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What is special about indexical attitudes?

Matheus Valente

LOGOS, Universitat de Barcelona, Barcelona, Spain

ABSTRACT

In this paper, I assess whether indexical attitudes, e.g. beliefs and desires, have any special properties or present any special challenge to theories of propositional attitudes. I begin by investigating the claim that allegedly problematic indexical cases are just instances of the familiar phenomenon of referential opacity. Regardless of endorsing that claim, I provide an argument to the effect that indexical attitudes do have a special property. My argument relies on the fact that one cannot account for what is it to share someone else's indexical attitudes without rejecting some plausible thesis about propositional attitudes. In the end, I assess Herman Cappelen and Josh Dever's considerations on intentional action and extract an argument from them that could – if successful – neutralize my own. I finish by arguing that their argument has an important flaw, thus failing to convince us that indexical attitudes are just as ordinary as any other.

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1. Introduction

Sometime during the 1970s, philosophers started paying attention to how a set of attitudes, those which we normally express by means of indexical expressions, seem to pose a *special* challenge to theories of propositions. Two terminological remarks:

- (1) By 'indexical attitudes' I mean those attitudes (such as beliefs and desires) that we normally express by means of indexical expressions (such as the first-personal pronoun). This is a neutral characterization and is silent about which special properties – if any – those attitudes are supposed to have.

- (2) By 'propositions' I mean the semantically efficacious contents of attitudes by virtue of which those attitudes gain their normative and explanatory power (e.g. allowing us to explain subjects' actions, assess their rationality, etc.).

The question that will concern me in this paper can be summarized as: Do indexical attitudes present any *special* challenge to theories of propositions? The gloss on 'special' is particularly relevant, since it might be that indexical attitudes are hard to characterize but only for the same reasons that other singular attitudes (e.g. those expressible by proper names) also are. Theories of proposition usually assume that attitudes are *dyadic* relations between agents and propositions, which are then defined as *absolute* and *shareable* contents such that it is irrational to hold antagonistic attitudes (e.g. belief and disbelief) towards them at the same time. To be shareable is to be accessible by any speaker and to be absolute is to have a truth-value that depends only on the objective state of the world. There might be many arguments to the effect that those assumptions (and others) are not jointly consistent and Lewis might be right in saying that 'the conception we associate with the word 'proposition' may be something of a jumble of conflicting *desiderata*' (Lewis 1986, 54). Nonetheless, my only concern is finding out whether any of those arguments arise exclusively because of indexical attitudes.

In the following sections, we will see that demarcating the 'special indexical challenge' is far from an easy task. Indeed, many have failed to see that in order to prove that one such challenge really exists, it is not enough to show that one cannot fully characterize indexical attitudes neither by means of *de re* nor *de dicto* propositions, since the same predicament is true of other singular attitudes. However, I do think that at least one such challenge can be demarcated. It has got to do with the following question: What does it take for someone to share someone else's indexical attitudes? I will argue that the three most plausible answers to that question all lead to the rejection of some independently plausible thesis about propositions. Furthermore, I will show that this challenge is particular to indexical attitudes.

2. Frege's Puzzle and indexical cases: the 'no *de re* and no *de dicto*' challenge

When one is trying to argue for there being something special about indexical attitudes, it is natural to turn one's attention to the work of Perry (1977, 1979). Perry's memorable characters and thought-experiments quickly became part of the philosophical canon, although it is often not easy to tell

what is their point supposed to be. I take it that Perry's discussion is usually based on two types of scenario. One type usually involves a subject who has information about himself without realizing that it is about himself. The key point of those cases is to show that indexical attitudes cannot be reduced neither to singular (*de re*) nor descriptive (*de dicto*) attitudes. In this section, I will argue that these 'ignorance cases' do not display anything special about indexical attitudes. While this is not an original point, I think that previous writers who have defended it failed to address certain worries. We will get to the second – and, in my opinion, more interesting – type of scenario in the following section.

The case of the amnesiac Rudolph Lingens is a paradigmatic example of an ignorance case about indexical attitudes (another famous example is the Messy Shopper):

Rudolph Lingens:

The amnesiac Rudolph Lingens is lost in the Stanford library. Lingens's amnesia is severe, and he has forgotten who he is. After reading a biography of Rudolph Lingens, he has a belief he could express by saying 'Rudolph Lingens has been to San Sebastián'. But at the same time, because he does not remember ever going to Spain, he does not have a belief that he could express by saying, 'I have been to San Sebastián'.¹

The purpose of that kind of story is to show that, even for those who are exceedingly savvy about wordly matters, there is always room for some residual indexical ignorance (i.e. ignorance of matters that would have most naturally been expressed by means of indexicals). More particularly, Lingens's story suggests that, whichever proposition he expresses by² 'Rudolph Lingens has been to San Sebastián', it is not irrational for him to endorse it while refraining to endorse whichever proposition he would have expressed by 'I have been to San Sebastián'. Thus, given the constitutive assumption that propositions should be individuated so that, if it is rational to hold antagonistic attitudes towards two of them, then they are not the same, it follows that: coming out from Lingens's mouth, those two utterances express distinct propositions.

