

The Logical Form of Intention Reports

Abstract for *Pragmasophia 2*

Propositional attitude verbs take complement clauses as direct objects. The verb 'believes' is a paradigm. The most familiar use of the verb is in a sentence like 'Eddie believes that the Earth is flat', where the subject of the sentence is 'Eddie' and the direct object is the that-clause 'that the Earth is flat', which denotes or otherwise specifies a proposition, which is the object of Eddie's reported belief. By contrast, intention (and desire and pro-attitudes in general) reports seem to have a very different form. The paradigm is for 'intends' to take an infinitive as its object, as in the sentence 'John intends to prove Eddie wrong'. How deep does this difference go? Is there in fact an underlying unity? In particular, in their deep form, is 'intends' (and desire and other pro-attitude verbs) in fact a propositional attitude verb? I argue that the surface infinitive object contains an unpronounced PRO that is bound to the primary subject of the sentence ('John', in the sample sentence given above) and *de se*. I base my case in part on a similarity with memory and imagine reports, as in the sentence 'Joan remembers leading the French army to Orléans', for which there are excellent reasons to suspect is in fact a propositional attitude with an unpronounced PRO in its object 'leading the French army to Orléans'.

There is an important distinction, stretching at least back to Ancient Greek times, between practical and theoretical reasoning and thought. Practical thought is productive while theoretical thought is reflective. On one conception, the difference between practical and theoretical thought can be found in their objects: Practical thinking takes an action or "do-able" as object while theoretical thinking takes a proposition as its object. So, one believes that one will be at the meeting today, which is an instance of theoretical thinking, while one intends to be at the meeting today, which is an instance of practical thinking. My thesis that the surface form of intention reports masks a more complex deep structure in which the object of the verb 'intend' is not just an infinitive but also contains an unpronounced subject and so is in fact a complete sentence, calls this conception of the distinction between practical and theoretical thought into question. My thesis suggests that, at least as far as the objects of the two kinds of thought goes, there is a deep unity between practical and theoretical thinking as both take propositions as their objects.

I begin with memory reports. While we can report remembering facts, as 'John remembers that $2+2=4$ ', a very important, if not basic, kind of memory report are episodic memory reports, as 'John remembers putting away the dishes'. Consider now the following three related episodic memory reports.

- 1) John remembers Sally putting away the dishes
- 2) John remembers his putting away the dishes
- 3) John remembers putting away the dishes

(1) is apt when John has a memory based on a past perceptual experience of Sally's putting away the dishes. (1) is in some way distinct from (1*) below, as (1*) is apt even if John never perceived an earlier event of Sally putting away the dishes but deduced that she did put away the dishes from, say, know that the dishes were put away by someone and reasoning that the only person around during the interval in question was Sally.

- 4) John remembers that Sally put away the dishes

My interest here is with (2) and (3). The direct object of (2) contains a subject, the pronoun 'his'. The pronoun can either be anaphoric on 'John' or a demonstrative, taking its value from context. (Imagine, for example, uttering (2) pointing and James while uttering 'his'.) Let's focus on cases in which the pronoun is anaphoric on 'John'. There is still an important difference between (2) and (3). As Jim Higginbotham observes in his 'Remembering, Imagining, and the First Person', (3) is essentially first-personal in a way that (2) is not. Suppose that John sees what is in fact his own reflection in the mirror and believes of the person that he sees that he is putting away the dishes. Not recognizing the person he sees as himself, when he reflects back on the experience, it seems that (2) is true while (3) is not, as he is not remembering an experience as of he himself putting away the dishes but instead an experience as of watching another put away dishes. (The case is made stronger if we move from actions like putting away dishes to states, like having messy hair or wearing torn pants. In that case, it is easy to imagine John believing of the person he sees in the mirror who happens to be himself that he has messy hair without believing of himself that he has messy hair. Reflecting on the experience later, it would be intuitively incorrect to say 'John remember having messy hair' while it is correct to say 'John remember his having messy hair'.)

We have experiences of happenings in the world (we watch other people performing actions, for example) and experiences of our own doings. Our memories, then, even though they are always in an important sense "from our perspective," have a similar duality. Our intentions, however, are always, at bottom, *de se*. When I intend to walk across the room to make an espresso, the subject of the walking is me myself. I may have intentions concerning others doings. For example, I may intend that John accept the offer the department extended. But in that case, the intention is both backed and constituted by intentions concerning my own doings: I intend to make a convincing case to John or press the administration for even better terms, etc.. I can't just intend that John accept the offer without taking further steps that essentially involve my own

doings. By contrast, I can simply intend to walk across the room. So, the most basic kind of intention are de se and so the most basic kind of intention report is one akin to (3) above. We should expect, then, a similarity in form. There are excellent reasons to think that remembering is fundamentally a propositional attitude and so memory reports that take gerundive complements like (3) are still at deep level complement clauses and so have a hidden subject PRO that is both anaphoric on the subject of the report and essentially first-personal. Similarly, while it is true that the most basic form of intention reports take infinitive clauses at surface level, there are excellent reasons for thinking that the deep structure of intention reports have complement clauses with a hidden subject PRO that is both anaphoric on the subject of the report and essentially first-personal. Thus, we should reject, on purely linguistic grounds, the thesis that the objects of practical thoughts like intentions are do-ables as opposed to propositions.