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Comments on Manuel García-Carpintero:
"A priori Knowledge in Understanding Demonstratives"

(DFG-Konferenz **Concepts and the A Priori**, Konstanz, June 2004)

Since I am in full agreement with what I take to be Manuel's main conclusion

that certain uses of referential expressions do not reveal the existence of contingent truths which can be known *a priori*, and, what is more, of *prima facie* demanding truths which can be known in a disappointingly cheap and trivial way that involves no intellectual effort at all; and that the distinction between a statements "official" *de re* content and that related but distinct content which the speaker in reality is justified in believing can be helpfully elucidated in terms of the distinction between a singular, object-individuated proposition and the diagonal proposition related to the statement in question,

since, as I said, I agree on this, I had to look pretty hard in order to find fault with any point he makes. Fortunately, his paper is a very rich one, and so I spotted two more or less incidental remarks I hoped I could reasonably disagree with. Although these two points which I shall focus on are not, as far as I can see, in any way indispensable for arriving at Manuel's main conclusion, I think they are in themselves philosophically interesting enough to consider them a bit closer.

Indexicals, pure and other

The first claim I'd like to take up is Manuel's *en passant* remark that the division among indexicals —between "pure" and "impure" ones— is theoretically uninteresting.

Against this I'd like to hold that, first, as a matter of fact, there **is** this difference, and that it is displayed by the standard examples mentioned in the literature: the word "I", for example, is a pure indexical, and the demonstrative "that", for example, is an impure one. Secondly, I think

that this difference **is** theoretically interesting, or at least a difference which has to be respected by any adequate meaning theory for the English language.

Manuel seems to think that there is no such distinction (although he doesn't put it in so many words), and his reason seems to be this: The semantical rule for an indexical expression like "he" will contain some concept like *the most salient male*. The attempt of giving a finite list of the ways in which a speaker may make clear which item in the world is for him, at the moment of his utterance, the most salient male, is futile. "Creative speakers will be able to come up with sensible new ways of manifesting referential intentions", says Manuel. And I think, he is quite right about this. The general specification of the semantical value of an expression like "he" is bound to contain some such phrase as "the most salient male or what counts as a male in the context of the utterance", and there is no hope of exhausting the indefinitely many ways in which something can acquire, in a context, the status of being the most salient male or the most salient entity which counts as male.

As far as this correct observation goes, it only shows that "he" is **not** a pure indexical: the referent of a token of this word, as uttered in a particular context cannot be determined without taking into account matters like the following: what are, in the context of the utterance in question, the relevant standards of saliency for males (or supposed males)? what does the speaker do, for example by glances or gestures, to render a particular item in the context salient? and so on. In brief: given all non-intentionalistic facts of the context (the identity of the speaker, the hearers, the place, the time, whatever), the referent of a token of "he", as uttered in this context, is not determined.

But, but!, I do not see how this should carry over to the relevant facts concerning the word "I". Now, what are the relevant facts here? As I see this issue, these are facts concerning the literal standing **meaning** of certain **expressions**; not facts concerning speech **act achievements** of **speakers** when they use sentences containing these expressions (like drawing the hearer's attention to a particular item). So we should, in considering these issues, keep two sorts of questions apart. Just to give them a name, I shall call the first family of questions *semantic*, and the second *pragmatic*.

(Semantic Questions) Are those rules which give the literal standing meaning of indexical expressions invariably of the same type, in the case of all indexical expressions? Or are the rules which give us the literal standard meaning of "I", "here", "now" significantly different in kind

from the rules which give us the literal standing meaning of "he" or "that"? - Are there indexicals at all the meaning rules of which determine the referent (of any literally used token) independently of any intentionalistic facts about the context? And so on.

(Pragmatic Questions) Can a speaker, in using, on a particular occasion, the indexical expression within a meaningful sentence of the language in question, find ways to refer to an entity which is not identical with the semantic value of the expression for that occasion? In a case of clash, does so-called speaker's reference normally come out on top of so called semantic reference? And if so, does it simply and plainly, without bells and whistles, sweep the board, or only if certain requirements concerning the out-in-the-openness of the referential intentions are fulfilled? Is the speech act of reference a gricy action? And so on.

Now, when we are addressing our question at issue, whether there is a pure/impure division among the indexical, it is only semantical questions which are pertinent. When Manuel suggests that there is no such division, he answers a semantical question, makes a claim about the semantics (the meaning rules) of indexical expressions. But the reason he outlines is nothing but a pragmatic observation which, by itself, does not entail any such sweeping semantic claim.

Now why should we think that, as I claimed, the word "I", *e.g.*, is a pure indexical? Here comes a sketch of an argument. Let's assume for the sake of simplicity that the rules which give us the literal standing meaning of all indexicals are quite simple in their basic structure: They assign a semantical value to the expression, where by a semantical value I mean the complete contribution the word, if it is used seriously and literally within a meaningful sentence, makes to the proposition which is what is said by the utterance of that sentence. The rule for "I" may be given thus:

The semantical value of (a token of) "I"
= the person who produces the sentence-token containing it.

