Making It Explicit

Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Commitment

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It turns out to be a consequence of the inferentialist way of conceiving conceptual content that it makes sense to specify the content of a state only from some point of view, relative to some set of collateral concomitant commitments, which can serve as auxiliary hypotheses in inferences involving it. For both the attributor and the attributee of any contentful state, there are two relevant sets of background commitments available in determining the practical significance (for what else one should go on to do or be committed to) of adopting a state with a specified content—that of the attributor and that of the attributee. Thus two socially related kinds of perspective are always in play, for each interlocutor. This fact, it has been claimed, secures and gives meaning to the possibility of a genuinely *normative* significance for the occurrence of contentful states. It is also what is expressed by *representational* idioms such as ascriptions *de re*. It is because of this fundamental social deontic structure, then, that propositional and other conceptually contentful states are always *representationally* contentful states. This analysis of the nature of the objective representational norms that govern the application of concepts makes it possible to see why *only* what plays a suitable role in essentially *social*, indeed *linguistic*, discursive deontic scorekeeping practices should count as *conceptually* contentful in the fundamental sense. The understanding of intentional or conceptual contentfulness that is finally arrived at vindicates the initial commitment to understanding discursive practice as social linguistic practice.

Appendix: The Construction and Recursive Interpretation of Iterated Ascriptions That Mix *De Dicto* and *De Re* Content Specifications

The expressions that serve to specify the content of the commitments attributed by undertaking assertional commitment to basic ascriptions can play two different sorts of expressive role. In the regimented language employed here, this distinction of roles is marked by a distinction of two sorts of position in which content-specifying expressions can occur in ascriptions. Expressions may occur either in the scope of a 'that' operator (what is called, following the tradition, "*de dicto* occurrence") or in the scope of an 'of' operator ("*de re* occurrence"). The leading idea of the explanatory strategy developed in this chapter is that the significance of an expression's occurring in *de dicto* position is that the expressive commitment to the effect that the content of the attributed assertional commitment can properly be expressed by the use of that expression is *attributed* along with the ascribed assertional commitment, while the significance of an expression's occurring in *de re* position is that the expressive commitment to the effect that the content of the attributed assertional commitment can properly be expressed by the use of that expression is *undertaken*, along with the assertional commitment to

the whole ascription. The distinction between *what* is represented, the objective, *de re*, relational content of what is ascribed, on the one hand, and *how* it is represented, its subjective, *de dicto*, notional content, on the other, is based on this fundamental social-perspectival distinction of deontic attitudes (the distinction between undertaking a commitment and attributing one). One of the distinguishing characteristics of the present approach to propositional-attitude-ascribing locutions is understanding what is expressed by the difference between ascriptions *de dicto* and ascriptions *de re* as indicating the difference between two perspectives or attitudes an ascriber can adopt when specifying the content of an ascribed state, rather than as distinguishing two *kinds* of state (as Quine does), or two *components* in the content of any intentional state (as McGinn does).[104]

One of the criteria of adequacy of any account of this difference is its capacity to deal with *iterated* ascriptions—ascriptions of assertional commitments that themselves have ascriptional contents, expressions for which accordingly contain *embedded* ascriptional expressions. For interpretation of such compound expressions requires the recognition of many more than just two ways in which expressions can function in specifying the contents of ascribed commitments. It turns out to be straightforward to extend the social-perspectival account to handle the complexities of iteration. It is much less clear how the motivation behind distinguishing *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions as ascriptions of different kinds of belief, or of different components of beliefs, fares once iterated ascriptions are taken onboard.

How, then, can all the iterated ascriptions be constructed in the regimented language of the scorekeeping model? To keep things under control, two simplifying assumptions are adopted—working at the level of types rather than tokenings, and only considering the case of singular-term exportation. These are straightforwardly dispensable in favor of more general formulations. Consider a basic nonascriptional content expressed using an n-adic predicate $\Phi\langle x_1, x_2, \ldots x_n\rangle$. In ascribing commitment to a claim of this form, one might attribute the expressive commitments associated with the use of all of the terms used to specify the content, in the pure *de dicto* form

S_2: S_1 claims that $\Phi\langle t_1, t_2, \ldots t_n\rangle$.

Or one might undertake all those expressive commitments and syntactically export all of the terms to *de re* position, in the pure *de re* form

S_2: S_1 claims of $\langle t_1', t_2', \ldots t_n'\rangle$ that $\Phi\langle it_1, it_2, \ldots it_n\rangle$,

where each it_i is an ascription-structural anaphor dependent on t_i'. But such exportation need not be an all-or-none thing. Some terms may remain in *de dicto* position while others are removed to *de re* position, as in

> Russell believed of Hölderlin's roommate that he was not a worthy successor to Kant,

where 'Kant' remains in *de dicto* position, but the other term has been exported to *de re* position, leaving the anaphoric trace 'he'. Thus arrayed between the pure *de dicto* and pure *de re* forms will be a variety of mixed ascriptions, in which some terms appear in *de dicto,* and some in *de re* position. So the general form of first level ascriptions is

$$S_2\text{: } S_1 \text{ claims of } \langle t_1', t_2', \ldots t_k' \rangle \text{ that } \Phi\langle t_1, t_2, \ldots t_n \rangle,$$

where k is less than or equal to n, and for all i less than or equal to k, there is a j less than or equal to n such that t_j is an ascription-structural anaphoric dependent of t_i', symbolically: Depends $(/t_j/, /t_i'/)$. Since each term can appear in two positions, either exported or not, corresponding to an n-adic predication $\Phi\langle x_1, x_2, \ldots x_n \rangle$ there will be 2^n different first-level ascriptions.

