

The Frequency of Telling Stories

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Abstract

Starting from the considerations by Frege and agreeing with the edits by Kripke, I briefly present the crucial points in the debate on a subject referring to itself and, even more importantly, the way a subject has to understand someone else talking about itself. The second section exposes a slight edit on Kripke's way of understanding the use of "I" in conversations and the similar case of referencing to qualia and indexicals. In conclusion I examine the implication such a theory has on terms like "actual world" or "scientific language".

This essay will mainly refer to the lecture Kripke gave in New York in 2006, transcribed and published in *Saul Kripke, Philosophical Troubles*, Volume I, Ch. 10, *The First Person*.

1 Kripke's edit on Frege

In this section I will present Frege's standpoint and the edit Kripke suggests in the named article, at the end of the first part. I begin by quoting the same passage Kripke quoted in the article. After noticing a couple of important points, I'll directly show the edit Kripke suggests and which will solve some problems on the Fregean Theory. First, Frege writes:

Now everyone is presented to himself in a special and primitive way, in which he is presented to no one else. So, when Dr Lauben has the thought that he was wounded, he will probably be basing it on this primitive way in which he is presented to himself. And only Dr Lauben himself can grasp thoughts specified in this way. But now he may want to communicate with others. He cannot communicate a thought he alone can grasp. Therefore, if he now says 'I was wounded', he must use 'I' in a sense which can be grasped by others, perhaps in the sense of 'he who is speaking to you at this moment'; by doing this he makes the conditions accompanying his utterance serve towards the expression of a thought. [3]

I want to focus on two main points in this passage: firstly, Frege made a neat distinction between the meaning of 'I' when talking to himself or 'I' used in a dialogue. The first has a concrete and direct denotation, probably the most direct denotation we have and the latter has a far less clear one. In Frege's theory it seems to me that the denotation of 'I' when heard by a second subject is not very clear. It should denote the person speaking, and even Frege himself makes us understand that it doesn't seem to be a precise denotation. A second trouble on this is briefly presented by Kripke in the following example:

Moreover, Dr. Lauben may think to himself, 'Leo Peter realizes that I am wounded', or, alternatively, 'Is Leo Peter aware that I am wounded?' Since Dr. Lauben is thinking to himself, surely (following Frege) he uses in the special sense that only he can understand. But how can he wonder whether (Leo Peter has a thought that Peter cannot understand? Something is going wrong here.

These two points are to be solved before accepting a theory pretending to split the two notions of 'I', one for speaking of myself and one for speaking on other people's selfs (or hearing them speaking of themselves).

Second, I want to underline the similarity between how Frege talks on the 'I' and how Descartes [2] does it. To me it seems that what corresponds perfectly is not necessarily the actual features of the 'I' but instead the way I have to be acquainted with it. Very close to this is Lewis when he describes

belief *de se* as being the highest form of belief *de re* ([1], p. 314)

Kripke's edit on the presented theory is subtle, though essential to get free of the two problems presented above.

The hearer is aware that each person, including the hearer herself, uses 'I' to refer to herself by direct self-acquaintance. Hence, knowing what this is in one's own case and *taking it to be the same way for others*, one understands what the first person statement is, even though it has a sense that is, strictly speaking, *incommunicable* to the hearer. ([1], my emphasis)

Two points of this paragraph are to be underlined: first that we are "taking it to be the same way for others", which is surely a reasonable assumption, though I think it should be stated more precisely, and this will be the object of the next section. Secondly note that the first person statement is said to be "incommunicable" and so, a similar procedure will be applied to all incommunicable statements, namely, as well known in philosophy of mind, qualia; this will be the object of the third section.

2 Necessary Rephrasing and the Need of Stories

How can we understand one's expression of his sensation of himself if it is said to be uncommunicable? Consider the following example: my friend John went to a party last night and this morning I find him lying on the bed. Now he tells me that he feels sick, has nausea and a sense of vomit. If I went to a party and had the same feeling already, then I'd be able to tell easily, because *I know how it feels*. Notice two differences from the presented example and the case of communicating the feeling of myself: there is no need of considering the case in which I don't know the feeling, since we're talking about the sense of feeling myself, which, as written, we assume to be necessary to any subject. Secondly, it is also given that I feel myself at the time when he tells me that he feels himself, since I must always feel myself (by the same previous Kripke's assumption). Given these two differences from the case of the pain-qualia can I actually understand what he's saying?

