" Analogical Uses of the First Person Pronoun: a Difficulty in Philosophical Semantics "

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Analogical counterfactuals such as "If I were you, I would do so and so…" create a puzzle for philosophical semantics. Whereas the 'received view' in philosophical semantics has it that the first person pronoun always refers to its utterer, one may wonder whether this is still the case when the first person pronoun is embedded in analogical counterfactuals such as (2) "If I were you, I would stay away from me". I suggest that the intelligibility of (2) lies in the fact that the token of the expression 'I' in the consequent of the counterfactual does not refer to its utterer. Should one then conclude, following the 'anaphoric theory' that the second occurrence of 'I' in (2) does refer to its addressee? For the 'anaphoric theory', 'I' in 'I would stay away from me' refers anaphorically, thanks to the linguistic context, to the referent of 'you' in 'If I were you'. On the basis of an analysis of the imaginative project involved in uttering a practical advise in the form of (2), I suggest *contra* the 'anaphoric theory' that the first pronoun 'I' in the consequent of (2) behaves as an indexical and that its content is obtained by the application of its character to a pretend context differing from the context of its utterance. According to the so-called 'pretence theory', the first person pronoun in its second occurrence in (2) pretends to refer to a fictional composite of the utterer and the addressee.

1. Introduction

A common human enterprise is to try to understand what another human will do, how he will act, in terms of oneself. Many philosophers and psychologists agree that humans often predict what another will do by, in

imagination, placing themselves in the other's situation and simulating the other's mental economy. On the basis of his own psychological responses during this exercise of imagination, the simulator then may predict what the other will do. Simulation theorists argue that human competence in predicting behaviour, and more generally in mindreading, depends mainly on a capacity for mental simulation[1]. Most simulation theorists suppose that two steps are needed in an exercise of prediction: a replication in oneself in some significant respects of the other's situation and mental states and an implicit analogical inference to the effect that the individual simulated is in the same or in similar mental states.[2]

This common human enterprise of thinking of another as oneself may also be exemplified in a different way. Without aiming at understanding what another will do, humans may aim at guiding the other's behaviour in presenting oneself as a model for the other. I am thinking of the common human enterprise of giving a practical advise in the form of "If I were you, I would. …" statements. Since these statements rely on an explicit analogical inference from the advisor to another person and have the form of a counterfactual conditional, let's call these statments 'analogical counterfactuals'.

In what follows, I suggest that analogical counterfactuals in which one thinks of oneself as another may create a puzzle for philosophical semantics. Whereas the 'official doctrine' in philosophical semantics has it that the first person pronoun always refers to its utterer, one may wonder whether this is still the case when the first person pronoun is embedded in analogical counterfactuals such as "If I were you, I would stay away from me". Does the second occurrence of 'I' in this counterfactual refers to its utterer? Does it refer to its addressee? Focusing on the analogical counterfactual "If I were you, I would stay away from me", I try to argue in favour of a third option according

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[1] Voir, en particulier, Davies & Stone, 1995a, 1995b, Carruthers & Smith, 1996 et Dokic & Proust, 2002.

[2] Among simulation theorists, Robert Gordon has argued that simulation does not require this second step in order to yield attributions of mental states to others. For Gordon, simulation does not have the logical structure of an analogical inference from one's own mental states to the mental states of others, cf. Gordon 1995a.

to which the first person pronoun in its second occurrence refers to a fictional composite of the utterer and the addressee.

2. Two-Dimensionalism Semantics and the First Person Pronoun: The Classical Theory

2.1. Context, content, circumstances of evaluation and extensions

According to kaplanian two-dimensionalism semantics,[3] the first step on the way to a logic of an indexical expression is to distinguish between its content and its extension. This first step leads naturally to the second step towards such a logic which is the distinction between the context of utterance and the circumstance of evaluation or 'world' of the indexical expression under study.

