Thinking Selflessly

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1   Introduction

> I once followed a trail of sugar on a supermarket floor, pushing my cart down the aisle on one side of a tall counter and back the aisle on the other, seeking the shopper with the torn sack to tell him he was making a mess. With each trip around the counter, the trail became thicker. But I seemed unable to catch up. Finally it dawned on me. I was the shopper I was trying to catch[...] I stopped following the trail around the counter, and rearranged the torn sack in my cart. (Perry, 1979, p.3 – *The Messy Shopper Case*)

Why did Perry stop pushing the cart?

1.1   Background: Perry x C&D

Perry:

Because Perry believes « that he (himself) is making a mess » and desires not to make a mess.

1) Indexical beliefs → beliefs expressed by utterances of sentences with indexical expressions.

2) EITA (Essential Indexicality Thesis about Agency): Indexical beliefs are necessary to explain the motivation of intentional bodily actions.

C&D:

Because Perry believes « that Perry is making a mess » and desires Perry not to make a mess & the action of rearrange the torn sack is available to him.

1) Indexical beliefs? Who knows!

2) *action inventory* model: an agent performs an intentional action ↔ there's a match between beliefs and desires on the one hand, and an available action on the other hand.

Me:

Because Perry believes « that he (himself) is making a mess » and desires not to make a mess.

1) Indexical beliefs → enable identification.

2) EITA: Indexical beliefs (either selfish or selfless) are necessary to explain the motivation of intentional bodily actions.

1.2   ** Main Argument **

P1) Motivations for (or explanations of) intentional bodily actions require a belief with an identificational element.

      2.1 & 2.2) A match between beliefs and desires on the one hand, and an available action on the other hand, is neither *sufficient* nor *necessary*.

      2.3) Explanations of actions with beliefs that don't allow misidentification are in accordance with our intuitions.

P2) *De re* and *de dicto* beliefs don't have an identificational element.
      3)

∴ We need a new kind of belief to explain intentional action – *indexical* beliefs.

- There are indexical beliefs which are neither implicitly nor explicitly *de se*).
      4)

- EITA: Indexical beliefs (either selfish or selfless) are necessary to explain the motivation of intentional bodily actions.
      5)

2   P1) Motivations for (or explanations of) intentional bodily actions require a belief with an *identificational element*

2.1   How the agent takes the world to be

P3) If a set of (true) beliefs and desire explain a particular action *X*, then the desire is not satisfied by chance.

> *Case 1*: Herman is in a room with Nora and Nira. He believes that (a) Nora is in danger and (b) if he hugs Nora, then she'll be safe. (c) Herman also wants Nora to be safe. Herman believes that (d) she[pointing at Nora] is Nora. Herman hugs Nora.

Case 2: Herman is in a room with Nora and Nira. He believes that (a) Nora is in danger and (b) if he hugs Nora, then she'll be safe. (c) Herman also wants Nora to be safe. Herman believes that (e) she[pointing at Nora] is not Nora but he believes that (f) she[pointing at Nora] is in danger, that (g) if he hugs her[pointing at Nora], then she'll be safe, and (h) wants her[pointing at Nora] to be safe. Herman hugs Nora.

- Does Herman satisfy desire (c) by chance?
    Case 1: No!
    Case 2: Yes!

So...

(a)-(c) is not an explanation of Herman's action in Case 2.

∴ The action inventory model is incorrect.
    → it's not true that if there's a match of beliefs and desires with an available action, then those beliefs and desires explain the action.

2.2   *X* instead of Y

P4) If a set of beliefs and desire explain an action *X*, then it can't also explain a different but available action *Y*.

Case 1: Herman is in a room with Nora and Nira. He believes that (a) Nora is in danger and (b) if he hugs Nora, then she'll be safe. (c) Herman also wants Nora to be safe. Herman believes that (d) she[pointing at Nora] is Nora. Herman hugs Nora.

Case 3: Herman is in a room with Nora and Nira. He believes that (a) Nora is in danger and (b) if he hugs Nora, then she'll be safe. (c) Herman also wants Nora to be safe and believes. He also believes that (i) she[pointing at Nira] is Nora. Herman hugs Nira.

- According to the action inventory model, can (a)-(c) explain different actions?
    Yes!

So...

(a)-(c) is not an explanation of Herman's action in Case 1 and 3.

  ∴ The *action inventory model* is incorrect.
   → it's not true that if a set of beliefs and desires explains an action, then there's a match between them and an available action.

2.3   Diagnosis and Solution

Problem → "gap" between (x′) and (x″):
  (x′) the object the agent's belief (desire, etc) is about.
  (x″) the object in the agent's immediate environment she takes her belief (desire, etc.) to be about.

Solution to the problem → close the "gap" between (x′) and (x″).

Appropriate Belief → a belief the agent holds which enables her to identify the object her belief is about at the moment she forms the belief.

Therefore...

Motivations for (or explanations of) intentional bodily actions require a belief with an *identificational element.*

3   P2) *De re* and *de dicto* beliefs don't have an identificational element.

De Re?
  No – see Case 2 and Case 3.

De Dicto?
  No – it's perfectly possible that Herman forms the belief that the smartest girl is in danger, which makes his belief about Nora, but he doesn't take it to be about her when she is around.

Sui Generis!
  Appropriate beliefs → *indexical beliefs.*

4   Selfless Indexical Beliefs

Selfish beliefs: identify the agent.
    I am making a mess.
    I am about to be shot.

Selfless beliefs: identify any object which is not the agent.
    She$_{[pointing\ at\ Nora]}$ is in danger.
    He$_{[pointing\ at\ François]}$ is about to be shot.
    That button$_{[pointing\ at\ a\ button\ \#2]}$ is the one to press to call for help.

5   Conclusion - new EITA

Indexical beliefs (either selfish or selfless) are necessary to explain the motivation of intentional bodily actions.

> *Case 1*: Herman hugs ⚲, because he believes « that *she*$_{[pointing\ at\ Nora]}$ is Nora » − selfless belief.

> *The Messy Shopper*: Perry stops pushing the cart and rearranges the torn sack of sugar because he believes « that *he (himself)* is making a mess » − selfish belief.

6   C&D's objections to EITA

6.1   The Fax Machine

    Action: press button #2 on a fax machine

• C&D have a point here. No selfish beliefs are necessary. But Perry needs to have an indexical belief about the button he wants to press.

6.2   Reply to an Anonymous reviewer

    In the Messy Shopper case, doesn't Perry need to know that he is Perry?

C&D reply: No. Because we don't need self-locating beliefs in the Nora case (similar to case 1).

• C&D's generalization based on case 1 doesn't work. If I'm right, self-locating beliefs are not necessary in case 1, as C&D claim, because Herman needs to identify an object other than himself. In the Messy Shopper case, however, Perry is the agent and his actions are directed at him, so he needs a self-identification belief.