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# *De Se* Assertion

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## **abstract**

It has been long known (Perry (1977, 1979), Lewis (1981)) that *de se* attitudes, such as beliefs and desires that one has *about oneself*, call for a special treatment in theories of attitudinal content. The aim of this paper is to raise similar concerns for theories of asserted content. The received view, inherited from Kaplan (1989), has it that if Alma says “I am hungry,” the asserted content, or *what is said*, is the proposition that Alma is hungry (at a given time). I argue that the received view has difficulties handling *de se* assertion, i.e. contents that one expresses using the first person pronoun, to assert something about oneself. I start from the observation that when two speakers say “I am hungry,” one may truly report them as having said the same thing. It has often been held that the possibility of such reports comes from the fact that the two speakers are, after all, uttering the same words, and are in this sense “saying the same thing”. I argue that this approach fails, and that it is neither necessary nor sufficient to use the same words, or words endowed with the same meaning, in order to be truly reported as same-saying. I also argue that reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion differ significantly from such reports in the case of two speakers merely implicating the same thing. Finally, I outline a new account of the content of assertion, similar to Lewis's account of *de se* attitudes. The proposal is, roughly, when Alma says “I am hungry”, the asserted content just the property of being hungry, and it is a property that Alma asserts *of herself*. I then propose to generalize the account to the other cases in a way that departs from Lewis's account, and I close by showing how my proposal handles the cases discussed in the first part of the paper.

## **§1. The received wisdom on *what is said***

In philosophy of language, the dominant view regarding indexicals' contribution to content, inherited from the work of David Kaplan (1989), has it that *what is said* by a speaker using a sentence that contains an indexical pronoun (or the

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'content', in Kaplan's terms) differs from the lexical meaning of the sentence (or its 'character') in that, on the one hand, it includes the specification of the pronoun's referent (as determined in the context of utterance), but, on the other, does not include the lexically encoded conditions that help determining the referent, such as the condition of being female in the case of 'she', or of the condition of being a speaker in the case of 'I'. Suppose that on Friday May 15, 2012, at noon, Alma says:

(1) I am hungry.

According to the Kaplanian view, the meaning of the sentence in (1) is a function from contexts to contents which, given a context, returns the proposition that the speaker of that context is hungry at the time of the context, while *what is said* by (1), or, equivalently, its content, is the output of that function as applied to the context of (1), hence the proposition that Alma is hungry on May 15, 2012, at noon.

Let me clarify from the outset that my target in this paper is Kaplan's account of what is said, and not his semantic account of indexicals. There is some unclarity in Kaplan's writings as to the status of his notion of *what is said*, since he seems to move back and forth between a stronger view, on which his notion of content (*qua* something that, when evaluated at a circumstance, gives a truth value) is meant to account for our pre-theoretical, intuitive notion of *what is said*, and a weaker view, on which 'what is said' is merely another "technical" term for the notion of (semantic) content. I am interested in the stronger view, for I am interested in the question of whether the Kaplanian notion of content is able to account for the content of assertion and for *what is said*, where the latter

is taken to be what calls for analysis, rather than just another technical notion. Since I would also like to leave it open what Kaplan's own view was, I shall speak of the *Kaplanian* account, whether or not he himself would have ascribed to it.<sup>1</sup>

There are two intertwined motivations for the Kaplanian account. Suppose that at the time at which Alma utters (1), Bruce, pointing at her, says:

(2) She is hungry.

Then we can truly report Bruce as having said in (2) what Alma said in (1). Indeed, they both said that Alma was hungry. Or, suppose that on Saturday May 16, Chris says:

(3) Alma was hungry yesterday at noon.

Again, it seems that one may truly report Alma and Chris as having said the same thing on the grounds of their utterances of (1) and (3).

The previous example involves speakers who same-say using sentences whose meanings are not the same. The second motivation for the Kaplanian view concerns speakers who use sentences with the same meaning, yet fail to same-say. Suppose that on Saturday, May 16, 2009, Chris says:

(4) I am hungry.

Those who share Kaplan's intuitions would insist that what is said by Alma in (1) and what is said by Chris in (4) are different things:

What is said in using a given indexical in different contexts may

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<sup>1</sup> While some of Kaplan's remarks suggest that he might have had the weaker view in mind, and while some of Kaplan's followers take the expression 'what is said' to be synonymous with 'content' and view both of these as technical terms, it is still true that the force of Kaplan's arguments often draws on our intuitive notion of what is said.

be different. Thus if I say, today, “I was insulted yesterday,” and you utter the same words tomorrow, what is said is different [...] There are possible circumstances in which what I said would be true but what you said would be false. Thus we say different things (Kaplan 1989: 500).<sup>2</sup>

## §2. *De se* assertion

It has been pointed out many times (e.g. Feldman 1980: 80, Lewis 1980: 97) that cases such as (1)-(4), in which the sentence “I am hungry” is uttered by different speakers, are as much of a problem for the Kaplanian view as they are a motivation for it. On the one hand, a proponent of the Kaplanian view is arguably right to say that, *in some sense*, what Alma says in (1) is different from what Chris says in (4). As we have seen, Alma's utterance of (1) says, *in some sense*, the same thing as (2) or (3), but there seems to be no sense in which Chris's utterance of (4) says the same thing as either (2) or (3). But on the other hand, there is, to use Lewis's words, an “equally legitimate” sense in which Alma in (1) and Chris in (4) do say the same thing. Indeed, each says that he or she is hungry.