At first, it is not obvious why that would be a particularly difficult challenge for a theory of propositions: we just need to search through the set of all propositions and assign these utterances two distinct ones. Since propositions are supposed to be the kind of thing that can be assessed for truth or

¹This is inspired by, but not identical to, Perry 1979, 21–22.

²Wherever it does not lead to ambiguity, I will omit 'uttering' when mentioning sentences with quotation marks. Thus, 'The belief he would express by "I am Rudolph Lingens"' is an abbreviation for 'The belief he would express by uttering "I am Rudolph Lingens"'.

falsity given a possible state of the world, they must either ‘say’ something general or particular about the world. To that fact corresponds the distinction between singular (*de re*) and descriptive (*de dicto*) propositions. On the assumption that propositions are absolute, these two types of proposition are all the propositions we have.

But notice that no absolute proposition will do the job. Firstly, it cannot be the singular (*de re*) proposition that is true in every world in which Lingens has gone to San Sebastián, since this is most naturally seen as being the one expressed by the non-indexical utterance (and there has to be at least two distinct propositions around). It will also not do to characterize it as the proposition that is true in every world where the utterer of U [Lingens’ utterance of ‘I have been to San Sebastián’] has been to San Sebastián, since it is easily conceivable that Lingens fails to realize that he himself is the utterer of U (and, as a consequence, believes that proposition without having the indexical attitude). Secondly, it seems that no purely descriptive (*de dicto*) proposition will be of any help. We could conceive of Lingens believing that, e.g. *the one and only amnesiac in the Stanford Library has been to San Sebastián* without him having any correspondent indexical attitude (because he could fail to believe that he himself is the only amnesiac around). This point generalizes: assuming that Lingens believe that he is in a reduplication world (where every qualitative property is satisfied by at least two different individuals), there will be no uniquely satisfied property F such that we could say that, when Lingens thinks of himself by means of the first-personal pronoun, he thinks of himself as the F. In other words, there is no property F such that it is irrational for Lingens to believe that he himself has been to San Sebastián while failing to believe that *the F* has been to San Sebastián.

This is our predicament: the logical space of absolute propositions is exhausted by the set of all *de re* and *de dicto* propositions and none of those serve to properly characterize indexical attitudes. Thus, these attitudes cannot be characterized as dyadic relations between agents and absolute propositions. However – and most relevantly for our concerns – is this predicament essentially related to indexical attitudes? It is quite easy to show that it is not.

It did not take many years until people realized that the ‘no *de re* and no *de dicto*’ challenge, although legitimate, is less about indexicality than about the hyper-intensionality of singular thought.³ Both Magidor (2015)

³Stalnaker (1981) was probably the first to press this point. Cappelen and Dever (2013) brought these issues back to the spotlight and got the discussion running again. At the same time Magidor (2015) was advancing very similar claims.

and Cappelen and Dever (2013) make a very strong case that this very challenge arises by means of cases which are *prima facie* unrelated to indexicals. To see that, notice how easy it is to construct an analog of Linguen's story not involving indexicals (nor amnesia):

(non-indexical) Rudolph Lingens:

Rudolph Lingens is lost in the Stanford library. Lingens knows that he is Rudolph Lingens but does not know that he is also known under a different name: Joseph K. After reading a biography of Joseph K (who happens to be himself), he has a belief he could express by saying 'Joseph K has a published biography'. But at the same time, he also has a belief that he could express by saying 'Rudolph Lingens does not have a published biography.'

This non-indexical story seems to pose the same challenge to theories of propositions than does its indexical counterpart. The difficulty in characterizing the propositions expressed by Lingens' two utterances is the same as we previously had. Firstly, one cannot characterize them by means of the *de re* proposition true in each world where Lingens has a published biography, since none of the two utterances seem to have a stronger claim on that proposition than the other. Secondly, no *de dicto* proposition (e.g. *the one and only lost person in the Stanford Library has a published biography*) can do the trick, since, for any *de dicto* proposition, we can conceive of Lingens believing it while disbelieving whichever are expressed by each of his utterances (and vice versa). Thus, the predicament we reach is the same: proper name attitudes cannot be characterized as dyadic relations to absolute propositions.

Here is a reaction someone could have at this point: 'even though the structure of the predicament is the same both for indexical and non-indexical cases, the solutions available to each are distinct – this is enough to show that there is something special about indexical attitudes'. This is a fair claim and should be taken seriously. Which types of solutions can we employ after discovering that propositional attitudes cannot be characterized as dyadic relations to absolute propositions? It seems there are at least those two possible solutions: one can either reject the claim that attitudes are merely dyadic relations (and then introduce a third factor in their account) or the claim that all propositions are absolute.

Perry (1979) preferred to reject the dyadic claim than to let go of the absoluteness of propositions. Thus, his solution is a type of 'third-factor strategy', according to which one needs a third ingredient – on top of the subject and the absolute proposition – to fully characterize an attitude. Perry called that third ingredient the 'belief state', although talk of 'guises' or 'modes of presentation' might also ring a bell. The important feature of that strategy

is that it opens the way for there being different ways of, e.g. believing the same absolute proposition. This allows one to claim that, while Lingens' utterances (both in the indexical and in the non-indexical stories) have the same absolute *de re* proposition as their content, they encode different ways of believing that content. Perry's theory is an instance of the general strategy of differentiating between the *content* of a belief from *the way* it is believed.

