

*SE WHAT YOU MEAN*

by

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For my grandparents, Richard & Gisela Lebek,  
to whom, together, I owe my head and heart.

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## ABSTRACT

Propositional attitude ascriptions raise important questions about what constraints a semantic theory for natural languages must accommodate, but ascriptions of “what is said” are thought by some to be semantically uninformative. Where past attempts to defend a semantically robust notion of “what is said” fail to meet several objections raised to them, I provide a way to specify semantic content through ascriptions of “what is said” by focusing on *de se* ascriptions, or as they are sometimes called: propositional avowals. For those that make such ascriptions, semantic content is fixed by the ascriptive immunity to error that avowals exhibit. The standard objections against a semantically informative notion of “what is said” are avoided by adopting a first-personal stance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Do I contradict myself?  
Very well then.... I contradict myself

—Whitman, “Song of Myself”

We must take Whitman at his word on this. For though, as philosophers, we may find contradiction inimical, Whitman asks after neither you nor me, but only himself. The answer he gives, and the manner in which he gives it, has been instructive to my development as a philosopher over the course of the present enterprise, as well as to the ideas that inform the theses I wish to advance. On the former count, perhaps an ethical one, I have found that one ought to express a certain degree of humility with respect to the difficulty that any attempt to develop a cogent philosophical position inevitably imposes. To submit oneself to antinomy, to lean on contradiction, as Whitman does with such assuredness, is not to play the sophist, but to learn something of oneself, to recognize that you are not finished. In much the same way that Socrates did, Whitman knows himself in his self-ascription of contradiction and this can only be good company to keep. On the latter count, perhaps a linguistic one, I have found that turning away from Whitman’s assertion of contradiction to examine his non-contradictory assertion is instructive. Whitman tells us something about himself with his utterance, and the particulars of his doing so call out for clarification. I believe that the properties of self-ascription should lead us to examine our relationship to our own speech as a particularly valuable resource in the philosophy of language. Though this pursuit is not distinct from the investigation of the language of others, it is at least accorded some priority herein. The methodological implications of tacking towards the personal are various, but it is my hope here to develop

just one such implication for a theory of meaning. Namely, I hope to provide an answer to the question: do we say what we mean?

In the writing of this work, in trying to answer this question, I was often tempted to follow Whitman's example, to ease into the contradictions of philosophy, of language, and of myself most of all. I cannot help but feel that an author with more sense would have left off here before having half begun, for a philosopher conceives too much of articulation and I have too few words for the task at hand. But for the help of a few people I surely would have done just that. To that end I must thank my family for their constant support of my vagrancy; Michael Hymers for his patience and encouragement, without which even these words would not have been written; my fellow graduate students in philosophy at Dalhousie, and the department more generally, for keeping me halfway sane on a new coast. Lastly, I must express my warmest thanks to William Barthelemy for introducing me to philosophy a decade ago. I owe much to Bill's explanations of my reasoning gone awry and have little doubt that having been a student of his contributed greatly to my pursuing philosophy further. He will be sorely missed by myself and many others.

I hope this preface will not be a deterrent to the reader as what is to follow has undoubtedly been a detriment to me, myself. Let us now attend to ourselves and see how in saying of oneself we may better restrain our semantic speculation.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The following work concerns ourselves, our relationship to language, and our best attempts to come to terms with the expressions thereof. This is not an attempt to provide any particular semantic theory, one which would give us a way to determine the references of our words or the meanings of our sentences in any systematic and consistent way. Rather, the present aim is metasemantic. What separates the two tasks, semantics and metasemantics? And where do we fit in, if we do at all? As to the former question, various philosophers try to draw the distinction between the semantic and metasemantic along similar lines: Dummett (1974) individuates a theory of meanings from a theory of meaning, Kaplan (1989) works with our present terminology, semantics and metasemantics, Stalnaker (1997) differentiates descriptive and foundational semantics.<sup>1</sup> “Neige” means *snow* in French. “Schnee ist weiss” means that *snow is white* in German. These are semantic facts about the respective languages and properly belong to *a theory of meanings*, or *descriptive semantics*, or, plainly, *semantics*. Metasemantics (a theory of meaning, or foundational semantics) is not directly concerned with such facts. Here the primary focus is on claims about “the *basis* for ascribing a certain meaning to a word or phrase” (Kaplan, 1989, p. 573-4); the reasons *why* “neige” means snow, and “Schnee ist weiss” means that snow is white. These “reasons why” are about the semantics of a particular language