The intuition that Alma in (1) and Chris in (4) same-say is further supported by our linguistic practices of reporting what is said. Consider the following

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<sup>2</sup> Although Kaplan was arguably the first to systematically distinguish between lexically encoded meaning and what is said, both insights go back at least to Frege, who wrote: “The sentence ‘I am cold’ expresses a different thought in the mouth of one person from what it expresses in the mouth of another. [...] It is not necessary that the person who feels cold should himself give utterance to the thought that he feels cold. Another person can do this by using a name to designate the one who feels cold” (1899: 236).

dialogue:

(5) Chris: I am hungry.

(6) Bruce: Alma said that, too.

Bruce's report in (6) is ambiguous. It can be understood as reporting Alma to have said that *Chris* was hungry, or that *she herself* was hungry.<sup>3</sup> This ambiguity is very similar to the well-known syntactic ambiguity with VP-ellipsis. Suppose that Bruce says:

(7) I love my wife, and so does Chris.

On its “strict” reading, (7) says that Chris loves Bruce's wife, while on its “sloppy” reading, it says that Chris loves *his own* wife. Given this apparent similarity, I will use the 'strict' vs. 'sloppy' terminology for the ambiguity that we find with reports of same-saying such as (6).

### §3. Saying the same thing vs. using the same words

In the previous section, we saw that when different people say “I am hungry,” there is a sense in which they are saying the same thing, for each is saying that he or she is hungry. A response readily available to the Kaplanian is to point out that the same sentence is being uttered, and that this could explain why we are inclined to hear the two speakers as saying the same thing – for, after all, they are uttering the same words. In this section, I want to argue that this is not a correct approach to the problem of *de se* assertion. Although the use of one and

<sup>3</sup> As a matter of fact, the report in (6) is four-ways ambiguous because of the contribution of the present tense: it can report Alma as having said that Chris was hungry at the time when she said it, or that he is hungry at the time of (5), or that she was hungry at the time when she said it, or that she is hungry at the time of (5). For the sake of simplicity, I will leave aside all the issues raised by the contribution of tense.

the same sentence may partly account for the intuition that the same thing has been said, that cannot be the end of the story, since, as I will show, it is neither *necessary* nor *sufficient* to use the same sentence in order to be reported, literally and truly, as same-saying. I will first provide cases in which two speakers are using sentences that have different meanings as well as different propositional contents (relative to their respective contexts), yet there is a sense in which they are saying the same thing, as robust as in the case of (1)-(4). Then I will provide cases in which two speakers are using the same sentence, but when we report them as same-saying, the report comes out false.

### *§3.1. Different meanings, different contents, same thing said*

Imagine a situation in which Alma, Bruce and Chris have attended Prof. Cheng's lecture on Montague on Monday evening. During the lecture, Bruce tells Chris:

(8) I really like this lecture.

Several days later, in a conversation with Chris about recent lectures that they have attended, Alma says:

(9) I really liked Prof. Cheng's lecture on Montague last Monday.

Chris may then truly reply to Alma:

(10) That's what Bruce said, too.

The sentences used by Alma and Bruce are different, and so are their lexical meanings. What is more, the differences at stake are quite significant: where (8) contains a demonstrative, (9) contains a complex definite description; also (8) is present tense, while (9) is in the past tense. The Kaplanian contents associated with (8) and (9) are also different, the one involving Bruce, and the one, Alma.

Despite all this, the report in (10) is ambiguous and has a true, sloppy reading, on which Bruce is reported to have said that *he* liked Cheng's lecture. This reading will be dominant if, for instance, it is common knowledge in the context of (10) that Bruce has no idea who Alma is and could not have said anything explicitly about her.

### *§3.2. Same meanings, different things said*

Just as using the same sentence is not required for same-saying, it is not enough either. Consider the following pair of dialogues:

(i) *de se* assertion

(11) I am a fool. (Alma talking to Chris)

(12) I am a fool. (Bruce talking to Chris)

(13) That's what Alma said, too. (Chris's reply to Bruce)

(ii) *de te* assertion

(14) You are a fool. (Prof. Cheng talking to Alma, overheard by Chris)

(15) You are a fool. (Chris talking to Bruce)

(16) (?) That's what Prof. Cheng said, too. (Chris talking to Bruce again)

There is an interesting asymmetry between the 1<sup>st</sup> person and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person pronoun in how they behave in reported speech. Consider (13). As it stands, it has two readings: a strict reading, which reports Alma to have said that *Bruce* was a fool, and a sloppy reading, which reports her as having said that *she herself* was a fool. If it is, say, common knowledge in the context of (13) that Alma would have never said such a thing about Bruce, the immediately available reading of (13) will be its sloppy reading, and (13) will be true in virtue of Alma's



having uttered (11). However, if we try the same sort of sloppy report by simply replacing 'I' by 'you', such a report will be normally unavailable. Unless there is something special about the context of the same-saying report (cf. below), (16) will not be ambiguous, but downright false (assuming that Prof. Cheng never said that *Bruce* was a fool).