Each of these ascriptions still contains n independent terms in its content-specifying regions. The *de dicto* positions will always contain n argument places. Each of them is filled either by an independent term or by an ascription-structural anaphoric pronoun. But corresponding to each anaphoric pronoun is exactly one term that is exported to *de re* position. Such exportation accordingly does not change the total number of terms occurring in the content specification. All the forms of first-level ascriptions of commitment to a nonascriptional claim involving n argument places can then be thought of as (ascriptionally complex) $n + 1$ place predications. (The extra argument place is that which specifies the one to whom the commitment is ascribed; it occurs outside the content-specifying regions of the ascriptional expression.) These first-level ascriptions of the form $\Psi\langle t_1, \ldots t_n \rangle$ can now themselves be treated as specifying the content of commitments that can be ascribed, by second-level ascriptions. A second-level ascription is one like

Russell claims that Hegel claims of Pluto that it does not exist,

in which the commitment ascribed is itself an ascriptional commitment. Clearly all of the terms that occur independently in the first-level ascriptional content $\Psi\langle t_1, \ldots t_n \rangle$ (that is, all the terms except the ascription-structural anaphoric pronouns left as syntactic traces of terms exported to *de re* position) are available either to be left in what is *de dicto* position with respect to the outermost, second-level, ascriptional content-specification, or to be exported to the *de re* position of that outermost, second-level, ascriptional content-specification. Thus there can be second-level forms such as

$$S_2 \text{ claims of } t_1 \text{ that } S_1 \text{ claims of it that } \Phi\langle it_1, t_2 \rangle$$

and

$$S_2 \text{ claims of } t_1 \text{ that } S_1 \text{ claims that } \Phi\langle it_1, t_2 \rangle$$

that differ in that in the first what is exported to the second-level *de re* position occurred in *de re* position in the embedded first-level ascription as

well, whereas in the second what is exported to the second-level *de re* position occurred in *de dicto* position in the embedded first-level ascription.

Just as the first time around, exportation does not change the total number of independently occurring terms, and each of the $n + 1$ independent terms available for possible exportation in the first-level ascriptions can either be exported or not. So for each of the 2^n first-level ascriptions, there are 2^{n+1} second-level ascription forms, or $2^n \cdot 2^{n+1} = 2^{2n+1}$ second-level ascriptions (based on the nonascriptional n-adic expression $\Phi\langle x_1, x_2, \ldots x_n\rangle$) in all. For the general case of m^{th}-level iterated ascriptions, there will be $2^{n+(n+1)+(n+2)+\ldots(n+m-1)}$ distinct ascription forms, which is $2^{n \cdot m + (m^2 - m)/2}$. If one treats *de dicto* and *de re* ascriptions as ascriptions of two different kinds of belief, then this is how many different kinds there are, not just two. And if one sees first-level ascriptions of the two sorts as specifying two different components of the content of the state that is attributed, then this is how many different components one is committed to discerning in the content of an m^{th}-level iterated ascription, not just two. The complication in this calculation results from the argument place for the target of the ascription—which behaves like a term in the scope of the *de re* operator 'of', except for not having ascription-structural anaphoric dependents. Putting those occurrences aside, an n-ary nonascriptional predication generates $2^{n \cdot m}$ possible mixed ascription forms, where m is the number of iterated applications of the ascription-forming locution.

A criterion of adequacy of an account of the content of ascriptions is that it determine for each of these myriad iterated ascription-forms the pragmatic significance, in context, of undertaking commitment to an assertion with that form. The theory must offer a reading of each, specifying what an ascriber becomes committed to by asserting it. In the context of the sort of pragmatics or speech-act theory in play here, this means saying how the deontic score is changed by an ascriptional undertaking, which is to say what attitudes it expresses. For instance, looking only at a single iteration of ascribing operators and at a one-place predicate, two of the forms that must receive interpretations are:

(i) S_2: S_1 claims of t_1 that S_0 claims of it_1 that $\Phi(\text{it}_1)$.
(ii) S_2: S_1 claims of t_1 that S_0 claims that $\Phi(\text{it}_1)$.

These examples are representative of the new sorts of structural anaphoric connections across ascriptional boundaries that become possible with iteration. How do the attitudes involved in these complex ascriptions unpack according to the rules for the regimentation suggested in Section IV?