It would be impossible for me to directly understand what he's saying, because I can't feel something that he's feeling, I never felt in my life something that someone else felt, I perceive nothing more than what I perceive. The solution, though, seems to be not that far away, the only thing I have to do is slightly modify his sentence, from "John feels himself" to "John feels in the same way I feel myself". I call this process *rephrasing* or *transposition* of a fictional 'I' to my own, and I've shown why this is necessary for understanding a sentence concerning the self.

When rephrasing the sentence in this way I need to imagine myself in his same situation, which, in the case with the feeling of myself, is particularly easy, because I'm certainly feeling it at any time I'm thinking about it and therefore surely also when I'm trying to imagine it as being John; so "John feels in the same way I feel when feeling myself and I feel myself". Fundamental in this passage is to underline the fact that, even though I have the same feeling he has, this does not allow me to avoid the use of imagination, I need anyway to distinguish "I feel myself" from "John feels himself". Transposing his 'I' into mine is still a matter of imagination since what I denote with John is intrinsically different from me, *my* primitive sense of I (which we take for granted) is not naturally in John. Therefore the proposition "John feels in the same way I feel when feeling myself" requires me to imagine a situation, to build it up, to tell a story.

3 Domain of Rephrasing

In the previous section I showed the need of rephrasing when talking about the self, this section discovers many other cases in which we have the same need. Consider the example named before, but do not consider the metaphor between pain and the feeling of myself, when I say pain I actually mean it and therefore I may not feel in the same way when he tells me what he feels. So I rephrase his sentence in "John feels in the same way I would feel having what he called pain". When doing such transposition there is a constant which I can't avoid, this is the use of conditional. This is just because of the fact that, when we say "John feels in the same way I would feel having what he called pain" we are talking about a counterfactual world, since I may not have any pain at all at that moment. John's pain is not something that exists to me in any perceivable way, it is always something that I need to

imagine, telling a story to myself.

Similarly, consider that I write in my diary “I feel pain” and then I read it the day after, when the pain ceases. Similarly I won’t have any direct access to the pain I felt, I’d need to rephrase the sentence as “I felt in the same way I would feel now having what I called pain”. This would solve the problem similarly to before¹.

We notice then that any feeling that we regard as uncommunicable needs such a rephrasing not to be communicated but just to let the sentence make sense in the way we mean it in everyday life.

3.1 On Qualia

The need to be rephrased and then transposed to my own present self concerns every feeling we have, every perception, namely, to use a common word in the vocabulary of philosophy of mind, every qualia. The primitive feeling I have of myself and the feeling of pain are qualia and they are considered in no aspect more than how they are perceived by my own present self. Therefore every past or someone else’s qualia needs to be transposed into myself and therefore create a story. What needs no rephrasing? Which talk does not contain qualia? This question will be answered in the section after next.

4 Mapping and Codomain of Rephrasing

When a sentence is rephrased it can be directly understood by the hearer, it will sound like a story, so what does this imply, what is the actual meaning of a rephrased proposition? I stressed particularly on the fact that there is the need for the subject to use his imagination when understanding a rephrased proposition, that it needs to describe a counterfactual world.

4.1 Possible Worlds

I regard telling a story as the exact equivalent of giving the description of a world, and therefore creating a possible world. Let’s reconsider the first example I made with this further implication: “I feel pain” John is telling me, then, since I can’t directly feel others’ feeling, what I understand is “John feels in the same way I would feel having what he called pain”. Stating this proposition I’m imagining the world in which (i) I am John, with all the attributes I imagine John has, and (ii) in which I feel the pain he describes in the way I remember it from my own experience. This may be counterfactual because of (ii) and is surely counterfactual because of (i) (as shown in the last paragraph of the second section). Therefore talking about qualia with any communicative purpose, so when referring to someone else or to myself at a later time, implies the creation of counterfactual worlds which therefore can’t be part of the actual.

5 On the Limit Concepts

Can we denote no qualia in a proposition? It doesn’t seem so, since every object that appears in a proposition has to be part of my experience, otherwise I wouldn’t know it and I would not be able to talk about it. What I mean here with experience is the very broad sense, I don’t experience just the things that I perceive with senses in our world, namely the things that I call physical, but I similarly perceive also feelings or logico-mathematical truths, they come to my mind in such a way that there’s nothing I can change on them through my will alone. When I sum two numbers and get the result, it’ll appear necessary and concrete to me, similarly to the perception of a physical object. Even if what I felt yesterday passed away and will never come back and the rainbow I saw this morning won’t come back in the same appearances either, though a theorem might come back in its full appearances. To state this question more precisely I will need before a brief explanation of the concept of existence I’m developing.