The asymmetry between the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun is even more striking. Consider the following case, minimally different from (i) or (ii):

(iii) *de re* assertion

(17) She is a fool. (Prof. Cheng, talking of Alma)

(18) She is a fool. (Chris, pointing at Daisy)

(19) (?) That's what Professor Cheng said, too. (in reply to Chris)

Again, in an ordinary context, (19), as it stands, is not ambiguous. Only one reading seems to be available, namely, the one on which Cheng said that Daisy was a fool.

To forestall a possible misunderstanding, I am not claiming that there is no sense whatsoever in which Cheng in (14) and Chris in (15) could be taken to have said the same thing. For instance, we may take them to be same-saying insofar as they are both saying *of their addressee* that he or she is a fool. But if this should serve as grounds for reporting what they said as being the same, the mere report in (16) won't do. In general, what is further required is that the reporter should make it explicit that the addressee was someone else, as in:

(20) That's what Professor Cheng said, too, *to Alma*. (Chris talking to Bruce)

The report in (20) is, again, ambiguous between a sloppy reading, on which Cheng said to Alma that *she* was a fool, and a strict reading, on which Cheng is reported as having said to Alma that *Bruce* was a fool.

With the 3<sup>rd</sup> person pronoun, one can similarly report that the same thing has been said, provided that one makes it explicit that it was said *about* different people. Thus the following report, based on Cheng's utterance of (17), becomes correct:

(21) That's what Professor Cheng said, too, about Alma.

There is, then, a significant asymmetry between *de se* assertion and the other cases, since the former, unlike the latter, is such that the reporter does not have to make it explicit that the reportee was talking about herself or himself.<sup>4</sup> This asymmetry raises the following problem. Suppose that Kaplanian contents play the role of what is said. Now, (11) and (12) have different contents, and still, in an important sense, they say the same thing: in both cases, the speaker is saying of herself or himself that she or he is a fool. This sense of same-saying is further reflected in the fact that, properly disambiguated, the report in (13) is true. Now, a Kaplanian might think that this is because the sentences uttered in (11) and (12) are the same. However, this explanation won't work. Take (14)-(15) and (17)-(18). There, too, the sentences uttered are the same, but we do not get a

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<sup>4</sup> Note that it is sometimes possible to have sloppy same-saying reports even with the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person, without making it explicit that the person talked to or about was someone else. Here is a tentative example. Suppose that Bruce and Chris had a blind date each on Saturday evening. On Sunday, when Alma asks him how the date went, Bruce tells her, "She was obnoxious." Later, Chris, talking about his own date, tells Alma, "She was obnoxious." Alma may then truly reply "Bruce said that, too." The report is acceptable because the context makes it sufficiently clear that Bruce must have been talking *of his own* date. My point is not that sloppy same-saying reports with the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> person are impossible, but rather, that in ordinary contexts, they are simply unavailable.

sloppy reading for either (16) or (19). Those reports are not ambiguous, but false. This shows that something was missing in the account that the Kaplanian view gave us for the *de se* cases in the first place.

#### §4. *De se* assertion vs. the other senses of 'what is said'

It is possible that what I have described as a received view may well no longer be one. There is a growing number of Kaplan's followers who, while fully endorsing his *semantics*, do not want to identify semantic content with what is said. Among such semi-Kaplanians one finds e.g. Salmon (1986), Soames (2002), Predelli (2005), Cappelen and Lepore (2005), to mention only a few. What their views have in common is the idea that the notion of what is said is too versatile and too heavily context-dependent to be possible to capture by means of the notion of content.

One of the first to have pointed out that Kaplan's identification of semantic content with what is said was unwarranted was David Lewis:

“Unless we give it some special technical meaning, the locution ‘what is said’ is very far from univocal. It can mean the propositional content, in Stalnaker's sense (horizontal or diagonal). It can mean the exact words. I suspect that it can mean almost anything in between” (1980: 97).

In addition to the senses mentioned by Lewis, there is also was Ziff (1972) called the *implication sense* of what is said. Suppose that Bruce is thinking of enrolling in Prof. Blanchet's logic class and asks Alma what she thought about it. She

says:

(22) I don't think I've ever been in such a boring class in my whole life.

Then he asks Daisy, and she says:

(23) That class is a sheer waste of time!

It is easy to imagine Bruce replying to Daisy:

(24) That's what Alma said, too.

Reports such as (24) are very natural and ubiquitous, but the relevant sense of same-saying cannot be captured by either lexical meaning or Kaplanian content, or even any combination of the two. This presses even further the worry whether one could ever account for the notion of what is said by pinning it down to something as stiff as the notion of semantic content.<sup>5</sup>

In the context of the present discussion, the plurality of senses connected with the locution 'what is said' raises the following worry: the sort of cases that I brought up in section 3.1. against the Kaplanian view, aren't they just another garden-variety of the many senses of 'what is said'? In the remainder of this section, my goal will be to show that there is a significant difference between reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion and reports such as (24), which rely on the implication sense of what is said.