Suppressing type-tokening niceties, one can begin reading (i) by stripping off the outermost *de re* occurrences:

(i′) S_2: For some term x_2, S_1 claims that [S_0 claims of x_2 that $\Phi(\text{it}_2)$], and $t_1 = x_2$.

The second-level *de re* ascription by S_2 is interpreted in terms of a nonascriptional identity (that is, symmetric substitution-inferential) commitment undertaken by S_2 and a second-level *de dicto* ascription by S_2. The undertaking of a *de dicto* ascriptional commitment (of whatever level) is itself readily interpreted in terms of the attributing it expresses. Bracketing, in the interests of simplicity, elaborations required to deal with indexicals, and foreign languages (details that the discussion of Section IV shows how to reintroduce as needed), substitution instances of the first clause of (i′) are interpreted by

(i″) S_1: S_0 claims of t_2 that $\Phi(\text{it}_2)$,

that is, by attributions of first-level ascriptions, in this case, *de re* ones. And now the same procedures that were applied to turn (i) into (i′) can be applied to (i″), followed in turn by the procedures that turned (i′) into (i″). Those procedures suffice to interpret n^{th}-level ascriptions in terms of attitudes toward $(n - 1)^{\text{th}}$-level ascriptions. Repeatedly turning the crank on this machinery provides a recursive procedure for assigning a reading to each of the arbitrarily complex iterated ascriptions in the hierarchy.

The procedure is the one followed with the example just considered. First, strip off the terms occurring in the scope of the outermost *de re* operator, resulting in an undertaken identity commitment and an attributed *de dicto* ascriptional commitment at the same ascriptional level. Then trade that *de dicto* ascriptional commitment for an attributing at the next lower ascriptional level. The construction of the hierarchy of regimented iterated ascriptions proceeded by arbitrary repetitions of two sorts of formation rule, one corresponding to *de dicto* ascriptions, another to *de re*. So these interpretive rules match the ones used in constructing the expressions, and it follows that for any complex regimented ascription, a finite number of repetitions of the two interpretive steps will render the complex attitude in terms of simpler, ultimately nonascriptional ones. Recall that the general form of an m^{th}-level ascription is:

$$S_{m+1}\text{: } S_m \text{ claims of } \langle t_1', t_2', \ldots t_k'\rangle \text{ that } \Phi\langle t_1, t_2, \ldots t_n\rangle,$$

where k is less than or equal to n and for all i less than or equal to k, there is a j less than or equal to n such that t_j is an ascription-structural anaphoric dependent of t_i' (symbolically Depends$(/t_j/, /t_i'/)$), and $\Phi\langle t_1, t_2, \ldots t_n\rangle$ is itself an ascriptional sentence of level $m - 1$. It is clear from this that it suffices to reduce the ascriptional complexity of the ascriptions involved, first, to trade *de re* ascriptions for *de dicto* ones plus undertaken identity commitments and, second, to trade undertaking an m^{th}-level *de dicto* ascription for attributing an $(m - 1)^{\text{th}}$-level ascription.

In this way every complex ascription is shown to correspond to a set of deontic attitudes. A converse condition holds as well. That is, starting off with any set of nonascriptional attitudes on the part of various interlocutors, it is possible to express them explicitly, from any desired point of view, by

means of iterated ascriptions, in a recursively complete fashion. The attitudes with which one starts can be any combination of undertaken and attributed identity commitments (involving singular terms) and assertional commitments (involving sentences in which those terms occur). What is being claimed is the *expressive completeness* of the regimented ascriptional idiom, over a certain domain. For consider: given a grasp of the background entailments, any interlocutor can attribute any nonascriptional assertional commitment to any other *de dicto,* with the ascriber consulting only his or her other attributions to that individual. Furthermore, given one's own undertakings of commitment (particularly to identities), one can offer *de re* versions of those ascriptions, and so indicate what, according to the ascriber, the one to whom the commitments are ascribed is talking *about.* Thus all of the first-level attitudes—that is, perspectives on the states of interlocutors—can be expressed with assertional explicitness by the use of ascriptional locutions. The undertakings of assertional commitment to these first-level ascriptional claims, however, expand the community's stock of states beyond what was present before ascriptional locutions are introduced. So these states must be explicitly ascribable in their turn, if ascriptional locutions are in fact to make possible the explicit expression of all the deontic attitudes. Applying the ascriptional expressive machinery one more time permits this, yielding second-level *de dicto* ascriptions of all of the new states generated by the first application of the machinery, and then in turn *de re* ascriptions of all of them. Repeating these two procedures inductively then permits the expression by any interlocutor of the contents of ascriptional claims of arbitrary complexity, from either the point of view of the ascriber (*de re,* inferentially expanded by commitments *undertaken* by the ascriber) or the point of view of the ascribee (*de dicto,* inferentially expanded by commitments *attributed* by the ascriber).