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<sup>1</sup> Stalnaker’s distinction is telling: “First there are questions of what I will call ‘descriptive semantics’. A descriptive-semantic theory is a theory that says what the semantics for the language is, without saying what it is about the practice of using that language that explains why that semantics is the right one.... Second, there are questions, which I will call questions of ‘foundational semantics’, about what the facts are that give expressions their semantic values, or more generally, about what makes it the case that the language spoken by a particular individual or community has a particular descriptive semantics” (1989, p. 535).

without being a part of the semantics. Another metasemantic question we may ask is “what does it take for a fact to be semantic?” This provides a further aim for the metasemanticist: to circumscribe the area that semantics is concerned with.

The question of demarcation has been and still is a pertinent one. Where does the study of meaning end and the study of other linguistic phenomena such as syntax or pragmatics begin? Is each a wholly distinct enterprise, or, despite our best attempts, is there no way to circumvent the encroachment of one area into the other? This is particularly pressing in the case of semantics and pragmatics. Salmon (2005) makes the issue seem remarkably tangled:

How are we supposed to understand the difference between semantics and pragmatics when the meaning of an expression is so closely bound to the manner in which that expression is used? An expression is used a certain way because of its meaning, and yet the expression came to have the meaning it does through usage. Each of the meaning and use seems to be a direct product of the other. (p. 317)

Szabó (2005) echoes the same sentiment:

The question remains how the relation between linguistic expressions and the world can be studied in isolation from the way these expressions are employed in speech and writing. After all, a large part of what semantics is supposed to explain are judgments regarding the truth or falsity of certain sentences in certain actual or merely imagined circumstances—and these are hard to separate from judgments about the appropriateness or inappropriateness of certain uses of those sentences. (p. 1-2)



Now, though important as far as these things go, this question is a very general one. And we should have little confidence that a strategy of contrasting a definite notion (if we have one) of what pragmatics is with a heretofore ill-defined notion of semantics will yield a robust semantic picture—thereby we only fall into negative space. More properly, we should keep this question in mind while focusing our inquiry more modestly, for one cannot accurately measure the whole landscape without taking a first reading.

Allow me to start small. Lying at the interstices of the semantic and pragmatic is a debate concerning the semantic relevance of “what is said”; that is, the question whether utterances and assertions can be taken as an informative guide to the meanings of the sentences which they express. Settling such a diminutive debate will not settle the entire issue, but it will serve as an initial point from which a larger blueprint, either semantic or pragmatic, can be drawn (though this further task will be beyond the scope of my current enterprise). What is said becomes a point of contest when we try to characterize it one way or the other; as a guide to the semantic content of the uttered expression (as a semantic phenomenon), or as heavily influenced by non-linguistic aspects of communication (as a pragmatic phenomenon).

For example, if we say that our exchanges of ordinary verbal discourse are primarily characterized by pragmatic factors, such as context of use, then we are minimizing what can be learned about the semantic content of the expressions used via such discourse, because in our understanding of regular conversation the meanings of the words which make up our utterances are most often subordinate to strong pragmatic intrusion. This is not a value judgement on the importance of semantics, but only to say that its proper place, even for a semantics of natural language, is not to be found in the

murky business of everyday speech. In congruence with this picture we find a strong push since the turn of the century towards a “minimal semantics” (MS), as evidenced by the work of Borg (2004), and Cappelen & Lepore (1997, 1998, 2005a,b). This picture of semantics is circumscribed and expected to account for very little of the kind of communication that we most often engage in. It leaves large portions of work to pragmatics and in doing so a sharp divide is maintained between these two categories of linguistic inquiry.<sup>2</sup>

Conversely, if we say that semantics is largely accounted for in any given common language exchange, then it might be thought that we are conflating semantics and pragmatics; that is, committing the heresy of ordinary language philosophy, equating the meanings of linguistic expressions with their use in our everyday discourse. Depending on who you ask, this route either harmlessly puts semantics front and centre at the cost of maintaining a definitive boundary between semantics and pragmatics, or it allows, with much weeping and gnashing of teeth, pragmatics to swallow semantics whole. Those in the minimalist camp claim that what is said, and reports thereof, is too much a product of pragmatics to have a direct bearing on semantic content, while those of a mind to associate meaning with use, and so subsume semantics to pragmatics, will claim that what is said is exactly the phenomenon that we need to examine in order to determine the meanings of our expressions. After all we are philosophers of language, and not merely lexicographers.