This last distinction between the context of utterance and the circumstances of evaluation reflects, among other things, the fact that whereas one can easily conceive worlds or circumstances of evaluation with no individuals in them, one has no similar freedom with contexts. The context appears to be as much tied to the actual world with its speakers as the circumstances of evaluation appear to be detached from these particular constraints of the actual world. This is the reason why a context is traditionally conceived as 4-tuple consisting of a world, place, time, agent, such that, in that world, the agent of the context is in that place at that time ($<a, p, t, w>$) whereas a circumstance of evaluation is conceived with only two co-ordinates as a world-time pair ($<t, w>$).[4]

Once these distinctions are made, two groups of notions are naturally constituted: content and context on one side, extension and circumstances of evaluation or world on the other side. Still there is one missing ingredient which Kaplan calls 'character' without which the first group of notion [content, context] would not exist as a group. What Kaplan calls 'character' is the linguistic rule which governs the indexical expression under study and which, associated with a context of utterance, determines its content. Once determined, the content is then evaluated with respect to a circumstance or world to determine an extension. This is why, whereas characters are functions

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[3] Cf. Kaplan (1989).
[4] Cf. Taylor (1998, p. 276).

from contexts to contents, contents are functions from circumstances of evaluation to extensions.

2.2. 'Pure indexicals' are not controllable

By contrast of predicative expressions whose extensions vary relative to the circumstances of their evaluation, there is a class of terms whose extensions are their referents and whose extensions do not vary across worlds or 'circumstances of evaluations' in kaplanian vocabulary. For these terms, you can change the circumstances of evaluation as you wish, the expressions belonging to that particular class would still have the extensions they have (or do not have) in the actual world. These terms are, in kripkean terminology, 'rigid designators'[5] and in kaplanian vocabulary 'directly referential terms'. This means that the content of these terms is fixed once and for all in their originating context, it is a constant function from circumstances of evaluation to their referents (if they have any).

This class of terms includes names and demonstratives and what Kaplan calls 'pure indexicals'. Leaving names aside, there is an important difference between 'true demonstratives' and 'pure indexicals': whereas 'true demonstratives' are expressions the content of which is not fixed until a demonstration is either provided or stipulated, that is determined by the intentions of the speaker, the content of a 'pure indexical' first depends strictly and in a very regular way on an external feature of the context and it cannot be stipulated by the speaker.[6]

2.3. The first person pronoun

The first person pronoun 'I' is a 'pure indexical' that is an expression (taken in context) the content of which is fixed directly by features of context. To the expression 'I' is associated a linguistic meaning or 'character', a constant function taking as input a context and determining on that basis a content. For every context, the content of 'I' is a constant function from circumstance of evaluation to an individual, the agent of the context. It is a rule of language that

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[5] Cf. Kripke (1980).
[6] Cf. Recanati (2000, p. 256).

the first person pronoun 'I' refers to the agent of the context. Let's quote Barwsise and Perry:

> "One cannot simply choose which discourse situation to exploit. I cannot exploit a discourse situation with Napoleon as speaker; even if I am fully convinced that I am Napoleon, my use of 'I' designates me, not him. (Barwise and Perry, 1983, p. 148)"

And Kaplan:

> "The speaker refers to himself when he uses 'I', and no pointing to another or believing that he is another or intending to refer to another can defeat this reference" (Kaplan, 1989, p. 491)".

In other words, I do not choose myself in saying 'I'. The character of 'I' marks it as a device of self-ascription, whether you like it or not! That is a direct consequence of the Classical Theory.

3. Some Alledged Counterexample to the Classical Theory
3.1. A practical advise
If you were told that I said:

> (1) 'I would stay away from me',

you would certainly feel a certain perplexity. You would believe that I was just speaking nonsense or metaphorically. Leaving the metaphorical explanation aside, it seems that (1) has problematic truth-conditions, that it is not possible for (1) to be true or to make sense. One can offer at least two kinds of explanations of your perplexity regarding my utterance of (1), either metaphysically inspired or formally inspired:

The metaphysical explanation goes like this: when one notices that one is necessarily not able to meet oneself, one does not mean that one necessarily stays away from oneself: one means that there is no possible world in which one is identical with some other person and is able to meet oneself, or that there is no possible world in which one is identical with some other person and stays

away from oneself. Staying away from oneself is just like meeting oneself: these are modal properties which are metaphysically impossible to exemplify. And the formal explanation goes like this: the relations "to stay away from" or "to meet" hold of two different entities, not the same entity.