Reconsider (24). Even if we take this report to be true in the context at stake, someone who witnessed Alma's utterance of (21) may justifiedly challenge Bruce (the reporter) as follows:

(25) No, Alma didn't quite say that. She only said that she had never been in

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<sup>5</sup> Note that for radical contextualists such as Recanati (2004), the context-dependence of what is said serves as evidence to argue that pragmatics intrudes into semantics. As for those who, against such objections, defend a purely semantic notion of what is said, see e.g. Bach (2001), (2002).

such a boring class. That need not mean that the class is a waste of time.

Presented with such a challenge, Bruce will normally retract, or at least somehow qualify his report, for instance as follows:

(26) OK, she didn't quite say that, but that's what she meant.

This retraction doesn't necessarily show that the report in (24) was false.<sup>6</sup> But what it shows is that the sense of same-saying relevant to the truth of such reports is not its most literal sense, but rather, a looser sense. Now, compare this with the case of *de se* assertion:

(27) *Alma*: I am hungry.

(28) *Chris*: I am hungry.

(29) *Bruce*: Alma said that, too.

(30) *Daisy*: (?) No, she didn't quite say that. She only said that *she* was hungry.

Faced with Daisy's challenge, Bruce will not retract his report in (29) – rather, he will point out that he was precisely reporting Alma as saying that *she* was hungry, and that Daisy simply failed to disambiguate his report properly. Once again, there is a striking similarity with VP-ellipsis:

(31) *Chris*: I love my wife.

(32) *Alma*: So does Bruce.

(33) *Daisy*: (?) No, he doesn't. He only loves his own wife.

Daisy's objection in (33) is off the target, just as it was in (30). In both cases,

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<sup>6</sup> Some will be tempted to see the challenge in (24) and Bruce's retraction in (25) as evidence that the report in (24) had been false all along. If so, this would make my point even more straightforward, since, as we will shortly see, reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion cannot be challenged by “she didn't quite say that” and remain literally true, unlike reports such as (24).

her attempt at denying her interlocutor's report merely emphasizes the fact that the report was ambiguous – she is denying the reading not intended by the reporter so as precisely to assert the intended reading, which is why (30) and (33) sound infelicitous.

The lesson to be drawn from these examples is that reports of same-saying in the case of *de se* assertion pattern differently from such reports in the other cases known from the literature. In those other cases, there is evidence that the locution 'what is said' is used *loosely* rather than *literally*.<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, the sense of same-saying deployed in reports of *de se* assertion belongs squarely among literal uses.<sup>8</sup>

## §5. Towards a solution

My aim in this paper has been to point out some problems for the received view regarding indexicals' contribution to the asserted content, on which regardless of whether we use the first, second or third person pronoun, the content, or *what is said*, will be the same provided that the referent is the same. I have argued that

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<sup>7</sup> There need not be a *sharp* distinction between loose and literal uses – it is enough for my argument that there be uses that are more literal than others. Also, let me stress once again that a report in which 'what is said' is used loosely need not be *ipso facto* false. All that matters is that, if challenged, the reporter feels the need of qualifying or retracting his or her report.

<sup>8</sup> Let me acknowledge that the range of patterns that one would need to look at in order to provide a thorough account of same-saying reports goes far beyond the sorts of case that I have considered here. For instance, suppose that Alma says “The logic class is terribly boring” and that Bruce tells Prof. Blanchet “Your class is terribly boring. That's what Alma said, too.” One should be able to challenge Bruce by pointing out that Alma never said to Prof. Blanchet that her class was boring, or even that Prof. Blanchet's class is boring. While such cases involving definite descriptions seem to fall on the 'literal' side of what is said, they also exhibit certain features of looseness. Although it would be interesting and worthwhile to compare same-saying report patterns in the *de se* cases and the cases involving definite descriptions, that would be a separate issue with only indirect bearings on the more basic distinction that I have been focusing on in this paper.

the received view can only handle a limited range of cases, and that there is no straightforward amendment that would allow it to handle the rest. In particular, the idea that speakers who say “I am hungry” may be truly reported to have said the same thing because they have used the same sentence is unsatisfactory, as I argued in section 3. On the one hand, speakers who say “She is hungry” may be truly reported to have said the same thing only if their uses of ‘she’ refer to the same individual (or else, if the reporter makes it explicit that they said it *about* different individuals). On the other hand, there are cases of *de se* assertion in which speakers are truly reported as same-saying even though they are using sentences whose lexical meanings may be very different. In section 4, I looked at another approach to the notion of what is said, which holds that this notion, as well as the relation of same-saying, are just too heavily context-dependent to be analyzable by means of the notion of semantic content. While acknowledging that we may often report same-saying in cases in which neither the Kaplanian contents nor the *de se* contents are the same, I showed that there was still a significant difference between these reports, which are easy to challenge and thus suggest that the relevant sense of ‘what is said’ is a loose one, and reports of same-saying in the cases of *de se* assertion, which, when challenged, reveal that there was genuine ambiguity in the report and thus fall together with the (more) literal uses of the locution ‘what is said’. Let me note that the data that I have presented, and the related problems for the Kaplanian view that I have raised, need not be seen as insuperable obstacles. Perhaps there are amendments to the view that would enable it to handle the data. However, the most straightforward ones fall short of accounting for the cases discussed, and for what seems to be a

privileged status that the first person pronoun has not only in the realm of thought (as has been long known from the literature on *de se* attitudes and on the essential indexical), but also in language.