The third-factor strategy applies across the board, i.e. there is nothing about the introduction of a third ingredient in an account of attitudes that seems to be specially about indexicals or which would preclude its application to non-indexical attitudes. For just one concrete example, this third ingredient could be the representational vehicle by means of which one believes a proposition. Thus, one could claim that it is possible to believe the same singular proposition via the proper name 'Lingens', the proper name 'Joseph K' or the first-personal pronoun 'I' – and that those three manners of believing the same proposition all amount, in the end, to type-distinct beliefs. Whether this is a good theory or not should not concern us here. The important point is that, as a candidate solution to the phenomenon of opacity, the third-factor strategy does not seem to have a restricted application either to indexical or non-indexical attitudes.

However, things are not so clear when we look at the second general type of solution to the 'no *de re* and no *de dicto*' predicament: the strategy of introducing non-absolute (or relative) propositions. Lewis (1979) is perhaps its best example. Its crucial move is to complicate the notion of proposition. While one can assess the truth-value of an absolute proposition given no more than the full specification of a possible world, more is needed to assess a relative one. Take, for example, the case of first-personal attitudes. The natural idea is that a first-personal attitude expresses a proposition whose truth-value varies across different subjects. According to this idea, the proposition Lingens expresses by 'I have been to San Sebastián' is true or false *relative to a pair of a world and a thinker*, i.e. it is true just in case that thinker has been to San Sebastián in that world. Thus, it is true in the pair consisting of Lingens' world w and Lingens – the pair $\langle w, \text{Lingens} \rangle$ – but false in the pair consisting of our actual world w^1 and (up to this date) me – the pair $\langle w^1, \text{MV} \rangle$. By introducing this new class of propositions, one is able to discriminate between having a first-personal attitude and having a proper name attitude. One can say that the former has relative propositions as its content, whereas the latter has old-fashioned absolute ones. The same strategy can be generalized to other indexical expressions, e.g. temporal indexical attitudes ('Now is the time!') express time-relative propositions and locative indexical attitudes ('Here is the place!') express place-relative

propositions. However, it is not clear whether that strategy sheds any light on non-indexical attitudes. That is, what relativization could we put in place so that one would be able to distinguish between the propositions expressed via, e.g. coreferential proper names?

Lewis (1979, 135) himself was the first to point out that his theory was a bit too specific. Interestingly, he did not think that this was a big problem: 'My hunch is that this problem [the general phenomenon of singular thought] cuts across the issues I want to discuss [indexical attitudes], so I shall ignore it' (Lewis 1979, 135). Unfortunately for him, Lewis' hunch does not have as much weight these days as it had in the late 1970s, when the literature on indexicality was flourishing and virtually no one doubted that indexical attitudes were special in some sense. Indeed, as soon as one starts to wonder whether indexical attitudes pose any special challenge over and above other singular attitudes, any theory of propositions which is only able to account for the former will need to have really good excuses.

I think the right reaction to have about those issues is simply to point out that Lewis' strategy can in fact be extended so as to encompass all singular attitudes. One just needs to take into account the so-called 'centered descriptivist' strategy,⁴ according to which all singular expressions refer in virtue of being associated with definite descriptions containing indexical elements. Glossing over important details, one could claim that a name like 'Lingens' refers to *the person being called 'Lingens' by the persons from whom I've acquired that name* and that 'water' refers to *the clear and potable liquid filling the rivers and oceans in our environment*. The presence of indexicals in these descriptions makes it obvious that the attitudes characterized by them will not have absolute truth-conditions.

Now, even if centered descriptivism were proven to be a successful account of singular attitudes (we are as far as we can be from a consensus on that), one could complain that, as a solution to Frege's Puzzle, it only generalizes to non-indexical attitudes by reducing them to indexical ones. Thus, if it turned out that centered descriptivism is the best account of our singular attitudes, we would not have proven that indexical attitudes do not present any special challenge to theories of proposition: we would only have proven that much more attitudes are indexical in the first place.⁵

Someone suspicious about the importance of indexical attitudes could then complain:

⁴The roots of that theory are present in Lewis (1979) himself and Searle (1983). The epistemic two-dimensionalism of Chalmers (2006) and Jackson (1998) is a more recent instance of that general strategy.

⁵Ninan (2016, 98) expresses the same worry.

we have two extant solutions for the indexical and non-indexical cases of Frege's Puzzle – the Perrian and the Lewisian. They seem equally able to account for all the data but the latter additionally requires us to make the revisionary claim that all singular attitudes are indexical, thus, the Perrian one is clearly in better shape.

This leads us to a point in the discussion where not much is left to be said unless we are willing to get our hands dirty and start assessing concrete examples of Perrian theories and see how well they work. For just an example of how quickly things get complicated, it seems that concrete examples of Perrian theories typically end up having to claim that indexical attitudes have special properties not shared by non-indexical ones. Thus, even if the overall structure of Perrian solutions does not seem to imply any substantial distinction between indexical and non-indexical attitudes, what we find while examining concrete Perrian implementations is that, for one reason or another, they end up having to ascribe some special property to indexical ones. For just two examples, both Perry's own positive account and, more recently, García-Carpintero's (2016, 194) start from reasonable assumptions about attitudes and – because of issues related to action motivation – end up concluding that indexical attitudes have some form of 'limited accessibility', such that it is particularly hard to hold someone else's indexical attitudes.

