

Notes on **Ruth Garrett Milikan's**
“There's no ‘I’ in Mentalese”

Description: Response for 1989 SPP conference, to be held in Tucson, April 14, 1989

File path: ... :Papers:Milikan:Milikan — Notes

Copyright: © 1989 Brian Cantwell Smith

Last edited: Monday, April 3, 1989 — 3:17:08 PM

I. Background

A. Indexicality itself

1. A property of types
2. Two properties
 - a. Facts about the specific event (not shared by the type) are relevant to what is the particular event's content.
 - b. That relevance is a kind of *spreading-out-from-the-event* kind of locality or “ego-centricity”.
3. Second, there is a **regularity** or **rule** that relates the specifics, in each case, associated with the type (parameterised on the instances, presumably).
 - a. Milikan's “indexical adapting relation”
 - b. “Meaning”, or (Kaplan) “character”.

B. Claim

1. There is analogy, with respect to indexicality, between language and mental life.
2. Specifically, that indexical thoughts are relevant to action.

C. Example

1. Suppose I claim that bomb will land at place x and time y, which you don't realise are “here” and “in 10 minutes”. Won't move. But if you do, will move.
2. Claim: *resultant thought* (one that led to action) is indexical.
3. What is mentally indexical isn't an act of *recognising* that it's going to hit here, but resultant thought *that it is going to hit (here)*.

D. Question of explicitness

1. Is the thought of the form
 - a. It will arrive in 10 minutes; or
 - i. It will arrive in 10 minutes from *now*.

- b. Former: *is* indexical; latter: *has* an indexical (object).
- c. Call latter “index”.
- 2. Similarly, move from
 - a. Hungry! to
 - i. I *am* hungry!
 - b. Requires explicit representation of person (I) and time (am)
- 3. Explicitness matters because it is distracting:
 - a. The explicit versions seem the closest analogue to language; but
 - b. The implicit versions are the ones that recommend action
 - i. Reason: because *action* is indexical
 - ii. Not only do different acts of the same type have different consequences, but what those consequences are depends, in the appropriate local way, on the act itself.

II. Milikans' claims

- 1. Relation of indexical (word) to referent: not relevant to action
- 2. Relation of self to world *that must be taken into account* in order to act: not of the sort that an indexical bears to its referent
- 3. Indexicals needn't *signify* relation between themselves and referents, whereas such inner signs are needed.
- 4. Self-representational token (\$me) isn't indexical.

III. Milikan's arguments

- A. Sum relation (AB & BC) isn't necessarily relevant to action.
 - 1. Her arguments
 - a. Postcard case: self(author)-relative relation isn't transferred to self(reader)-relation, for obvious reasons having to do with long-distance text transmission.
 - b. Murdoch: doesn't have the local, self-relative character any longer.
 - c. Percepts: point (well-taken), that *interpreting* an indexical requires an *independent* access to the referent: relation A to B, plus *rule*, isn't enough (or even of the right kind) to create proper relation A to C.
 - e Hence: adapting relation isn't relevant to action.
 - 2. My reaction:
 - a. Sure enough, but no one said it was. No reason to suppose that R1+R2 would be indexical, just because R1 was (compare: short).
 - i. Mistake to assume that the *indexical's* adapting relation (rule) was relevant to action.
 - ii. All she has concluded is that the *rules of indexical words* aren't of the sort to ensure that, when interpreted, they lead the person into a state relevant to action.
 - iii. But, again, no one said they were. The claim, rather, was that indexical *thoughts* were relevant to action, not thoughts that result from the interpretation of indexical *language*.
 - iv. What has Milikan *has* suggested, which is interesting, is that the proper interpretation of indexical language doesn't automatically engender an indexical thought.
 - b. In sum, she has argued that

- i. The *specific* relation that an indexical word bears to its referent isn't relevant, when understood, to action.
 - ii. Claim, however, was that the *type* of relation that an indexical word bears to its relation (namely, two properties given above), when it holds of a thought, is relevant to action.
 - iii. Those are different.
 - c. Why would she have thought it did?
 - i. Because she thinks that *thinking an indexical thought* is to be cashed in as *interpreting an indexical token of mentalese*.
 - ii. Hmmm.....
- B. Things that are relevant to action (relative size, graspability, distance, etc.) aren't the sort of things that indexical words bear to their referents.
 - 1. Her argument: obvious
 - 2. My response
 - a. Sure enough, but what of it.
 - b. Again, all that is to be concluded is that the *particular* relations indexical words bear to their referents aren't the *same* (in content) as the *particular* relations that action-engendering thoughts must bear to theirs.
 - c. May, again, be true.
 - d. But doesn't argue that *those thoughts* aren't themselves indexical.
- C. Indexicals don't display the (indexical) relation between themselves and their referents. Interpreter must *independently* know what item is the referent, and therefore stands in that relation.
 - 1. RM
 - a. Postcard, etc.
 - 2. Me:
 - a. Sure enough, isn't part of the content.
 - b. Can, however, be displayed (ordinary face-to-face conversation). Admittedly, the interpreter must know the *rule*.
 - c. But again, so what.
 - d. More seriously:
 - i. Could take her arguments as showing, once again, that the interpretation of indexicals isn't enough to stand the interpreter in a position of being able to act with respect to the referent. (Pointing, when what is pointed isn't visible).
 - ii. Point is that the interpreter has to stand in his or her *own* relation to that referent.
 - iii. Now whether that "own" relation has to be *independent*, I doubt, but that it is *different*, I concur.
 - iv. Still, doesn't bear on the general issue.
- D. Mentalese "me".
 - 1. Her argument
 - a. Obviously special.
 - b. Procedures for interpreting the referent: turns (in this case) into procedure for deciding what other thoughts it coincides with in content, etc.

2. Me:

- a. Not just special, but special *in the way in which indexicals are*. That it is relatively *constant* is true. But more seriously, it plays the role of being inserted and removed (cf. self-reference arguments).
- b. Procedures she talks of (inter-thought) are of wrong type — irrelevant to the claim. $A \leftrightarrow A'$, not $A \leftrightarrow C$.

N. Notes to be included

- Cases of disanalogy
- Thoughts don't require acts of interpretation
- 'I', I think, is misleading. Has appropriate self-relativity, but not, within a given person, the appropriate variation (though it does across people types. RM not impressed; I am. But no matter.)
- RM assumes that thoughts are tokens that are *interpreted* by the agent. I think this is a mistake. Thoughts are *thought*; they *have* interpretations, just like planets have circumferences and distances from the sun. But I'm not yet sure whether her argument hinges on this.
-

C. Specific, sorted

- ...

F. Fragments

- ...
- end of file —(t)(t)