In the remainder of the paper, I would like to propose a novel account of what is said, and of the content of assertion, motivated, on the one hand, by Lewis's account of *de se* attitudes and, on the other, by some independent reflections on the notion of semantic content (cf. Stojanovic (2009)). My proposal, in a nutshell, is to model the asserted content, in the sort of cases discussed in this paper, as a property; or, more precisely, a function from sequences containing an individual, a pair of times and a pair of worlds (and perhaps yet other parameters) into truth values. However, what is crucial is that speakers do not assert such properties and functions *simpliciter*: rather, they assert them *about*, or *with respect to*, or *of* various objects, places, events, people, and sometimes, of course, of themselves. In other words, the relations of *saying* and of *asserting* are no longer to be viewed as binary relations (between the speaker and that which is said/asserted), but rather, as (at least) ternary relations among the speaker, that which is said/asserted, and that about which it is said or asserted.

Let me first illustrate the idea with some examples, before discussing it in greater detail. Suppose that, pointing at a work of art, I simply say “Impressive!” Then I will be saying something *about* that work of art, and what I will be saying of it is that it is impressive. In other words, the property of being impressive is what I assert *of* the work of art at stake. Similarly, if, talking of that same work, I now say “This work is impressive,” what I have said is, I suggest, again simply



the property of impressiveness, and it is again asserted *about* that work of art.<sup>9</sup>

Just as speakers may say something about various things or people, they may say things *about themselves*. For instance, if I say “I am hungry”, what is said will be the property of being hungry, and it is a property that I assert *of myself*. Assertion *de se* is, of course, correlated with the use of the first person pronoun.

As a third example, suppose that, pointing at Bruce, I say “He is late”. I will be talking about Bruce, and saying *of* him that he is late. What I assert is the property of being late, and I assert it of, or with respect to, Bruce. But note now that this property is itself a *relational* property: people are not late *simpliciter*, but are late *for* some thing or another. Thus when I say “He is late”, not only will I be talking about Bruce, but I may (and typically will) be also talking about an event, for which I claim Bruce to be late. If I am talking about tonight's concert, and Bruce is late to the concert, what I say is true, but if I am talking about the deadline for a project submission, and Bruce meets it, what I say is false. In either case, though, I assert the same content (or so I suggest). It is the property or, if you prefer, the relation, of being late, which, in the one case, I assert of Bruce and of the concert, and in the other, of Bruce and of the project submission deadline.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For the sake of simplicity, I ignore here the issue of whether in saying that something is impressive, one is also saying something about oneself, viz. that the thing at stake is impressive from *their* point of view. For a discussion of this idea, see Stojanovic (2007).

<sup>10</sup> Of course, the more complex the expressions we start looking at, the more difficult it will be to decide what belongs to the asserted content, and what to that about which the content is asserted. To give you a hint of the complexities that may start arising, suppose that at a conference, I say “Most people are philosophers.” What is the content asserted, and what is it asserted of? One option would be to say that in such cases, the content is a function invariant in the argument of the individual(s) at which it is evaluated (or, in other words, a proposition). But another plausible option would be to say that it is still a property, though not the property of being a philosopher that would have been said “of most people.” Rather, it is the property satisfied by an object (such as an event or a situation) when most people *at it* are philosophers, a property that, in our example, I am

As may already be seen from these examples, there is an important difference between Lewis's account of attitudes and the present account of assertion. For Lewis, attitudes like beliefs remain binary relations between the attitude holder and the content of the attitude (which is property), because the content is always *self*-ascribed. For example, the belief that Alma expresses by saying, in reference to Chris, “He is hungry”, would presumably have for its content the property of attending (perceptually or otherwise) to a male individual who is hungry, and Alma would self-ascribe that property. (Alternatively, the property that Alma would self-ascribe in this case is that of inhabiting a world in which Chris is hungry.) Regardless of whether this is indeed a plausible way of generalizing the Lewisian account of (genuine) *de se* attitudes to *de re* attitudes, it strikes me as not the most promising proposal when it comes to assertion. Rather, the option that I will explore acknowledges the distinction between *self*-asserting a content vs. asserting it about something or someone else.

My proposal will combine the following ingredients, all of which I believe to be motivated by further independent considerations:

(i) a notion of *content* (and even, arguably, of *semantic* content) that is not propositional but is, rather, to be modeled by functions that take sequences that contain not only a possible world, and a time, but other parameters as well, to truth values. In full generality, it will be functions that take a sequence (or pair) of worlds, a sequence of times, and an assignment of values to variables, to truth values; but for our purposes, simpler functions that, in addition to a world and a

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asserting of the conference about which I am talking. This suggestion is, of course, to be argued for, but for the sake of simplicity, I will focus in this paper on the simpler cases, acknowledging the complexities to which quantifier phrases may well lead us.

time, take an individual, or a pair of individuals, will most often suffice.<sup>11</sup>

(ii) a notion of '*what is talked about*', which, as illustrated with the previous example, I take to be an intuitive notion, one that also played an important role in some theories of direct reference, such as Keith Donnellan's.<sup>12</sup>

(iii) a notion of *self*-asserting, in addition to the notion of asserting; although the two are, of course, correlated, neither should be reduced to the other. (On the other hand, the distinction itself could be an instance of a more general one, between an action directed at some object vs. the same action directed at the agent himself or herself.)