Instead of assessing concrete accounts of singular attitudes and investigating whether there could be an implementation of a Perrian theory which did not entail anything special about indexical attitudes, I will take the hint that it is in relation to action motivation and sharing-conditions that indexical attitudes really become peculiar and analyze the interconnections of those issues. My excuse for doing so is not so much that the first line of inquiry is impossible to be pursued, but just that, as long as there are interesting issues to dissect without leaving the most general level of discussion, it is important that it be done before going deeper into more intricate material. As I hope to show in the next section, one can advance a pretty robust argument to the effect that indexical attitudes are specially challenging without having to say anything substantial about which solutions to Frege's Puzzle one should adopt.

3. Indexicals and action explanation

As we've seen in the previous sections, the 'no *de re* nor *de dicto* challenge' did not allow us to draw any fundamental distinctions between indexical and non-indexical attitudes. As far as it goes, we can only conclude that the attitudes we express by means of indexical expressions are usually not identical to the ones we express by means of proper names. One place to look for

peculiarity of indexical attitudes is in its relation to intentional action. Minor tweaks to Lingen's first story may suggest that, not only his two utterances seem to express distinct propositions (or, alternatively, to express the same proposition *in a different way*) but also that only the indexical one is able to give rise to intentional action:

Rudolph Lingens (Action):

The amnesiac Rudolph Lingens is lost in the Stanford library. Lingens's amnesia is severe, and he has forgotten who he is. After reading a biography of Rudolph Lingens, he has a belief he could express by saying, 'Rudolph Lingens's family is in San Sebastián' and a desire he could express by 'I desire that Rudolph Lingens reunites with his family'. However, only after realizing that he himself is Rudolph Lingens (a realization he could express by saying 'I am Rudolph Lingens!'), does he acquire motivation to go out and book a flight to San Sebastián.

The underlying idea suggested by that version of the story is that, so long as one only has non-indexical attitudes, one will not be capable of finding out how the subject matter of these attitudes are related to oneself and, since performing an action requires knowing how one is related to the object of one's action, one will not be able to form an intention to act on the basis of them. In other words, one is never motivated to act unless one has some beliefs one would express indexically. Following Cappelen and Dever (37) – henceforth C&D, one can rephrase that point in terms of what it takes to explain someone's intentional actions. The idea being that one cannot explain the intentionality of one's actions without mentioning, at some point, some indexical belief of that agent:

NIC (non-indexical incompleteness claim):

All non-indexical action explanations/rationalizations are incomplete because of a missing indexical component.

A first point to note is how implausible NIC is given our ordinary practice of explaining the actions of our peers. Is it not the case that we, more often than not, explain the reason behind people's actions without mentioning any self-representational component? Is it not enough to explain why someone voted for the communist candidate to point out that this agent believed that if everyone voted for the communist candidate, then the world would be a better place? Why would we need to include any self-representational attitude in that action explanation? The belief she would have expressed by 'I am a part of everyone', besides seeming silly, appears to play no role in her action. Perhaps the idea is that, in order to perform coarse-grained actions like voting, one needs to perform a multitude of finer-grained actions such as using one's hand to put the ballot on the urn. Then, one could claim that those basic bodily actions presuppose some sort of self-representation by

means of the subject (e.g. knowing where one hand is in relation to the urn). But that claim is just as implausible as the idea we had begun with. As we perform basic bodily actions, there is very little need of representation to be going on in our conscience – we rarely have explicit thoughts about where our body is and its relation to the objects of our environment. As long as there is any use for the information encoded in those thoughts, it is something our subconscious motor system is more than capable of taking account of. In summary, there seems to be no argument to the effect that most of our ordinary action explanations are incomplete or that every basic action need be motivated by some self-representation.

A second point to note is that, even if we grant that Lingens' action can only be explained by mentioning an 'I'-belief ('I am Rudolph Lingens!'), NIC is a universal generalization and, strictly speaking, does not follow from considering an isolated case (C&D, 41–42). At most, Lingens' case would seem to prove a weaker claim such as:

NIC2 (weak non-indexical incompleteness claim):

Some action explanations/rationalizations ineliminably contain an indexical component.

However, C&D (39) argue that there is no way 'to read NIC2 as anything but a trivial corollary of the opacity of action explanations/rationalizations'. Magidor (2015, 17) makes essentially the same point and observes how some non-indexical elements can *also* occur ineliminably in some action explanations. For example, in order to explain why Lingens acquires an intention to go to San Sebastián, one must mention certain beliefs and desires involving 'San Sebastián', as opposed to 'Donostía', even though both are names for the same city. Thus, it seems that, at least as far as this particular action explanation is concerned, the name 'San Sebastián' occurs ineliminably.

I think C&D and Magidor's conclusions are a bit too quick. Even if NIC2 does not allow us to claim that every action is indexical (which I wholeheartedly agree is a hopeless claim to make), if we just ask ourselves about what does it take to share someone else's indexical attitudes and keep an eye on the implications of that question to action explanation, we will have in our hands a neat argument in favor of a special indexical challenge. Furthermore, I will have shown that this case follows from a premises that are accepted even by its most notorious detractors.