As it turns out, the worry that a reliance on “what is said” leads to a strongly pragmatic and use-based semantics is only a charge levelled against “what is said” by those

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<sup>2</sup> See Levinson (1983) for corroboration of this point.

who support (MS). Several authors, from Grice (1989) and Kaplan (1989) through to Perry (2001), and even Davidson (2001a,b), help themselves to the notion of what is said in building their respective and disparate semantic theories, yet none of them can be said to be working in the tradition of the later Wittgenstein. Some, such as Richard (1998) and Reimer (1998), engage the proponents of (MS) directly in order to salvage a semantically relevant notion of what is said which avoids conflating a theory of meanings with pragmatics. Discussion of the efficacy of the defence mounted by these authors against the proponents of (MS) will comprise the first portion of the present work.

Before going any further I should not forget myself, or rather ourselves, as this was the second question needing clarification. I claimed at the beginning that our relationship to language has a role to play in this thesis, and now that we have broached a subject and see that it needs clearing up we have occasion to return to ourselves. For doing so is just the thing to help with the clearing.

The characterization of the worries which philosophers who support (MS) has been up until now a little too muddled. Their concerns centre on *indirect reports* of what is said. That is to say, they do not believe that any report of what is said by the utterance of some third party, of the form “A said that *p*”, will need to track the semantic content of the sentence which comprises the utterance reported on. The reason for the emphasis on *oratio obliqua* stems, I believe, from traditional problems in the philosophy of language centring on propositional attitude ascriptions; talk of such ascriptions is most often made with respect to the propositional attitudes of others. But this emphasis gives the lie to the minimalist’s condemnation of what is said. The problem is not with what is said, but with who has been saying, and whom they have been saying about. For when we report on the

utterances of others we are removed from the production of the utterance. There is a distance which not only introduces the possibility of error, but also the possibility of acceptable reports that are not semantically informative. Things change when we speak about ourselves and our own utterances. And this is not a novel observation. So-called *de se* ascriptions, ascriptions to oneself, are noted for being particularly troublesome, or in need of separate treatment.

It is my aim here to argue that the *de se* ascription of having said that such and such to oneself are semantically informative because such ascriptions are not amenable to error, nor are they similar in certain important respects to those second-hand reports that Borg and Cappelen and Lepore find so unserviceable. Herein, taking cues from Bar-On (2004), I exploit the ascriptive immunity to error that *de se* ascriptions exhibit in order to specify a semantically informative notion of what is said, and thereby provide evidence to support the claim that a semantic theory ought to be sensitive to the locutions of our ordinary speech. Though shedding new light on the debate surrounding what is said will surely not be the only consideration when deciding on what the boundaries of semantic theory are, if the current criticisms of what is said are avoided by the first personal approach taken herein, then the semantic relevance of what is said is reinstated barring further refutation.

The rest of this chapter serves as a brief summation of what is to come. Chapter two begins with an overview of the importance of propositional attitude ascription to the philosophy of language and examines some of the issues that arise in trying to develop a systematic account of them. Out of this discussion emerges the three-pronged debate surrounding the semantic informativeness of “what is said”. There I characterize Cappelen & Lepore’s (1997) challenge to the “long held assumption” that “what is said” has some

specific relationship to the semantic content of sentences or utterances. Following this I introduce Richard's (1998) counter arguments. Finally, Borg's (2004) criticisms of Richard's position and support for the two former authors is spelled out.

Chapters three and four advance a methodology for cutting through the debate canvassed in chapter two. By doing so I reinstate the importance of ascriptions of "what is said" for our semantic theorizing. Instead of attempting to salvage the received view put forward by Richard, I point out that an overlooked assumption is the potential source of doubt surrounding ascriptions of "what is said". The debate characterized in chapter two is marked by the assumption that ascriptions of "what is said" are only ever ascriptions made by individuals to others, that is to say reports on the utterances of other speakers. Adherence to this view ignores that it is often natural to ascribe states and properties to oneself. By turning away from third person ascriptions and attending to *de se* ascriptions, we are able to carve out a semantically informative notion of "what is said". This strategy exploits certain immunities to error that *de se* ascriptions possess.