(iv) a notion of *same-saying*, which is relational and serves, in turn, as a guide to the notion of what is said. The idea is that the notion of what is said emerges from an equivalence class over utterances, viz. those whose speakers same-say. The primacy of the relation of same-saying over the unary notion of what is said has been defended, for instance, by Everett (2000). For our purposes, it does not matter whether the one is more basic than the other. What matters, though, is that when it comes to canvassing for speakers' intuitions, it is those regarding same-saying that are crucial, the "direct" intuitions on what is said being, upon scrutiny, only indirect.

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<sup>11</sup> I have argued elsewhere (e.g. Stojanovic (2009)) that the reference of indexicals, though relevant to truth value, is not part of semantic content. In certain respects, that was also Lewis's own take on semantic content: see Lewis (1980) (though he takes it to be, rather, a function from context-index pairs to truth values). Several other people have argued, albeit to different degrees, that semantic content is not fully propositional (cf. e.g. Carston (2007)). As for the idea that this is also the kind of content that may be prove fruitful in accounting for *de re* attitudes, see e.g. Ninan (ms.).

<sup>12</sup> The vast literature on Donnellan (1966) tends to focus exclusively on the referential/attributive distinction, neglecting the fact that the notion of referential use crucially involves the idea that the speaker can say something true *about* a thing or a person, even when the latter is not singled out by the description itself.

## §6. The proposal, and its application to the cases discussed

Before going back to the cases discussed in sections 1 through 3, it may help to flesh out my proposal somewhat more formally. I will do it by laying down two definitions, the one concerning semantic content and the other, the same-saying relation and the truth conditions for same-saying reports.

**Def. 1.** The **semantic content** of an expression  $\varphi$ , noted  $sc(\varphi)$ , is a function from sequences of the form  $(w_1, w_2, t_1, t_2, i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n, \dots)$  to truth values (where the  $w$ 's are possible world parameters, the  $t$ 's, time parameters, and the  $i$ 's, individual parameters), defined as follows:

1.  $sc(R^n(x_1, \dots, x_n))(w_1, w_2, t_1, t_2, i_1, i_2, \dots, i_n, \dots) = 1$  iff  $(i_1, \dots, i_n) \varepsilon \mathcal{M}(R)(w_1, t_1)$
2.  $sc(\varphi \wedge \psi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff  $sc(\varphi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = sc(\psi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$ ;  
 $sc(\diamond \varphi)(w_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff there is  $w'_1$  accessible from  $w_1$  s.t.  $sc(\varphi)(w'_1, \text{etc.}) = 1$ ;  
 $sc(@\varphi)(w_1, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff  $sc(\varphi)(w_2, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$ ;  
 similarly for other connectives, intensional and indexical operators
3.  $sc(\varphi(\alpha))(w_1, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$  iff  $(\varphi(x_i))(w_1, w_2, \text{etc.}) = 1$   
 where  $\alpha$  is a 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> p. pronoun, and  $x_i$  a newly introduced variable

Though the definition may look complicated, the underlying ideas are simple, so let me make two or three remarks to explain what is going on here. First, the inclusion of two possible world parameters and, similarly, two time parameters, is a standard move known as 'double-indexing', and is required for dealing with embedded occurrences of modal and temporal indexicals (in particular, 'actually', noted '@', and 'now'; cf. Kamp (1971)); though we are not concerned in this paper with modal and temporal indexicals, let me still note that different utterances of a sentence containing 'actually' or 'now', even if made in different worlds and at

different times, will be associated with the same semantic content. This also shows that the notion of semantic content as defined here comes much closer to Kaplan's notion of *character* than his notion of *content*. But there are interesting differences. Recall that Kaplanian characters are functions from context-world-time triples to truth values, and that special requirements are placed upon the context parameter (viz. that the agent be located at the context location at the time and in the world of the context). Semantic content (as defined above) does not deploy any context parameter, and no agent parameter either. Rather, when it comes to indexicals, all they do is contribute a variable-like slot that requires evaluating the content *at an individual* before being able to assign it a truth value. In other words, the semantic content defined above is pretty much what one would get if one took a Kaplanian content and merely abstracted over all referential values contributed by indexicals.

Relatedly, note that whether we have a first person, second person or third person pronoun, and whether it is a feminine or a masculine pronoun, none of this has any impact on semantic content. The idea is not to eliminate altogether such lexically encoded constraints (such as being a speaker in the case of 'I', an addressee in the case of 'you', female or male in the case of 'she' and 'he'); but it is to remove them from the level of semantics (or, more precisely, from the level of *truth-conditional* semantics) to some other level; for discussion, see Stojanovic (2009). With this in mind, let me turn to the second definition:

**Def. 2.** The **same-saying** relation obtains between any two utterances whose expressions' semantic contents are the same. However, the truth conditions for

**reporting** same-saying are defined as follows. Let  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  be two utterances. Then  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  may be truly reported as saying the same thing if and only if they same-say (in the sense defined above) and for every parameter to which their semantic content is sensitive in truth value, one of the following obtains:

- (a) the speakers of  $u_1$  and  $u_2$  self-assert the content (with respect to the parameter at stake);
- (b) one of the speakers self-asserts it, while the other asserts it about the other speaker (w.r. to the parameter at stake);
- (c) the two speakers assert the content (w.r. to the that parameter) about one and the same thing or individual (and this is known to the reporter);
- (d) the reporter makes it explicit, or else the context makes it sufficiently clear, that the two speakers assert the content (w.r. to that parameter) about different things or individuals; or else, the context makes it irrelevant whether or not they assert it about the same thing/individual.