4. What does it take to share someone else's indexical attitudes?

So far we have conceded that indexical attitudes are sometimes not identical to proper name attitudes and even that indexical expressions might

be ineliminable from some action explanations. However, none of this was enough to prove that indexical attitudes are *sui generis* in any substantial sense. I think there really is a special indexical challenge in that vicinity, but the best way to get to it is via indirectly considering what does it take for someone to share someone else's indexical attitudes.

One important comment: in the remainder of that paper, I propose to focus on first-personal attitudes – those expressible by means of the first-personal pronoun. My reasons for doing so are multiple: most of the literature on indexical attitudes (e.g. C&D) focus only on issues arising from first-personal attitudes (indeed, the concept of *de se* attitudes is usually taken as synonym for indexical attitudes); even if temporally indexical attitudes could be proven to be as fundamental as first-personal attitudes, discussions about the former are additionally complicated because of issues in the metaphysics of time (e.g. it would seem that even deciding what 'now' refers to depends on whether one is an A-theorist or B-theorist about time). Finally, even if one complains that my discussion is exclusively concerned with first-personal attitudes, if my argument is cogent, it is more than enough to show that indexical attitudes (or at least a subset of them) do indeed raise a special challenge to a theory of propositions. Without further ado, the argument.

Take some arbitrary agent Amelia who has a belief she expresses by uttering 'I am an aviation pioneer'. What would it take for Berthold, who is distinct from Amelia, to hold the same belief that she expresses by means of that utterance? My argument, which I take to be a development of an argument found in Ninan (2016),⁶ is that the three most plausible answers to that question each lead to the rejection of a different but independently plausible thesis about attitudes. Here are the three possible replies:

Option #1: For Berthold to share Amelia's first-personal attitude, he would need to form a belief (perhaps in response to Amelia's utterance) which he would express by means of 'You [pointing at Amelia] are an aviation pioneer'.

Option #2: For Berthold to share Amelia's first-personal attitude, he would need to have himself a first-personal attitude about himself, one which he would express by means of 'I am an aviation pioneer'.

Option #3: It is impossible to share someone else's first-personal attitudes (e.g. they are private, or limited accessibility, etc.)

Let us begin by considering Option #1. It is supposed to be the most plausible of them, since it makes the sharing of a first-personal attitude a

⁶I think Ninan's paper has all the ingredients for the construction of this argument, but that it somehow fails to put all the pieces together. All in all, I was deeply influenced by reading his paper and see myself as developing its themes.

completely ordinary and easy affair. It can be seen as grounded on the principle that, when two subjects are in agreement with each other in virtue of some of their beliefs, then these beliefs are identical. In other words, since Berthold's second-personal belief seems to be the right belief to form in face of Amelia's utterance, it would seem that they agree with each other in virtue of the attitudes they express (even though she expresses it first-personally and he, second-personally). One who thinks that first-personal attitudes are just as ordinary as any others should be drawn towards Option #1, since it entails that thinking of oneself via the first-person is no more special than thinking about someone else via the second-person (and there does not seem to be anything mysterious about the latter). However, Option #1 has the consequence that the exact same belief will have distinct motivational roles for distinct agents. Imagine that Amelia and Berthold find themselves in a situation where there is urgent need for the expertise of an aviation pioneer, and that only Amelia fits that bill. Even though both believe the same thing by means of their, respectively, first-personal and second-personal attitudes, they would plausibly be disposed to perform different actions: Amelia would run to offer her help while Berthold would just stand by and hope for the best.

More generally, Option #1 would conflict with the principle (let us call it, following Ninan, 'Explanation') that two agents who are doxastically identical should be disposed to perform the same actions. Explanation should not seem like a gratuitous ad hoc principle. Instead, it is one of the most entrenched principles governing folk-psychology. It is because of Explanation that it makes sense to explain people's behavior by means of their beliefs/desires and expect that this explanation be generalizable to distinct agents. If beliefs systematically had different motivational roles for different people, it would be impossible to predict people's actions based on what they believe and desire. It's not an exaggeration to say that, if Explanation were more often false than true, folk-psychology itself with its practice of ascribing semantic contents to attitudinal states would lose much of its *raison d'être*. Option #1 seems to entail that, for at least some attitudes, the first-personal ones, Explanation is bound to fail.

Since we have good reasons to protect Explanation, it could be good to try out the other possible answers to the attitudinal sharing question. However, both Option #2 and #3 seem to lead us to distinct conflicts with other independently plausible theses about attitudes and their contents. To be sure, both Option #2 and #3 allow us to maintain Explanation in its full generality, but that victory might be illusory seeing that they make us reject, respectively, the absoluteness of attitudinal contents or their shareability.

According to Option #2, when Berthold believes of himself that he is an aviation pioneer, he believes the same that is believed by Amelia when she believes of herself that she is an aviation pioneer. While it is true that two subjects who self-ascribe the same property are usually disposed to perform the same actions (unless they have other differing beliefs and/or desires in the vicinity), Option #2 entails that the same belief could be true for an agent and false for other (let us call 'Absoluteness' the thesis it rejects). Thus, it entails that at least some objects of our attitudes are not absolutely truth-evaluable. Making way for objects of knowledge that are not themselves true or false irrespective of their knowers would be a significant departure from orthodoxy. Whether one could come up with good arguments for that is not what I intend to assess.