But if you were told the whole story, your perplexity about my utterance of (1) would certainly vanish. The whole story is that I did talk to a person who owed me a lot of money he cannot pay back and that (1) is the consequent of the following subjunctive conditional statement:

> (2) 'If I were you, I would stay away from me'.

Notice that an utterance of (2) expresses a very thoughtful proposition. The content thereby being expressed by the consequent of (2) is that my addressee would better stay away from me, the speaker. Notice also that this content seems semantically conveyed, not pragmatically conveyed.[7]

One can easily prefix (1) with antecedents of the form 'If I were x' where demonstratives or names can be the value of x such as in:

> (3) 'If I were him, I would stay away from me'
> (4) 'If I were Chirac, I would stay away from me' (or 'I would not try to challenge me at the next presidential election', said by Sarkosy).'

While a detached utterance of (1) does not make sense, a non-detached utterance of the same sentence can make sense as in (2), (3) and (4). The absurdity of (1) may vanish when the very words of (1) are embedded in a larger sentence such as in (2) - (4).

There is a kind of revolution in the semantic content of (1) since, once it is embedded as in (2)-(4), it becomes intelligible. In the next section, I will discuss two explanations of this semantic phenomenon, an 'anaphoric explanation' and a 'pretence explanation'. Whatever explanations one chooses, it remains that the intelligibility of (2) - (4) lies in the fact that the token of the

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[7] The information pragmatically conveyed by an utterance of (2) might be that I would like to meet him.

expression 'I' in the consequent does not seem to refer to the agent of the context. And this is in direct conflict with one tenet of the Classical Theory concerning the first person pronoun.

I owe the example (2) to Robert Gordon. Gordon discusses briefly this example in a footnote of a paper on simulation theory. Gordon claims that (2) is a case of practical advise, advises which are naturally prefaced with the phrase "If I were you …". And he adds the following comment which goes against the Classical Theory:

> "But we are not committing ourselves as to what in fact we ourselves will do when such a situation arises. The consequent of the conditional that begins, "If I were you"—the "I would W" part—does not refer to the speaker. Consider, e.g., "If I were you, I would stay away from me"" (Gordon, 1995, fn. 17, p. 740).

If Gordon is right — and I think he is right —, this refutes all analysis of (2) — such as Lakoff (1996, 95 sq.) — where the second token of 'I' is interpreted as co-referring anaphorically to the first token of 'I', that is to the speaker.

4. The Choice of a Theory

At least, two competing theories may be proposed to analyse analogical counterfactuals such as:

> (2) 'If I were you, I would stay away from me'.

Both theories admit that the second token of the first person pronoun does not refer to the agent of the context. But they disagree in their identification of the referent of 'I' in the apodosis. For the 'anaphoric theory', 'I' refers anaphorically, thanks to the linguistic context, to the referent of 'you': 'I' (in 'I would stay away from me') co-refers with 'you' (in 'If I were you'). For the 'pretence theory', 'I' in the consequent of (2) behaves as an indexical but its content is obtained by the application of its character to a pretend context differing from the context of utterance relative to its agent.

There are various arguments in favour or against each proposal. But the best

way to choose among these competing proposals is first to analyse more finely the kind of imaginative project involved in practical advises prefixed with an 'If I were You' sentence.

4.1. 'Imagining being another'

It is clear that, at the conceptual level, 'Imagining being X' is an ambiguous phrase. Its sense can vary between two extremes, from 'imagining oneself in X's place' to 'imagining that one is X rather than oneself'.