¹Such similarity between the use of ‘I’ and other indexicals is also underlined by Kripke [1]

5.1 The Predicate of Dialogability

I define the predicate on propositions of dialogability² to express if I am able or not to communicate a certain proposition to another person without the necessity of telling a story. This predicate might be used as a weaker substitute for the predicate of existence, since it may be useful to regard whatever exists as something somehow communicable between subjects. In fact, if something exists but can in no way be expressed by a subject to another if not through a story, it would be more a personal, subjective experience than a concrete, real, existing one. This is no more than a choice of a certain definition that seems to me to have been chosen already in many cases; though, I would not follow this suggestion at all, I regard incommunicable things to exist.

5.2 The World of Ideas

The world of ideas would be a world with propositions free of subjects and indexicals, a world in which the only language spoken would be very similar to Kaplan's scientific language [1]. There we could understand each other with no doubt thanks to an infinite formal precision on such ideas. Does such a world dialogably exist?³ This question will remain unanswered in this essay, because too far from its aim.

5.3 The Actual World

I define the actual world as being the world in which there is nothing counterfactual and, as I have shown before, every proposition containing qualia implies that I am someone that I am not. Therefore the actual world would be the world in which I'm able to denote precisely the things as I perceive but, as shown, I can't communicate them to anyone or even myself at a later time. So if you consider the limit of two subjects to their being the same (two very similar people or the same subject after an infinitesimal fraction of time), they would be able to communicate their actual world with qualia. On the other hand the world of ideas, because of its lack of indexicals, would also be a partial description of the actual world.

6 Brief Comparison with other Present Literature

Two main ways come to my mind if I'd be asked to insert the presented idea into a wider philosophical context. Firstly one would easily insert and compare it with the literature in philosophy of mind, and particularly the branch dealing with imagination, its nature and epistemological value. A paper that shares much similarities with what I've exposed here has been written by Jennifer Church [4]. A radical difference, though, between the approach I have on this matter and the one Church has is that I focussed more on the role imagination plays in the *dialogue* among subjects, and Church stressed more on the use of imagination in the perception of out and out experiences. The core of her paper, though, is not that far apart from what the direct derivations of this essay, since the predicate of dialogability I described seems to be a very crucial one for Kripke's out and out and Church's objective experience too. From this follows that, since any dialogable experience needs imagination, then such out and out experience will need it too. I didn't however investigate how imagination might help in the formation of out and out experience, e.g. by imagining the same direct experience from many points of view, which seems to me a yet too strong implication.

Another major comparison one might think of when dealing with the concepts presented in this essay, is with the realists theses. And there again, one needs no more than unpacking the definition of reality such a realist has and check if dialogability as I formulated it is an assumed predicate for all experiences or not. By definition though, a realist doesn't want to include in any way a subject into her definition of reality. In such a case she shouldn't worry at all and then conclude that imagination, in so far of

²I wanted to specifically use the word dialogue for its very appropriate etymology: $\delta\alpha$ (dia) "from one to another" or "between two" and $\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma$ (logos) as known, "word", "talking", but also "thinking", "reasoning". The preposition $\delta\alpha$ indicates always a new connection (e.g. the diagonal) which is the exact aim here.

³Kripke's answer to this question is probably already implicitly given when he describes the Kaplan's scientific language as "spoken by no one" [1], p. 301. On the other hand, to consider an opposite opinion, one might consider what Gödel writes in his *Philosophische Notizbücher*, Band 3, p. 85: "[...] nur solche Terme verwenden, die allgemein und intersubjektiv gleich verstanden werden". This verifies my general and yet imprecise claim that existence of mathematical objects requires at least partially their dialogability.

what I implied in this essay, is needed for dialogable experience which doesn't need to include all of what exists (or the totality of experience either).

References

- [1] *Saul Kripke, Philosophical Troubles, Volume I, Ch. 10, The First Person*, p. 302-303
- [2] Descartes, *Meditationes*, II
- [3] *Frege, Der Gedanke*, 1918–19:333
- [4] *Perceiving People as People: an Overlooked role for the Imagination*, Jennifer Church, Vassar College