For the record, following the methods prescribed by Romdenh-Romluc or Corazza Corazza, Fish, and Gorravett (cf. note 4) determines, *mutatis mutandis*, the same appropriate context in (3) and (4) as Predelli's method.
6. In fact, it should be obvious that applying the linguistic meanings of "here" and "now" to *any* context in (3) and (4) will fail to pick out the right referents: the linguistic meanings of these indexicals always pick out location for (3) when a time is needed, and a time for (4) when a location is needed.
7. It may be controversial whether a place or position in the structure of an argument is a place in the appropriate sense, i.e., a place that could be best picked out by "here," but it should be clear that in such a case "now" is not picking out a time and cannot be read literally.
8. Thanks to Jenny Saul for suggesting this possible response.
9. See, for instance, Romdenh-Romluc (2002, p. 35, n. 2).
10. Whether or not Kaplan *should* worry about deviant instances of pure-indexicals is, of course, a separate issue. This much, though, is clear—context-determination theories cannot offer Kaplan away out of these problems if they cannot deal with cases like (3) and (4).
11. Corazza (2004) proposes an anaphoric "tacit initiator" account to handle such cases. It is not, however, a context-determination account and so I shall not discuss it here.
12. See Huddleston (1984, pp. 42–44) for a standard explanation of sentence behavior under idiomatic readings.
13. It is this literal reading that generates the wide spread belief that "I am not here now" is a logical falsehood since it cannot be uttered truly. This intuition clearly relies on the literal constructed meaning of sentences like (1).
14. Thanks to Jenny Saul, Philip Percival, Gary Kemp, and Alan Carter for their helpful comments and suggestions.

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