To clarify this opposition, let's notice that the first imaginative project makes it possible for the imaginer to imagine being brought face to face with X, something which is clearly ruled out by imagining that one is X rather than oneself.[8] This is because only the second imaginative project aimed at not involving any aspect of the imaginer in it, at least it is one of its ambition.

What am I doing when I imagine being Kripke? The answer to this question will depend on the kind of ambition attached to my imaginative project. If this is a modest imaginative project, if this is an instance of 'imagining oneself in X's place', it will be imagining myself in Kripke's place, imagining myself in an analogous way as Kripke. This might involve imagining behaving as Kripke does, wearing Kripke's beard, having his virtues and vices. But this modest project will not involve imagining that I actually am Kripke, that I am identical with that great philosopher. This last and much more ambitious project would be an instance of 'imagining being X' understood as 'imagining that one is X rather than oneself'. By contrast the modest imaginative project is much like playing the part of Kripke and just as an actor is still Depardieu when he plays the role of Danton, it is still myself, Jérôme Pelletier, whom I imagine as Kripke, giving a brilliant lecture without notes … When I say things like:

> (5) 'If I had been Kripke, I would never have left the John Locke Lectures unpublished',

what I mean is that if I, Jerome Pelletier, had been in Kripke's shoes, I would

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[8] Cf. Wollheim (1984, p. 76).

have acted differently and publish the lectures. I do no mean that if I had literally been Kripke and not Jerome Pelletier, I would never have left the John Locke Lectures unpublished because, in this last case, I would have done just as Kripke did.[9] Neither do I suppose in asserting (5) that I am, with all my characteristics and ignorance of modal logic, into Kripke's body. What is characteristic of this modest imaginative project, what is characteristic of 'imagining being X' in the sense of 'imagining oneself in X's place' is that it involves a mixture of the imaginer's properties and of the X's properties. As Goldie claims, the question: 'What would I do if I were in Bill Clinton's shoes?' does not motivate either an answer like 'Obviously, just as Bill Clinton would' nor an answer

> "… which supposes that I, with all my characteristics and woeful ignorance of US politics, am strangely catapulted into Clinton's chair in the Oval Office" (Goldie, 1999, p. 412).

4.2. How to give a practical advise

Which kind of imaginative project is involved in my giving a practical advise in the analogical form of (2)? It is the modest imaginative project. In the paper already mentioned, Gordon rightly claims that:

> "... when we set up ourselves to give advice, we imaginatively project ourselves into the person's problem situation."

And he adds the important restriction:

> "Although we imaginatively project ourselves into the person's problem situation, it is always important, in giving advice, to hold back in certain ways from identification with the other person, that is from making the further adjustments required to imagine being not just in that person's situation but that person in that person's situation." (Gordon, 1995b, p. 740).

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[9] Cf. Williams (1973).

If we identified with the other, we then would lose the very advantages that makes our advice worthwhile: the special know-how or the independent judgement we are supposed to have. The idea is for the person giving the advise to imagine transforming himself or herself in the other without really identifying with the other. Advising supposes to imagine being oneself in the other's situation, not to imagine being the other person in the other's situation: it is a case of imagining being another without identifying with the other. In other words, it is the imagination of an analogical identification between two individuals.

4.3. The inadequacy of the anaphoric theory

According to the anaphoric theory, the first person pronoun 'I' in the apodosis of:

(2) 'If I were you, I would stay away from me'.

is an anaphoric pronoun which, thanks to the linguistic context given by the antecedent of the conditional, refers to the individual who is the addressee. This suggest that there are anaphoric uses of the first person pronoun as there are anaphoric uses of third person pronouns as in:

(6) 'John told Jane that she had won the lottery'[10]

This proposal has been already made for other 'pure indexicals". For instance Corazza (1999) suggests that 'now' in:

(7) 'In 1834, John visited his mother the once famous actress, now an old sick woman'

does not pick up the time the sentence is written or uttered, the reason being that in cases like this "now" is anaphorically linked to and co-referential with "1834". And Corazza proposes the same anaphoric analysis for sentences

