

Action-Based Indexicality

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Abstract

Most research done on indexicality so far has focused on singular indexical thoughts hold by a single person, and little investigation has been done on first-person plural thoughts ('we-thoughts', as I call them), like Alex's belief that «*we will meet at noon*», and joint demonstrative thoughts, like a group's belief that «*she_{Susan} is in danger*», where the subscript gives the demonstrated object.¹ Here I will offer an introduction to those two kinds of thoughts. I will present issues they raise to current accounts of indexicality, and argue that they are not easily overcome. I will then develop a tentative approach to them.

1 Indexical Thoughts

- context-sensitive;

| | John | Juliana |
|------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------|
| « <i>I have a headache</i> » | John has a headache | Juliana has a headache |

- dependent on perception;

| | perceiving Susan | <i>not</i> perceiving Susan |
|---|------------------|-----------------------------|
| « <i>she_{Susan} is in danger</i> » | ✓ | ✗ |

- typically expressed by sentences with indexical expressions.

«*we will meet at noon*» ≫≫ we will meet at noon'

¹Expressions within double angle brackets ('«' and '»') and italicized stand for the content of thoughts, broadly understood.

2 Orthodox View: Immunity to Error through Misidentification (IEM)

What is IEM: thoughts immune to a kind of misrepresentation (error).

Suppose John and Mark see that Susan is about to be attacked by a bear; and that Jasmin is the smartest person.

| | | IEM? |
|---|-----------------------|------|
| John: « <i>the smartest person is in danger</i> » | S: Susan T: Jasmin | ✗ |
| Mark: « <i>she_{Susan} is in danger</i> » | S: Susan T: Susan | ✓ |

- Source object: object perceived;
- Target object: object represented by the mental representation.

Where does IEM come from: perception of the thinker:

- Prosser: «*she*» represents the person Mark perceptually discriminates as appearing to be in danger;
- Recanati: implicit to explicit representation.

3 We-Thoughts and Joint Demonstrative Thoughts

We-Case: Alex teaches a class with 250 enrolled students, and she is scheduling a review session for the final exam. After reserving a room for May 1st at noon, she announces that they will meet for a review session on May 1st at noon, on a day that only 200 students showed up for lecture. Since nobody complains, Alex believes that they will meet at noon, which, from her perspective, is the following we-thought: (1) «*we will meet at noon*».

- (1) «*we will meet at noon*» is indexical and, consequently, IEM; *however*
- source object = 200 students in lecture;
- target object = 250 students enrolled.

Joint-Case: Deja teaches Bio 101, and is taking her class for a hike at the Yellowstone Park. She is walking in front of the group when she turns back and sees that Susan is about to be attacked by a bear. This prompts her to say to her students ‘she is in danger’, while pointing at Susan. Assuming Deja’s students believe her, *the class* or *the group* believes that (2) «*she_{Susan} is in danger*».

- (2) «*she_{Susan} is in danger*» is indexical and, consequently, IEM; *however*
- believer = the group;
- believer’s perception = group perception.

4 Proposal: action at the center

Proposal: when indexical thoughts motivate an action, the action necessarily aims at the object the thought is about.

| | Susan | Jasmin |
|-------|--|---|
| Set 1 | $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{b': } \langle \textit{she}_{Susan} \textit{ is in danger} \rangle \\ \text{b'': } \langle \textit{If I stand in front of her, she'll be safe} \rangle \\ \text{Desire her}_{Susan} \textit{ to be safe} \end{array} \right.$ | $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \checkmark \\ \times \end{array} \right.$ |
| Set 2 | $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{b*}: \langle \textit{the smartest person is in danger} \rangle \\ \text{b**}: \langle \textit{If I stand in front of the smartest person, she'll be safe} \rangle \\ \text{Desire the smartest person to be safe} \end{array} \right.$ | $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \checkmark \\ \checkmark \end{array} \right.$ |

We-case:

- Actions motivated by we-thoughts target the thinker;
- To target the thinker is to target the group.

Action?

(i) Set 3 $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \langle \textit{we will meet at noon} \rangle \\ \langle \textit{If we leave by 11 am, we'll be on time} \rangle \\ \text{desire } \textit{we} \textit{ to be on time.} \end{array} \right.$ *the group* leaves by 11am

(ii) The group leaves by 11 am \Rightarrow each member individually leaves by 11 am;

(iii) Alex leaving by 11 am targets the group;

(iv) Set 3 can motivate Alex to leave by 11 am.

Joint-Case:

- (i) joint demonstrative thoughts are indexical because, when they motivates *a group* to act, it guarantees that the group targets the object of the thought;
- (ii) for *the group* to stand in front of Susan, only some members need to individually stand in front of her (presumably, on the group's behalf);
- (iii) only the members who stand in front of Susan have to perceive her, thus indexicality in the group's belief is based on the perceptions of those members.

THANK YOU!