Chapter five raises objections to the method at hand, and I respond to each in turn. The first concerns the tense of avowals, claiming that past tense ascriptions cannot hold the same ascriptive security that specifies semantic content in avowals proper. The second questions *de se* ascriptions more generally, claiming that one of the reasons that *de se* ascriptions are thought to be necessary is actually no reason to suppose there must be things like essentially *de se* contents at all. If we have reason to doubt that *de se* attitudes exist, then making use of them for the purposes of securing semantic content is a suspect manoeuvre. The third concerns the uniqueness of *de se* ascriptions of what is said, claiming that if avowals specify content then any sort of avowal should do, but we do not intuitively

think that avowals of desire etc. should play a role in our semantic theorizing. Finally, having introduced an alternative view of what is said and defended it against both old and new objections, I conclude the thesis in chapter six with a summation of what the inclusion of what is said amounts to for semantics writ large.

## CHAPTER 2: PROPOSITIONAL ATTITUDE ASCRIPTIONS & INDIRECT SPEECH REPORTS

In this chapter I characterize the debate surrounding the semantic informativeness of propositional attitude ascriptions and indirect speech reports. It is sometimes claimed that an adequate account of attitude ascriptions and/or speech reports is useful for generating more general theses about the semantic content of language. This supposition is advocated for by Mark Richard (1998, 2006) and Marga Reimer (1998). In more recent work<sup>3</sup> Richard (2006) suggests that there is

a rather intimate relation between what determines what a sentence's use says and the meaning of the sentence. The upshot is that there appears to be a close connection between propositional attitude ascription semantics and the specification of sentence meaning. (p. 187)

In having an account of what clausal complements mean when embedded within indirect speech reports (e.g. S said that *y*) or other propositional attitude ascriptions (e.g. S believes that *y*) we can thereby gain some purchase in rooting out what those clausal complements mean on their own. The idea is to begin at the level of utterance (ascription, report, use, or what have you) and make our way down through unembedded sentence to semantic content. In what follows I will, firstly, canvas the historical motivation for holding that

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<sup>3</sup> Earlier, in Richard (1983), he espoused a "naïve-Russellian," or "neo-Russellian" theory of the semantics of attitude ascription. This position is abandoned by Richard in 1990. However, his currently held contextualist theory is still committed to some "reification of what is said" (Richard 1998); for Richard these reifications are "structured propositions" to which the subject of the ascription stands in some relation determined by the verb of the ascription. Though I am sympathetic in general to the idea of propositions as the truth evaluable bearers of semantic content, I do not wish to follow Richard in this regard here. For present purposes we can be satisfied that there is something that uniquely stands in for semantic content; though, as we will see in chapters three and four, the idea that there need be some *relation* between the subject of ascription and semantic content must be thoroughly deflated.

belief ascription and indirect speech reports are theoretically relevant for semantics; secondly, introduce criticisms of the above-mentioned view made by Cappelen and Lepore (1997, 1998), followed by a line of defence taken by Richard (1998); finally, I will, after Borg (2004), show why proponents of the so called “received view” cannot be correct. However, the conclusions drawn by Borg, Cappelen and Lepore are too quick; they ignore a unique mode of ascription which licenses a second look at “what is said”. The concluding remarks of this chapter will introduce this avenue and the following chapter will chart the course in more detail.

## 2.1 OPAQUE CONTEXTS

To one familiar with the history of the philosophy of language the terrain involving attitude ascription undoubtedly seems well-trodden; the first steps being taken by Frege (1892), with further notable strides made by Russell (1905) and Quine (1956). Substantive theses about truth and falsity, reference, and definite descriptions, among other philosophical flotsam, have been motivated by the relation these diverse topics bear to propositional attitude ascription. For Frege’s part, in “Über Sinn und Bedeutung” (1892) he was prompted to amend his theory of reference by further distinguishing the sense of a term from that term’s referent. There Frege holds a principle of compositionality, which maintains that the semantic value<sup>4</sup> of a non-atomic sentence is determined by its syntactic structure in combination with the semantic values of its constituent parts. A corollary of this principle is that the substitution of co-referential terms into a complex sentence ought to leave the truth-value of the sentence unchanged, but in sentences which contain

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<sup>4</sup> For Frege the semantic value of a sentence just is its truth value, either True or False.



attitudinal verbs such as “to believe,” “to know,” “to want,” etc. these theses fail. For example, assume that “Shade” and “Kinbote” are two names for the same person; they each refer to the same entity. Then (1) is true

- 1) Vladimir believes that Shade is Shade  
but (2)  
2) Vladimir believes that Shade is Kinbote

need not be true. In the case where Vladimir does not realize that Shade is Kinbote (2) would very well be false, despite the fact that the substitution in (2) involves only the co-referential term “Kinbote”. Contexts involving propositional attitudes have come to be known as “opaque contexts,” insofar as they do not allow such substitution *salva veritate*. In order to hold on to compositionality Frege’s solution is to have the complementary clauses embedded in the belief reports of (1) and (2) refer to their “customary senses,” rather than to their truth values, as they normally would outside of the belief report.