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[10] I found this example in Corazza (1999).

containing 'here' such as:

> (8) 'If an entire neighbourhood could qualify as an outdoor museum, the Mount Washington district would probably charge admission. *Here* just Northwest of downtown, are several picture-book expression of desert culture within a few blocks.'[11]

Let's quote Corazza:

> "In (8), 'here' does not refer to the place the author of the guide was when he wrote it. It refers to the Mount Washington district. And it does so because it is anaphorically linked to "the Mount Washington district". Actually, if in (8) 'here' were replaced by the anaphoric pronoun 'there', nothing would be lost." (1999, p. 10)

The main argument in favour of the anaphoric construal of 'I' lies in the non-detachability of (1) (= the apodosis) from (2): one cannot simply detach the consequent from the antecedent. If I were to utter (1), my context of utterance would certainly supply the wrong reference for 'I'. This is supposed to show that one depends anaphorically on the other.

But our construal of the imaginative project involved in uttering (2) makes it difficult if not impossible for 'I' in the apodosis to co-refer with 'you' in the prodasis. If that co-reference were the case, (2) would not be anymore an advise since, in that case, the adviser would have lost what makes his advise worthwhile, that is his independent judgement and expertise. While giving an advise to a person, we put forward our know-how, we rely on the fact that we have an independent judgement which the other should use as a norm for his or her actions, or as a guide to help him or her in his or her actions: in these circumstances, our use of the first person pronoun has a normative character. If by contrast 'I' in the apodosis co-referred with 'you', (2) would involve a simulation of the addressee with identification to the addressee and would lose

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[11] This is an example from Predelli (1998). Predelli does not draw the same conclusion, i.e., he does not take 'here' in (8) to work like an anaphoric pronoun.

all of its normative force: it would no more be a case of practical advise. The motivation of the anaphoric proposal is to take into account the analogical transformation announced in the prodasis of (2), a transformation of the adviser in his addressee. But its main mistake is to go too far: from a transformation up to an identification.

Another objection to the anaphoric proposal might be attributed to Lakoff who did not discuss this particular example but a very close one. The objection has the following form: let's compare sentences (2) and (2'):

(2') 'If I were you, you would stay away from me'.

Lakoff claims then that (2') is 'decidedly strange' (1996, p. 96) and that this shows that the second token of 'I' in (2) cannot refer anaphorically to the referent of the second person pronoun 'you'.

To this objection, one may reply that the observation that (2') is bizarre should not lead us to conclude that 'I' in the apodosis cannot refer anaphorically to the addressee. One could only conclude that 'I' in the apodosis is not a 'pronoun of laziness': it is not a pronoun which can be replaced by its antecedent without change of significance. 'I' would still be anaphoric to 'you' but in a non-lazy way.[12]

This rather would show that (2') is not grammatically correct, not that 'I' is not anaphoric. (2') looks like an analogical counterfactual conditional which in fact it is not. When you have a *if A then B* construction, its meaning consists in linking B to the imaginary situation A as a consequence.[13] But with (2'), there is no way to link the apodosis ('you would stay away from me') to the prodasis ('If I were you') in a thoughtful way. Whereas in (2), the link is established at the grammatical level by the repetition of the first person pronoun.

4.4. The 'pretence theory'

For the 'pretence theory', 'I' in the consequent of (2) behaves as an indexical but its content is obtained by the application of its character to a pretend

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[12] Cf. Geach (1962).
[13] Cf. Fauconnier (1996, p. 58).

context differing from the context of utterance relative to its agent. This pretend context differs from the context of utterance of (2) in that its agent is not the real agent but a fictional construction which has some properties of the real agent and some properties of the addressee. This pretend context is a fictional context containing an hybrid agent, a fictional person with a mixture of the speaker and the addressee characterisations. But still the various occurrences of 'I' in (2) are occurrences of an indexical expression since it is the tokens' non-linguistic context (though imagined) which is relevant in the determination of the tokens' content, not the tokens' linguistic context as it is the case with anaphora.

