

M LITT SEMINAR: INDEXICALITY AND ANALYTICITY

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The sentence I'm most interested in is:

(1) I am here now.

What interests me about it is whether it's an analytic truth, whether it's true in virtue of its meaning. I take these two notions to be equivalent.

Suppose we take the following analysis of the class of expressions, *indexical* expressions, of which 'I', 'here' and 'now' are members. Such expressions have a *character* such that they contribute a different meaning to utterances of which they are a part depending on the context of the utterance.

We can talk with some precision about contexts, or rather *indices*. For the purposes of semantics they can be defined as n-tuples of the form $\langle i_A, i_L, i_T, i_W \rangle$. i_A is a speaker, i_L is a location, i_T is a time and i_W is a world. We can add more parameters as needed, the ones I have chosen are sufficient for defining contexts / indices at which (1) can be assigned a content, and at which such contents can be assessed for truth or falsity.

Is (1) an analytic truth? David Kaplan thought so:

“Intuitively, [(1)] is deeply, and . . . universally, true. One need only understand the meaning of [(1)] to know that it cannot be uttered falsely.”¹

I think that it is possible to share this intuition and, as I will describe, Kaplan is able to secure that result in his semantics.

I think that it is also possible to resist such an intuition. We might reason as follows. In any particular context we will get an utterance with content that can be expressed in the form:

(2) A is at L at T.

Things of this form do not seem to be analytic. So while what is actually said by any use of (1) at any context is true at that context, it is not true at any context.

Suppose that the above claim is not found convincing. How can (1) be treated so that it is an analytic truth. Kaplan's semantics are such that (1) is true whenever it is meaningful. This is because he makes the following stipulation. Call an index $\langle i_A, i_L, i_T, i_W \rangle$ *proper* iff

¹Kaplan (1989) p. 509.

i_A is at i_L at i_T . Kaplan restricts indices to proper indices. In that case (1) is true whenever it is meaningful and so, on a slightly strained sense of ‘analytic’, it is analytic.

I think it can be made clear that this is an illegitimate move. Consider the following case:

JONES’ NOTE. Jones has decided to flee the country. At 8 a.m. he leaves a note for his wife, which reads: ‘As you can see I’m not at home now. If you hurry, you’ll catch the evening flight to Los Cabos. Meet me in six hours at the Hotel Cabo Real.’ As Jones is well aware his wife will not be home from work until 5 p.m.²

It seems that the only way to make sense of this kind of case is to accept that the context that fixes the referent of ‘now’, and therefore the point from which the six hours begin, is not when the note is actually written. But at that time the ‘I’ that is fixed may not exist. That is a consequence of the appeal to improper indices that such cases require. If we are pushed to accepting improper indices then we must reject Kaplan’s restriction and deny that (1) is analytic. It is not even analytic in the weak sense Kaplan tries to secure for it.

Does this have an important philosophical consequence? I think that it does in at least one contemporary debate.

Michael Glanzberg has argued that the only way for contextualism to deal with certain cases better than relativism is to adopt an *indirect metasemantics*.³ What he means by this is a little obscure. But part of what he means is the allowability of improper indices. The relativists’ response is likely to be that such a move is too costly. But if the argument I have presented is sound, and I think it is, we must admit such things anyway.

References

- Glanzberg, M. (2007). Context, content, and relativism. *Philosophical Studies*, 136(1):1–29.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives. In Almog, J., Perry, J., and Wettstein, H., editors, *Themes From Kaplan*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Predelli, S. (2005). *Contexts: Meaning, Truth, and the Use of Language*. Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Richard, M. (2004). Contextualism and Relativism. *Philosophical Studies*, 119:215–242.

²The example is from Predelli (2005) p. 43. My discussion here draws heavily on ch. 2 of this book, especially §4.

³See Glanzberg (2007), for his relativist target see Richard (2004).