Option #3 obviously leads us to the claim that some attitudes are special in the sense that they cannot be shared by different subjects. Interestingly enough, Frege (1991/1918, 359) seemed to be attracted to such an account of first-personal thoughts, even going as far as claiming that 'everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. And only [the thinker of a first-personal thought] can grasp thoughts specified in this way'. I hope that my way of framing the special indexical challenge makes it clear why such a position would be particularly attractive: it allows one to characterize first-personal attitudes while maintaining Explanation and Absoluteness. However, its drawbacks are obvious. As soon as one rejects the general shareability of attitudes (let us call 'Shareability' the thesis being rejected), one will need to come up with many revisionary stories about how communication works (since the same first-personal attitude cannot be put forward from speaker to hearer), disagreement (what is it to disagree about someone who claims to be an aviation pioneer?), etc.

In summary, whichever particular account of what sharing a first-personal attitude one chooses, one will need to reject some deeply entrenched thesis about attitudes: Explanation, Absoluteness or Shareability. If, for example, one feels strongly about Explanation (as one should), then one will be led into either rejecting Absoluteness or Shareability. As Ninan (2016, 109–117) points out, that way of framing the dialectics fits really well with the fact that people like Frege and Perry were forced, for one reason or another, to claim that indexical attitudes are unshareable in some sense. The same goes for the fact that people like Lewis felt so strongly about introducing non-absolute propositions to account for our attitudes. These philosophers were choosing among the available routes given the special indexical challenge. Another plausible theoretical way out would be accepting that Explanation really fails

for indexical attitudes. That is, one could claim that indexical attitudes are special in the sense that sharing them (in the sense of Option #1) does not entail being motivated to act alike. One could alleviate the consequences of that claim by suggesting that not identity of belief, but identity of type of indexical belief (e.g. when two subjects have first-personal beliefs about themselves) is the important relation for prediction of agency. If one chooses to take that route, the conclusion of the argument is that indexical attitudes are special in the sense that we need two distinct relations (as opposed to only one for the case of other singular attitudes) to characterize what is it to agree in virtue of them and to be disposed to act alike.

Finally, it should be clear that this is really a *special indexical* challenge. In other words, these complications would simply never arise if it weren't for indexical attitudes. That should be clear from the fact that, e.g. proper name attitudes, are such that it is very easy to characterize what it is to share them. We simply do not count someone who has a Lingen-belief as agreeing with someone who only has a Josef K-belief. More generally, we never count two people as agreeing about a belief when they use different proper names to express them. This ensures that there are no cases of agreement about proper name attitudes which motivate different actions. Thus, as far as proper name attitudes are concerned, we can just say that two subjects share a proper name attitude when they agree with each other in virtue of their respective attitudes.

5. Cappelen and Dever's action inventory model

As convincing as the argument just presented is, it is not immune to criticisms. One way to put pressure on its conclusion is by challenging the claim that Option #1 is incompatible with Explanation. C&D's discussion of intentional action (49–56) suggests one ingenious way of arguing for that compatibility claim. In order to assess their argument, we need to first be clear on what is the precise formulation of Explanation in question. A first try would be:

Explanation 1: If two agents have the same beliefs and desires, then, they will behave in the same way.

That goes in that right direction but not far enough. Firstly, notice that the antecedent of Explanation 1 is tremendously strong. Surely we do not need two agents to be doxastically identical in order for us to be able to predict that they will behave in the same way – what matters is that they have the same beliefs and desires about the relevant subject matter. For example, it does not matter that Amelia believes (and Berthold denies) that the Earth

is flat, if the relevant subject matter is that people need an aviation pioneer. Secondly, it is also not the case that every time two agents have the same relevant beliefs and desires, they will be able to behave in the same way. One can have as many attitudes as one likes, but if one's legs are tied down to the ground or if one is paralyzed by an evil genius, there will be many actions one will not be able to perform. Thus, it is natural to add some kind of *proviso* in the antecedent of the principle in order to account for cases where one is not able to behave as one desires because of external factors:

Explanation 2: If two agents have the same (*relevant*) beliefs and desires and the same (*relevant*) actions are available to them, then, they will behave in the same way.

While that principle seems to fare better than the last one, it still lends itself to more than one interpretation. Notice that there is considerable vagueness about when two people behave in the same way or not. The question is: When are two action tokens instances of behaving in the same way? There are literally infinite way of classifying action tokens into action types and some of those ways will trivially entail that any two tokens were instances of the same behavior. For example, if one classifies Amelia's action as *an action performed by a human being*, then it was an instance of behaving in the same way as Berthold (even though she ran to help people and he just stood by wishing for the best). Conversely, if we individuate Amelia's action as *an action performed by Amelia*, then it will never be the case that someone distinct from her will perform an action token that is an instance of behaving in the same way as her. Individuating actions is far from a trivial task, but I think we actually get by really well in our ordinary talk about actions and behavior. I think it is plausible to say that, given the description of ordinary scenarios such as Amelia and Berthold's, most people would be in agreement as to how to describe the actions they performed. Some discrepancy is surely to be expected, but I take it that most would lean towards saying that Amelia's action was something in the vicinity of *running to help people* and that Berthold's was that of *standing by*. Most importantly, these are descriptions of their actions which abstract away from their respective agents, focusing only in their qualitative component. In that spirit, let us assume that two agents can be said to have behaved in the same way if and only if they have performed action tokens which can be subsumed under the same ordinary (agent-neutral) action type. For example, Berthold would have behaved in the same way as Amelia if and only if he had performed an action which could be subsumed under the type *running to help people*.