A related problem, due to Quine (1956), involves the impermissibility of existential generalization into propositional attitude ascriptions. The “dubious business” of quantifying into propositional attitude ascriptions entails that it is not valid to infer from the use of a referential term in an opaque context the existence of the referent of that term. Accordingly, it is not valid to infer from

- 3) S believes that F(a)  
that  
4)  $(\exists x) (S \text{ believes that } F(x))$

Or, as Alice ter Meulen succinctly puts it, if “John believes that the spy is watching him, even if someone is indeed watching him, he need not be a spy. It may even be that no one is watching him” (2001, p.463). The usual inference from the unembedded “the spy is watching John” to the existentially quantified “there exists someone who is watching John”

cannot be made when the former is found in the opaque context of John's belief. For nothing about John's belief about "the spy" guarantees that there actually is one, or if there is that they are watching him, or if someone is watching him that the one doing the watching is a spy.

Propositional attitude ascriptions, and opaque contexts generally, then, have occasioned much spilling of ink. Their being incitement to new theorizing is itself nothing new; is indeed a foundational issue in the discipline. A more contentious claim, though one it is seemingly plausible to endorse, makes proper bedfellows of the explication of attitude ascription and semantic content. Despite the initial plausibility of the semantic significance of *oratio obliqua* it is by no means universally accepted. Herman Cappelen and Ernest Lepore (1997, 1998, 2005a,b), as well as Emma Borg (2004), give powerful arguments against such a position. How then, if at all, to preserve the initially promising connection? Although it will emerge that it is not possible to hold on to the received view wholesale, in what is to come I shall contend that there is a gap in the literature concerning what is said; more specifically, self-ascriptions of what is said have been overlooked as a possible option for securing a semantically informative notion of it. Ascriptions of attitudes to oneself (e.g. I say that such and such) are unique. They do in fact have something to tell us about how a semantic theory ought to specify meaning. The emphasis on self-ascription marks a departure from the received view, and an alternative route to securing the semantic informativeness of ascriptions of what is said. Before coming to self-ascriptions, however, we must first wade through the debate concerning the significance of indirect speech reports with Richard and Reimer on the one side, and Cappelen, Lepore and Borg on the other.

## 2.2 ORATIO OBLIQUA & WHAT IS SAID

The ascription of a desire or a thought or a belief to another is very much similar to indirect speech reports of “saying that”.<sup>5</sup> Each is an intentional ascription antecedent for further subordinate clauses which fill out the ascription. So far the model attitude ascription has been belief: S believes that such and such. Similarly, one might say of S that S *says* that such and such, and thereby ascribe some content to their utterance. Just as belief ascriptions have been theoretically motivational, so too have indirect speech reports.

The concept of “what is said” has been important since it was first contrasted with “what is implicated,” by Grice in *Studies in the Way of Words* (1989). This distinction effectively highlights a difference between what one says, strictly speaking, by an utterance and what one communicates by that utterance within a particular context. For instance, if I look underneath the cap of my coke bottle and find the words “try again” I may well understand the meaning of the instruction: there is something which I am supposed to attempt once more, so strictly speaking I know what the phrase “try again” says. But I might plausibly wonder what exactly this phrase is telling me to have another go at, I’ve just successfully opened the bottle, so what gives? Then I look at the label and see that there is a contest on and realize the implication is that I should try again to win the prize. Alternatively, if I’m meeting my friends at the movies and one of them phones me up and

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<sup>5</sup> q.v. Kaplan’s “Demonstratives” (1989) for a similar sentiment: “The situation regarding the usual epistemic verbs-‘believes’, ‘hopes’, ‘knows’, ‘desires’, etc.-is, I believe, essentially similar to that of ‘says’” (p. 553). Also, Perry’s *Reference and Reflexivity* (2001): “Our concept of what is said, of the content of a statement, is linked with other common sense concepts, such as the content of a belief...” (p. 19). Fodor (1978) claims that “A theory of [propositional attitudes] should explain the parallelism between verbs of [propositional attitudes] and verbs of saying (‘Vendler’s Condition’)” (p. 140). The work of Vendler (1972) systematically highlights some of the semantic and syntactic similarities between the complement clauses of propositional attitudes and plain declaratives.