In the prodasis of (2), the person giving the practical advise imagines being in the addressee's shoes. This first move corresponds to a context-shift where the agent is no more the empirical agent but a fictional entity with some aspects of the addressee as well as some aspects of the real agent. In the apodosis, the person giving the advise reasons then under that pretence but without losing track of the fact that he is only playing a part, a fact which shows in the last occurrence of the first person pronoun in (2) 'me' which, 'betraying' the pretence, refers to the agent of the original context. Following Walton and Recanati, the last occurrence of the first person pronoun in (2) makes of (2) an instance of a pretence-cum-betrayal statement as with negative existentials.[14]

4.5. Other linguistic data in favour of the pretence theory

4.5.1. Irony and quotation
Here is an example from Predelli:

> (9) 'Sure I can do it! I can fix anything! And now, look what you have done!' (Predelli, 1998, p. 408).

Predelli comments:

> "By uttering the first two sentences in (7), I am in a sense playing your

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[14] Cf. Walton (1990) and Recanati (2000, § 16.4, p. 308).

part. The content that is thereby being expressed is that *you* can do the job. (…) the correct content is obtained by applying the expressions' characters to a context differing from the context of utterance as to the agent's coordinate."

But the first two sentences in (9) may also be analysed as a case of disguised quotation as in (9'):

> (9') ' "Sure I can do it! I can fix anything!" And now, look what you have done!'

And in quotation, as Recanati (2000, chap. 12) claims, 'I' often does not refer to the person who quotes, but to the quoted person.

4.5.2. The use of 'I' to refer to an imaginary person

Smith presents a dialogue where the referent of a use of 'I' is determined by the context to be an imaginary person, not the real utterer of the first person pronoun. Here is the dialogue:

> " 'She looks just like you' Bob informs Jane as a picturesquely drawn character representing an imaginary person appears on the television screen. Jane laughs and the interchange continues. 'Hey, where did you go?' Bob asks as the character disappears from the screen. 'I left for a moment, but I will be back' Jane replies (Smith, 1989, p. 184).

4.5.3. Fictional narratives and dream reports.

When Henry James begins his tale *Four Meetings* with the following words:

> "I saw her but four times, though I remember them vividly; she made her impression on me" (James, 1979, p. 41).

it does not follow from the fact that James tells a story from the position of a witness or participant that he is that witness. In this passage, the world 'I' does not refer to Henry James. Rather it purports to denote a character in the novel distinguished from the author, namely the narrator.

According to Boardman, the same phenomenon happens in dream reports:

> "In most dreams, there is a character who represents the dreamer. When one narrates a dream by saying 'I dreamt that I saw Nixon tricked", the two occurrences of the pronoun have different referents: the first refers to the dreamer, while the second refers to the protagonist in the dream representing the dreamer" (Boardman, 1979, p. 116).

This kind of explanation where various occurrences of 'I' in one and the same utterance are interpreted to have different referents opens the way to an analysis of Jim McCawley's classic example:

(10) 'I dreamt that I was Brigitte Bardot and that I kissed me'[15],

an analysis according to which the second and third occurrences of the first person pronoun refers to the protagonist in the dream representing the dreamer. But one should add here to Boardman's analysis of dream reports that this supposes some degree of play-acting and pretense on the utterer's side. And as with (2), the last occurrence of the first person pronoun 'me' in (10) refers to the real utterer of the sentence 'betraying the pretence'.

5. Conclusion

In order to understand analogical counterfactuals such as (2), one does not need, as in the anaphoric theory, to postulate that some occurrences of the first person pronoun would refer to their addressees or an identity between two different persons: the utterer and the addressee. If the pretence theory is right, understanding analogical counterfactuals requires to imagine some third person, a blend of utterer and addressee, as the referent of some occurrences of the first person pronoun.

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[15] The example is cited in Lakoff (1996, p. 92)

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