That stipulation solves some of the interpretation problems, but notice that the *proviso* of Explanation 2 also talks about actions, so one should

expect that the same complications about action individuation will also come about there. The question is: When can two agents be said to have the same (relevant) available actions? I take it that, ordinarily, we have no trouble assessing whether some action could have been performed by someone. It is easy to judge that someone in handcuffs could not perform the action of hugging, or that someone paralyzed by an evil genius could not jump around. I take this to show that in ordinary action-talk we have the following operative principle in the background: an agent can perform an action subsumable under an ordinary (agent-neutral) action type if and only if that agent can perform that action under that very same ordinary (agent-neutral) action type. For example, Berthold can perform an action subsumable under *running to help people* if and only if Berthold could have ran to help people.

Explanation 3: If two agents have the same (relevant) beliefs and desires and they could both have performed the (relevant) actions under an ordinary agent-neutral action type, then, they will perform action tokens which could be subsumed under the same ordinary agent-neutral action type.

So far so good. I am of the opinion that something like Explanation 3 comes very close to fully characterizing our ordinary folk-psychological principle equal behavior prediction for people who believe and desire alike. But notice that if this is the correct formulation of the Explanation principle, then it really is incompatible with Option #1. Both Amelia and Berthold, we have agreed, have the same relevant beliefs and desires (they both believe Amelia is an aviation pioneer and they both desire that an aviation pioneer run to help the people in need). They also seem to have the same relevant actions available, since Berthold could very well run to help people and Amelia could very well have stood by. There is no physical/psychological constraints that would incapacitate them from performing actions under those agent-neutral types. Nonetheless, they still go on to perform different actions: Explanation 3 fails. As we have seen in the previous sections, this is precisely one of the horns of the special indexical challenge: unless we are ready to admit that indexical attitudes have some special property (either the same indexical attitude has different motivational role for different agents, or they have non-absolute contents or they are unshareable), we reach a dead-end.

In order to rectify the principle, one can either accept that indexical attitudes are special and then tweak the principle so that it accounts for their particularities, or one can question Explanation 3 itself and try to reformulate its conceptual basis. I take it that the first option is implicitly adopted by folk-psychology: it is the reason why the thesis that indexical attitudes are special sounds so intuitive in the first place. C&D, not satisfied with that, are,

to the best of my knowledge, one of the only authors to try to pursue the second option.⁷ By doing that, they end up making a fairly revisionary claim about intentional explanations, but if they succeed, that revisionary claim comes with the benefit of freeing us from the claim that indexical attitudes are more special than other ordinary ones.

Let us call the account which adopts Explanation 3 and that I take to be operative in ordinary action-talk ‘the indexical model’. The point where C&D diverge from the indexical model is in their understanding of what does it take for an action to be available to an agent. As we have seen, there are infinitely many ways to individuate an action token. Notice that whether an action token is available to an agent highly depends on which specific action type one chooses to describe that token. If one describes the relevant action in Amelia and Berthold’s case as *an action performed by Amelia*, then it trivially follows that Berthold is not able to perform it. However, that action type is a completely trivial one and surely not of the right granularity to be plugged into a principle of intentional explanation. Nonetheless, C&D believe that there are action descriptions which are, at the same time, (I) such that only Amelia could have performed it but not Berthold and (II) of the right granularity to be used in intentional explanations.

Take an *agent-specific description* of an action token to be a description which includes the ordinary (agent-neutral) component of that action but also its particular agent. In that sense, Amelia’s action can be subsumed under the agent-specific description ‘that Amelia runs to help people’. That type is not as trivial as the other one we’ve mentioned and could very well have the right amount of granularity to make our ordinary intentional explanations work:

Explanation 4: If two agents have the same (relevant) beliefs and desires *and they could both have performed the (relevant) actions under their respective agent-specific action types*, then, they will perform action tokens which could be subsumed under the same ordinary agent-neutral action type.

As I read C&D, they are suggesting that Explanation 4 is just as good a principle for intentional explanations as Explanation 3. Furthermore, Explanation 4 seems to be perfectly compatible with Option #1. It is compatible because, for the case of Amelia and Berthold, its antecedent will come out false. That is, even though they share all the same relevant beliefs and desires, it is not the case that Berthold could have performed Amelia’s action

⁷Magidor (2015, 20) also goes in the same direction, but leaves her point in very broad strokes.

under the agent-specific type *that Amelia runs to help people*.⁸ Naturally, the reason why he cannot perform an action token under that type is that he has no direct control over Amelia's body. Thus, according to Explanation 4, Amelia and Berthold would have both behaved in the same way if only they had the same actions available, but they do not, thus, they perform distinct actions. This is the central claim of C&D's action inventory considerations and, in my opinion, one of their most important arguments against there being a special indexical challenge.