I take this to be nothing but a notational variant of the rule formulation format which Manuel uses. Now let's look at the corresponding rule for the demonstrative "that"; it should be some refined version of the following:

The semantical value of (a token of) "that"

= the entity x such that the speaker, in doing whatever he does in the course of producing the sentence-token containing the relevant token of "that", makes it clear that it is x he thereby wants to speak about.

There is a striking difference between the two rules. In the rule for the word "that" we have to mention, in some way or other, what the speaker wants; in the rule for the word "I" nothing like that seems to be needed. If this is the correct meaning rule for "I", then no intentionalistic feature enters the determination of the semantical value of "I".

Well, on second thoughts, isn't the concept of a speaker itself an intentionalistic concept? Yes right, a speaker is not merely a noise-emitting system; but this only points to the fact that the whole business of specifying the literal meaning rules is couched in terminology ("speaker", "hearer", "intended audience", etc.) which presupposes a certain intentionalist background. So the claim about pureness of indexicals is not some kind of all-embracing naturalist claim, but a highly specific claim about the irrelevance of **additional** intentionalistic features for determining the semantic value of certain expressions in all contexts of their literal use. This is crucial: **Additional** intentionalistic features are perspicuous by their absence in the meaning rules for pure indexicals but not in those for impure ones. There may well be a *general* intentionalistic constraint with regard to *all* such rules, some constraint to the effect that the speaker intends to be speaking seriously and literally, or that he intends to refer to the semantic value of the token he utters. But even if this were so, this would not affect the distinction between those rules which must **additionally** mention specific speaker's intentions in order to determine the semantic value and those which don't.

So, given this criterion of purity, "I" is pure, "he" isn't, "that" isn't. Are there other pure indexicals but "I"? Well, interestingly, "we" (the so-called plural of "I") clearly isn't pure. "Here" at first glance seems pure, but, as is well known, there are as it were, common "impure" uses, as when somebody points to a spot on a map and says "We are here." — Is that to say that the word "here" is ambiguous? Because the simple meaning rule which first comes to mind seems not to suffice for accounting for the regular uses:

The semantical value of (a token of) "here"

= the place where the sentence-token containing it is produced.

Should we say that there is at least one additional meaning rule for "he"? Or should we stick to Paul Grice's recommendation to scrimp and save on meaning rules and try to explain those impure uses of "here" as generalized conversational implicatures? – All these questions are theoretically fascinating ones, and that's why I disagree with Manuel when he says that "the impression of a division of indexicals is theoretically uninteresting".

But even with regard to the word "I", isn't Manuel right after all in pointing out that always, inevitably, a "gap has to be bridged", when it comes to determining the actual referent of a particular use of a sentence-token involving an occurrence of this indexical? Yes, I guess he is right, as regards **the referent**; but he is mistaken as regards **the semantic value**. The referent of the word, as it is used in a particular utterance, is determined by a communicative achievement of the speaker. The referent is that entity the speaker makes it clear that it is *this* what he wants to talk about. It is a constituent of that singular proposition which is what the speaker primarily means. But the semantic value of the indexical is something different; it is not determined by a speaker's communicative achievement but what the meaning rule contributes to what is said, or better: what is strictly and literally said. Now the act of reference is gricy; but the act of determining the semantic value of an indexical is not. (I call an action type *X* **gricy** if and only if the following is true by conceptual necessity: Making it clear that one wants to *X* in doing what one does is sufficient for therein *X*-ing.)

Given the griciness of reference, there is always the possibility that the semantic value and the referent, maybe even of the word "I", the purest of the pure, may diverge. Here comes something which some of you may accept as an example. Somebody says "I am so pretty and so timid like a cute, cute little rabbit", and he says it in a very peculiar way, taking on a very affected accent, speaking in a very high pitched voice. He relies on his audience recognizing that he thereby tries to imitate the way in which Mrs. Nasty speaks. And he succeeds; the audience recognizes that he does not want to self-ascribe being pretty and timid, but wants to attribute to Mrs. Nasty the self-ascription of these qualities. Fine. I guess we might feel inclined to describe this case as follows: The **referent** of the relevant token of the word "I" was not the speaker but Mrs. Nasty; the **semantic value** of the relevant token of "I" would have been the speaker if he had said something, in the full Gricean sense of that phrase, in making this utterance. But as we try to keep the faith in Grice's doctrine we should say: Nothing was said, because the speaker didn't mean (again in the full Gricean sense of this phrase) what he made as if to say.

Anyway, what I take to be crucial here is this: Even if we concede that the indexical "I" could, given favourable contextual conditions, have a referent other than the speaker, this doesn't change a bit about its purity. Its purity is a semantical fact. The (envisaged) possibility of referring, by using the word "I", to something other than its semantical value is a general pragmatic fact which stems from the gricy nature of the act of reference. Both facts are fully compatible with one another.

