



Reply to Dokic

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Reply to Dokic

Do thoughts involve unarticulated constituents ? Dokic attempts to weaken the case for unarticulated constituency in thought, by arguing that the prototypical examples invoked by Perry should be reinterpreted. Those examples « do not introduce unarticulated constituents because in each case there is a better interpretation which makes the relevant utterances and thoughts completely articulated after all, although expressive of a more primitive ontology ».

Dokic discusses three examples : simultaneity, time zones, and Z-land. He points out an alleged difficulty for Perry's position or mine. Ordinary subjects do not have inertial frames in their ontology, five-year-olds do not have time zones in their ontology, and Z-landers do not have places in their ontology. According to Dokic, we should straightforwardly acknowledge the fact that the subject's ontology is more primitive than ours, instead of claiming that the subject's thought involves 'unarticulated constituents' which he or she is not even able to articulate. By positing unarticulated constituents in the subject's thoughts we — the theorists — unduly force our own ontology upon them.

Let me mention a fourth example which corresponds to the sort of case Dokic has in mind. Let us assume a primitive organism which lives in the present, constantly reacting to what is currently taking place, without ever thinking about the past or the future. Let the organism think 'it's cold' at time t_1 , and 'it's hot' (or 'it's not cold') at time t_2 . Dokic would say, correctly I believe, that the organism's ontology contains only objects and properties, and possibly places, but not times. This is the exact temporal analogue of the Z-land case. In the light of this example, however, Dokic's argument that the subject's thought in such situations does not involve unarticulated constituents turns out to be untenable. For we must account for the organism's rationality. If we don't relativize the organism's thoughts to times, by construing them as 'concerning' particular instants, we cannot capture the fact that the organism does not contradict himself even though he thinks 'it's cold' and 'it's not cold'. He does not contradict himself because his thought that it is cold is true iff it is cold at time t_1 (when the thought is tokened), while the thought that it's not cold is true iff it's not cold at t_2 .

The notion of an unarticulated constituent enables us to capture the truth-conditions of the organism's thoughts by bringing environmental facts into play, without imputing to the organism the ability to conceptualise or mentally articulate those facts. It follows that the primitiveness of one's ontology has no bearing on the issue, whether or not one's thought involves unarticulated constituents (thus understood). Of course the organism's ontology does not encompass times ; but this does not show that his thoughts do not *concern* times.

II

Dokic thinks one should accept unarticulated constituents only when they make a cognitive difference to the subject. This he calls the 'Anchoring Constraint' :

Anchoring Constraint :

A mental representation is not related to the situation it concerns in a purely external manner but by way of cognitive facts about the subject.¹

In the Z-land case Dokic denies that the place is an unarticulated constituent of the thought because the subject's relation to the place of thinking is 'purely external': the place has no cognitive reality for the subject. The situation is different for us, since we have a sophisticated ontology and can think about places. Still, we often do not bother to articulate the place because the current cognitive task does not require it. In such cases — e.g. when I look out the window, see that it rains, and grab my umbrella — Dokic accepts that the place is an unarticulated constituent of the thought. For the place has some cognitive reality for the subject.

At this point, however, the question arises: which cognitive reality? The fact that the subject is able to think about the place and to conceptualize it is neither necessary nor sufficient to confer the relevant cognitive reality. A conceptual ability is not sufficient because it is a mere ability, which may or may not be exercised; and it is not necessary because it is conceptual. As Dokic rightly points out, the subject typically bears a cognitive yet *nonconceptual* relation to the unarticulated place of thinking, in virtue of which he is able to monitor changes of location so as to inhibit certain inferences which require locational constancy.

It is interesting to compare Dokic's position with Perry's. In 'Relativized Propositions' (Recanati 2006) I ascribed to Perry the view that the situation a representation concerns *must* be given in a purely external manner, rather than through some cognitive discrimination on the part of the subject. Dokic holds the exact opposite of this view. As far as I am concerned, I hold an intermediate position. Against Perry, I insist that, in many cases, the situation which an utterance or thought concerns will be determined not by external facts like the location of the speaker, but by cognitive factors such as the topic of the conversation or what the thinker is mentally focussing on. In such cases, admittedly, the situation *s* which the representation *R* concerns will itself have to be somehow represented or articulated — it will have to be cognitively discriminated — but that would raise a problem only if that entailed that *s* is articulated *in R*. As I point out in 'Relativized Propositions', that consequence does not follow. I therefore reject the 'No Cognitive Concerning' principle which Perry seems to accept in his discussion of unarticulated constituents and the concerning relation. But I also reject Dokic's 'Anchoring Constraint', which goes too far in the other direction.

III.

There are unarticulated constituents in language and there are unarticulated constituents in thought. Dokic says that all combinations are possible: a given constituent may be articulated in language but not in thought, or in thought but not language, or in both, or in neither. I agree. The only problematic case is the case in which a constituent is articulated in language but not in thought. It is problematic because it seems that one cannot linguistically articulate something without *eo ipso* thinking about it. But in 'Relativized Propositions', I argued that an important category of thoughts, namely 'context-relative thoughts', cannot be literally expressed in language. To express such a thought sometimes the best thing we can do is to use an indexical sentence, which articulates what is left unarticulated in the

¹ See Dokic, 'Situated mental representations' (ms, Institut Jean-Nicod).

corresponding context-relative thought. Thus ordinary (non-emphatic) *de se* beliefs² are context-relative : they ‘concern’ the self but are not ‘about’ it. As Lewis (1979) puts it, the *de se* believer ‘self-ascribes’ a *property* : the content of his belief, therefore, is not a complete proposition with himself as a constituent. Still the proper way of expressing a *de se* belief in English is by using a first-person sentence, in which the word ‘I’ articulates the unarticulated subject of the self-ascription. We cannot say ‘Hungry !’, we have to say ‘I am hungry’. In such cases it makes sense to say that the self that is articulated in language is not articulated in the expressed thought.

Dokic sees that there is an important connection between situatedness (or unarticulatedness) and ad hoc concepts. He says that the simple concept ‘rain’ that one uses when one sees rain and thinks ‘it’s raining’ (without articulating the place) is an ad hoc concept « derived from the stable concept rain², true of times and places, by temporarily silencing our ability to distinguish one rain event from the another (at a given time) ». But I see no reason not to proceed in the other direction. Why not start from the simple concept ‘rain’ and enrich it into the more complex concept ‘rain-at-a-place’ ?

Finally, there is the problem of nonpersistence. Nonpersistent facts (such as the fact that it’s raining, or the fact that everybody’s happy) are perspectival : they hold only relative to a point of view, and may no longer hold when we change the point of view. Like Perry and many others, Dokic thinks that facts, being part of objective reality, cannot be perspectival, hence that one shouldn’t accept nonpersistent facts. He may be right, but I find this metaphysical issue extraordinarily complex. Reality is, indeed, objective, but it may be construed as fragmented (Fine 2005 : 280-84). That is, we do not have to accept the Tractarian idea that there is a world that is the totality of facts. We can take reality to consist of... situations, without reality itself being a ‘maximal’ situation (Barwise 1989 : 261-62). If we take this line, the issue of nonpersistent facts appears in a new light. Be that as it may, the theory of situations (including the bit about nonpersistent facts) is a tool which I find useful in theorizing about language and thought. Whether or not it makes sense as a metaphysical framework is an issue I’d like to leave open for the moment.

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² The contrast between ordinary and emphatic *de se* beliefs comes from Stéphane Chauvier, *Dire « Je » : Essai sur la subjectivité*, Paris : Vrin, 2001.