This, then, is the scenario we reach. Explanation 3 is the commonsensical formulation of the principle, but it fails for cases such as Amelia and Berthold's. Perry (1977, 1979) was precisely pointing to that fact when he discussed cases such as the Bear Scenario, which, just like our case, involves two agents who believe alike but act differently. The only way to hold onto Explanation 3 seems to be by claiming that, in these cases, certain indexical attitudes with special properties are playing some kind of special role. Explanation 4, on the other hand, is a bit revisionary about what it takes for an action to be available to someone, but it nonetheless seems to give the right result for this type of cases. If every case were like Amelia and Berthold's, then it would be a very easy victory for C&D and Explanation 4. But notice that for many other ordinary cases of intentional explanation, it is Explanation 4 that fails to output the correct predictions, while Explanation 3 works perfectly well:

Nora's Case: Carlota knows that Nora is in danger and that if someone calls the police, then she will be saved. Since she desires that Nora be safe, she calls the police. Desmond also knows that Nora is in danger and that if someone calls the police, then she will be saved. He also desires that Nora be safe.⁹

I take Nora's Case to be a completely ordinary story about an action being motivated by some beliefs and desires. So much so that we do not even need to appeal to any indexical attitudes in order to explain why Carlota goes on to call the police. Now, it seems that any plausible principle of intentional explanation should predict that Desmond would also be disposed to behave in the same way as Carlota did. That is, any good account of our attitudes and the way they motivate action should be able to predict that, if Desmond also believes that Nora is in danger and that if someone calls the police, then she will be saved, then Desmond will in fact call the police. But notice that

⁸And it is also not the case that Amelia could have performed Berthold's actions under the type *that Berthold stands by wishing for the best*.

⁹This is based on C&D's own case of Nora (36–37), which has no significant difference from mine.

Explanation 4 is unable to give us that prediction. That can be quickly seen by observing that the antecedent of Explanation 4 would only be satisfied if Desmond could have performed the action Carlota performed under the agent-specific type *that Carlota calls the police*. But surely Desmond cannot perform an action under that type for the same reasons given above: he does not have control over Carlota's agency. Thus, the antecedent of Explanation 4 is not satisfied for the case of Nora and that means that no prediction is made.

Contrast that with how well Explanation 3 fares for that case. Since Desmond could very well perform Carlota's action under the type *calling the police*, we get it that the antecedent of Explanation 3 is satisfied. Thus, it correctly outputs the prediction that Desmond, because he shares Carlota's actions and has the same relevant actions available, will also call the police.

So things were not so favorable to C&D's principle in the first place. While Explanation 4 seems to be compatible with Option #1, it does not allow us to make the right amount of predictions of behavior for our concepts of belief and desire to play the role that they have in folk-psychology. In other words, Explanation 4 allows us to go on without special indexical attitudes makes us unable to make very ordinary predictions of same behavior. Explanation 3, on the other hand, allows us to make those ordinary predictions, such as in the case of Nora, but it does get into trouble when considering cases such as Amelia and Berthold's. It is because of those cases that indexical attitudes are ascribed such special properties as unshareability of non-absolute-ness. Now, what C&D would need to show – if Explanation 4 is to be considered a real contender for principle of intentional explanation – is that they can tweak their theory in such a way as to be able to explain simple cases such as Nora's. My own suspicion is that the only way available to them will be claiming that some attitudes have some kind of special property and these special properties explain why things are different from cases such as Amelia and Berthold's to Nora's one. But if they are willing to admit that some attitudes have special properties, then we might as well just stick to the indexical model with its special indexical attitudes. That model is not only well equipped to deal with intentional explanation but also in consonance with our folk-psychological intuitions about how beliefs and desires work.

6. Conclusion

In this paper, I have examined the issue about whether indexical attitudes have any special properties or present any special challenge to a theory of attitudes and propositions. In Section 2, I defended the thesis that, as far as some cases such as the Messy Shopper go, they do not present any special

challenge over and above the general challenge of Frege's Puzzle, which is common to all singular attitudes, not only indexical ones. In Section 3, I proposed to focus on the interrelations between indexical attitudes and action explanations. I argued that, while it is implausible to claim that all action must be motivated by indexical representations, that at least some of them might be, and that this could prove to be an interesting point in itself. In Section 4, I built on previous considerations and showed how one can get to a special indexical challenge by asking what does it take to share someone else's first-personal attitudes. I defended the thesis that every plausible answer to that question leads us to reject independently plausible theses about attitudes. I argued that this is a robust defense of the claim that indexical attitudes have special properties and that it is based on very plausible premises. Finally, in Section 5, I assessed Cappelen & Dever's considerations on intentional action and extracted from their work an argument which could block the special indexical challenge offered in the previous section. I argued against their argument on the basis of the fact that their account of intentional explanations fail to output the correct predictions for many ordinary cases. On the other hand, what I called the indexical model – which has in its core the claim that indexical attitudes are special – seems well-suited to account for intentional action of all varieties. Thus, I concluded that these authors have failed to provide us with a reason to stop believing that there really is something peculiar about indexical attitudes.

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