Reference, genuine and other

The second claim I should like to take up is Manuel's *en passant* claim that "the characterization of 'genuine reference' in terms of the lack of descriptive content ... is ... theoretically misguided" (p. 6). I think this remark rests on a confusion again concerning the distinction between what is said and what is the content of the speech act of which the speaker makes it clear that it is this act which he primarily is interested in performing.

Manuel insinuates that Keith Donnellan almost contradicts himself when he puts forward the following claims:

- (1) The mark of a genuinely referential expression is its function simply to refer without any backing of descriptions, without any Millian connotation, or Fregean sense.
- (2) The word "I" is a genuinely referential expression.
- (3) The meaning rule for the word "I" is an equation of the type mentioned above:
 The semantical value of (a token of) "I"
 = the person who produces the sentence-token containing it.
- (4) This rule does not provide a description which "I" goes proxy for nor a Fregean sense.
- (5) This rule simply fixes the referent.

Manuel seems to think that these claims are almost inconsistent; and he sums up what he takes to be the imminent contradiction as follows:

So: genuine reference is not backed by description [yeah]; reference with cases of "I" is genuine [yeah]; reference with cases of "I" is fixed by description [no way].

So, what Manuel seems to want to claim is this: Donnellan is committed both to hold that a genuinely referential expression “refers” non-descriptively, and that referent with an utterance of a token of “I” is fixed by description. But, Manuel suggests, these two assumptions are incompatible. What I want to object to Manuel is two things: first, Donnellan is **not** committed to the claim that the referent of “I” is fixed by description. Secondly, Donnellan is making claims only of the semantic value of the word “I”, not about the acts of reference performed in concrete usings of tokens of this word, and the objects referred to in such acts.

Donnellan, at no point, says something to the effect that when a speaker uses the word "I" within a sentence by the serious utterance of which in its literal sense he performs a speech act, the referent of the relevant token of "I" is **fixed by description**. *Au contraire*, in (4) Donnellan claims as explicitly as one may wish that this is not so. But Manuel says that according to Donnellan “reference with cases of ‘I’ is fixed by description”.

Where did Manuel go wrong? Let me end my comment by venturing a highly speculative conjecture of the source of Manuel's confusion. (Of course, he can disprove this conjecture easily and conclusively, by claiming his first person authority: "Well, Andreas, nice try, but this was *not* the mistake I made". That would be a bit embarrassing for me. But nevertheless, I am not so much concerned, really, about Manuel's actual idiosyncratic cognitive processes when he misread Donnellan, but about what is intricate concerning the issue of genuine reference.) O.K. here comes the conjecture:

The rule which gives the literal standard meaning of "I", as stated in (3), has been misread. It has been read something into it which is not in it.

The rule merely says that what goes into the proposition which is what is said by the speaker. It is totally silent about anything which concerns the question how the speaker conceives of that item that goes into this proposition. Bluntly speaking, what the rule comes to is this: Somebody says "I", and whatever he thinks or feels about himself in that very moment, as long as he speaks seriously and literally, he himself will be a constituent of the proposition which is what he has said by his utterance of the sentence containing the relevant token of the word "I".

My conjecture: Manuel may have read more into this rule, since it is a rule which gives the meaning of the word.

I imagine him to have reasoned as follows, if only implicitly: The speaker we are talking about (when we do this kind of semantics and pragmatics) is, of course, a competent speaker of the English language. Being competent, he knows what the meanings of the expressions he uses are, and that is to say, he knows, at least implicitly, what the meaning rules, at least of those expressions he actively uses, say. So he knows, if only implicitly, that when he utters "I" within a meaningful sentence, he says something which contains *the person who produces the sentence-token containing the relevant token of "I"*. And this is, usually, how a speaker refers to himself. Therefore, a speaker, who uses the word "I", usually refers to himself **as** the person who produces an utterance of the very sentence token ... He refers to himself **under the description** which is specified in the meaning rule. And if not under this very description, then under some other description, a competent speaker may have in mind when he uses the word "I".

This reasoning, and, frankly speaking, I don't have the slightest idea if Manuel subscribes to it, contains more dubious moves than I could try to pinpoint —let alone analyse and reject— even in an one hour paper.

But let's see what has to be wrong about it. It mixes up issues of reference (of what a **speaker** has to try to achieve in focussing the hearer's attention on one particular item in the world) with issues of semantical value: issues concerning the truth conditions of what is said by making the serious and literal utterance. How a speaker achieves reference is a very difficult question, concerning, as Manuel rightly remarks, psycholinguistic facts. This is a question about the mechanisms of referring. And these may, or may not, inevitably contain a descriptive element of some kind. — But how a serious and literal utterance of a univocal sentence determines that what is said by it, is a completely different affair. It doesn't have anything to do with speech act achievements or the psycholinguistic mechanisms by which reference functions. The meaning rule for the word "I" is completely silent about *how* speakers *refer* to themselves. It just tells us *what* is the *semantical value* of this word in each and every serious and literal use which is made of it.