This, too, may look a bit complicated, but again, the idea is simple. What the definition does is describe the conditions under which we would truly report two people as having said the same thing. A necessary condition is that the semantic contents associated with the sentences that they used be the same; but that does not suffice. What is further required is that they both self-assert this content, or else that they assert it about the same thing or individual, or in case they don't, that this is either irrelevant, or explicit, or made sufficiently clear in the context

of the report.<sup>13</sup>

Before moving on to explaining how this proposal handles the cases discussed in the first half of the paper, let me pause for a second on the irrelevance clause, since it will not show up again later in discussion, and yet it is important for the proposal to work in full generality. Suppose that I see Bruce rushing by, and he tells me “I am late”. A short time afterwards, I witness a conversation between Alma and Chris, with Alma saying “Bruce is late”. I may reply “That’s what he said, too.” Will I be speaking truly or not? It will depend on the context. If all that is at stake is, say, why Bruce was in rush, then the issue what he was late for may well be irrelevant; thus if Bruce, in saying “I am late”, was talking about catching a bus that will take him to the train station, and if Alma was talking about the departure of the train itself, that need not (yet) make my report false. However, suppose that what matters is whether Bruce will make it to his train, and that it is known that, were Bruce to miss the bus, he would still have plenty of time to catch a taxi and make it to his train. In such a context, if Bruce says “I am late” talking about *catching the bus*, and Alma says “He is late” talking about *catching the train*, we may be reluctant to considering the same-saying report as a true one. One lovely feature of my proposal is that it accounts equally well for both cases.

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<sup>13</sup> Note that the conditions specifying when we can truly report two people as having *said* the same thing might eventually fall out of the more general conditions for reporting two people as having *done* the same thing. Suppose that Alma scratches her head, and that Chris scratches his head. We may report them as having done the same thing (viz. scratching one’s head). Now suppose that Alma scratches her head, and that Chris scratches *Alma’s* head. We may report them, again, as having done the same thing (viz. scratching Alma’s head). To be sure, at this point, this is merely an analogy. It remains an open issue whether the two are really an instance of the same phenomenon. (I am grateful to Ruth Millikan for pointing out the analogy after a talk that I once gave.)

In the remainder of this section, let me, then, go back to the cases discussed in sections 2 and 3, and show how my proposal handles them. Recall the kind of example that motivated the Kaplanian view:

(34) *Alma*: I am hungry.

(35) *Chris (pointing at Alma)*: She is hungry.

(36) *Daisy*: That's what she said, too.

What needs to be accounted for is, on the one hand, the intuition that what is said in (34) is the same as what is said in (35), and, on the other, the related intuition that the report in (36) is true. On the account that I am proposing, the content associated with (34) is a function that takes an individual (and a time, a world, and other things) and returns value True iff that individual is hungry (at that time and in that world). What is more, Alma is not asserting this content *simpliciter*, but rather, she is asserting it of herself. Now, the content associated with (35) is that very same function, and Chris is asserting this content *about Alma*. The contents asserted in (34) and in (35) are, then, the same: it is one and the same function, viz. the one that corresponds to the property of being hungry. Furthermore, this content is self-asserted by Alma, and asserted about Alma by Chris, hence the conditions for truly reporting same-saying are met. The report in (36) is true, and this is what, in turn, grounds the intuition that (34) and (35) “say the same thing”.

My account relies on the idea that it is hard to disentangle intuitions about what is said from intuitions about truth values of same-saying reports. To see this, consider a case of utterances that same-say in the sense of the definition proposed (viz. are associated with the same semantic content), yet fail to trigger



the intuition of same-saying; a case, in other words, that may appear to pose a problem for my view. Compare (34) and (35) with the following pair (where (38) is the same as (35)):

(37) *Alma (pointing at Bruce)*: He is hungry.

(38) *Chris (pointing at Alma)*: She is hungry.

(39) *Daisy*: (?) That's what she said, too.

According to the Kaplanian view, the content asserted in (37) is different from the one asserted in (38), the first being the proposition that Bruce is hungry (at a given time), and the second, the proposition that Alma is hungry. On my view, on the other hand, the semantic contents associated with (37) and (38) are the same: it is one and the same function (roughly, the property of being hungry). However, the report in (39) is false as it stands, and intuitively, (37) and (38) are not perceived as same-saying. *Prima facie*, this is a problem for my account: but only *prima facie*. My proposal predicts that the intuition that (37) and (38) say “different things” derives from the intuition of falsehood of reports such as (39). The proposal further predicts that the report in (39) is false for the following reason. Since the reporter in (39) does not explicitly say about whom Alma was talking when she said what she said, the default interpretation is that she must have been talking about the same person as Chris, hence about herself. Since (by assumption) she did not say that she was hungry, the report comes out false.

It is important to realize is that the falsehood of the report in (39) does not entail that Alma and Chris actually asserted different contents. They asserted the same content (or so I suggest), but they asserted it *about* different people: Alma asserted it about Bruce, and Chris, about Alma. Since the reporter does

not make it explicit that different people were talked about, the report in (39) is implicitly taken to report Alma to have said about the person that Chris was talking about, i.e. Alma herself, that she was hungry. This explanation is further supported by the fact that if the reporter explicitly indicates the person about whom Alma said what she said, the report becomes true:

(40) *Daisy*: That's what she said, too, about Bruce.

The account of the falsehood of the report in (39) applies immediately to the cases from section 3.2., in which the sentence "she is hungry" is used in reference to different people, and which were problematic for those who wished to handle *de se* assertion by appealing to the sameness of the sentences uttered.

As for *de se* assertion itself, what needs to be accounted for is the ambiguity of reports such as (42) below:

(41) *Alma*: I am hungry.

(42) *Bruce*: Chris said that, too.

Given that Alma in (41) asserts *of herself* the property of being hungry, there are two ways (namely, sub-clauses (a) and (b) in Def. 2) for the report in (42) to come out true: Chris should have either self-asserted that same property, or he should have asserted it about Alma herself. The former corresponds to the sloppy reading, the latter, to the strict reading.

The same explanation applies to the cases from section 3.1., which were also problematic for those who wished to handle *de se* assertion by the sameness of the sentences uttered:

(43) *Bruce (on Monday)*: I really like this lecture.

(44) *Alma*: I really liked Prof. Cheng's lecture on Montague last Monday.

(45) *Chris*: That's what Bruce said, too.

What we want to account for is the ambiguity in (45) between reporting Bruce to have said that Alma liked the lecture at stake (= the “strict” reading) vs. that he himself liked it (= the “sloppy” reading). The ambiguity falls out again from the fact that the target utterance of (45), viz. Alma's utterance of (44), is a case of self-assertion, hence both sub-clause (a) and sub-clause (b) of Def. 2 may apply. In particular, the fact that Bruce is self-asserting the property that Alma, too, is self-asserting (viz. the property of liking Cheng's lecture) makes (45) true (under this disambiguation).

Now, this case is more subtle than the straightforward case of *de se* assertion that we had in (41)-(42). There is the issue of time-sensitivity that I said I would set aside in his paper (cf. fn. 3). More importantly, the sentences used by Bruce and Alma are different, the one containing a complex demonstrative and the other, a definite description. Given that I did not say anything about the way that either contributes to semantic content, how can we be sure that (43) and (44) express the same content, so as to satisfy the first clause in Def. 2 and to qualify as same-saying? It is beyond the scope of my paper to give a thorough reply (since that would require saying much more about demonstratives and definite descriptions), so let me merely outline an explanation. It is plausible to think that, on some occurrences at least, complex demonstratives and definite descriptions work merely as devices that help the speaker make it clear to the hearer what he or she is talking about.<sup>14</sup> Thus Alma, for instance, might have simply said “I really liked it” in a situation in which Cheng's lecture is already

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<sup>14</sup> This assumption is fairly uncontroversial for complex demonstratives, though perhaps less so for definite descriptions.

singled out as the topic of a conversation, but in a situation in which there are a number of salient events that she might be talking about, she needs to raise in salience Cheng's lecture over those other events, and one easy way to do that is by using the definite description at stake. If we follow this line of thought, then both (43) and (44) may be associated with the same semantic content, viz. the one also associated with “I really like it”, or, for that matter, “she really likes it.” This content will be modeled by a function from worlds, times and, crucially, *pairs* of individuals that returns value True when the first individual really likes the second individual (in the world and at the time of evaluation). So there are, then, two individual parameters to which the truth value of the semantic content associated with (43) and (44) is sensitive, and we need to make sure that one of the clauses (a) to (d) from Def. 2 applies to the second parameter as well. And indeed, clause (c) applies, since both Bruce and Alma are asserting the content about one and the same event, viz. Prof. Cheng's Monday lecture on Montague.

To conclude, in this last section I have put forward a novel account of what is said that incorporates a number of independently motivated insights: (i) a notion of semantic content that keeps very close to the lexically encoded content (thus by failing to include referential values of indexicals, contents do not vary with the context; on the other hand, they also fail to include certain lexically encoded constraints, like speakerhood, gender, etc.); (ii) a Donnellanian notion of what the speaker is talking about; (iii) a notion of *de se* assertion, or of the action of self-asserting, which is arguably just another instance of the well-known *de se* phenomena as they arise in the realm of belief and action; (iv) a grounding of the notion of 'what is said', and of our intuitions on what is said, on our practices of

*reporting* people to have said the same thing. Of course, more would need to be said regarding each and every of these insights, but doing so would amount to a much more ambitious project. In particular, when it comes to reports of what is said, there is more work to be done regarding both the data and the account of the data. Issues such as how one disambiguates a report, or what distinguishes a loose report from a literal one (briefly discussed in sect. 4), remain important open issues, to which I hope to return some time in future.\*

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