asks me “Are you ready to go?” I might reply “I’m just putting on my shoes.” What my reply says, strictly speaking, is not an appropriate answer. My friend hasn’t asked me about the last action I performed. They want to know if I’m ready to leave the house. But what I’ve implied is appropriate given that it is reasonable to infer that I am ready from the fact that people who have just put their shoes on typically intend to leave the house. If a second friend of mine turns to the first and asks what I have said, the first might well report that I said that I am ready. The question then becomes: how much does the report of what I have said depend on the semantic content of my utterance, how much does it depend on other pragmatic factors such as time and place of utterance, or conventions surrounding shoe-horning?

Philosophers such as Richard and Reimer have advocated for “the idea that claims about what is said can be genuinely semantically informative or significant, for we can use the former to determine in some way the content of the latter” (Borg, 2004, p. 114). Call this claim and those in accordance with it the received view (RV). In its most naïve formulation (RV) maintains that an indirect speech report such as

5) Cicero said that p

lets us know what Cicero said. On this view, then, a semantic theory, T, is correct only if

(MR) A report *she said that p* of an English utterance u (by the referent of ‘she’) is correct just in case the semantic content of u (according to T) is the semantic content of p (in the context of the report, according to T).

Now, Richard (1998) holds that (MR) unqualified is an implausible principle. Cappelen and Lepore (1997) provide sufficient reason to reject (MR) as is. However, just as we saw

Frege amend his theory in the face of issues surrounding belief ascription, so too does Richard amend (MR) in the face of issues involving “what is said”.

Cappelen and Lepore’s criticisms initially come in three varieties:

- (i) Partial semantic overlap.
- (ii) Summarization.
- (iii) Substitution. (1997, p. 282-284)

Firstly, they point out that it is often admissible to report someone’s utterance where the complement clause of the report only partly agrees with the utterance. For instance, A’s utterance in (6) may be reported as (7) despite (7)’s complement clause differing in semantic content from (6).

- 6) A: James wore a bright red coat and blue jeans.
- 7) B: A said that James wore a red coat.

No satisfactory semantic theory would assign identical semantic content to the complement clause of (7) and the utterance of (6) even though the report is permissible, and so our actual practices of *oratio obliqua* fail to provide an avenue to semantic theory. Similarly, in (ii), cases of summarization, our conventions around indirect speech reports do not support (MR). Suppose, to take Cappelen and Lepore’s example, that “Clinton goes on at length to describe his new economic program. A journalist might summarize him by reporting, ‘Clinton says he’ll cut taxes’” (1997, p. 283). Now, if the journalist is reporting on Clinton’s economic program for a general audience that cannot be expected to follow the nuances of tax regulation then the journalist’s brief summarization can be thought of as a perfectly acceptable report of what Clinton said, despite the fact that Clinton never once throughout his speech uttered “I’ll cut taxes” or anything that might be considered a summary of his economic policy. Finally, in (iii), substitution, (MR) fails to account for reports that switch out one or more terms in the original utterance for co-referential ones,

e.g. (8) reported with (9), where the one doing the reporting knows that their audience is unfamiliar with the shade of green that “chartreuse” picks out:

- 8) François: Chartreuse is Maria’s favourite colour.
- 9) François said that *the colour of that dress* is Maria’s favourite colour.

It seems incorrect to equate the meaning of “chartreuse” with “the colour of that dress,” for the latter description depends upon contextual factors to fill out its meaning (owing to the inclusion of the demonstrative), whereas the former term does not, or so says the objection. What each of these counterexamples suggests to Cappelen and Lepore (1997) is that “for any possible utterance *u* of *S* in *L* and for any linguistic item *w* in *S*, there is a true indirect report of *u* not employing (any translation of) *w*” (p. 285).

Further, in some instances “pragmatic *non*-semantic features of an utterance reported become encoded in the semantics of the complement clause of the report” (Cappelen & Lepore, 1997, p. 284). Various examples of “hot enough for you”’s come to mind, but, pulling from Larson and Segal (1995), imagine an altogether too familiar scenario: you’ve just come from an obviously terrible philosophy talk, and your colleague turns to you and says, “That was, like, *really* good”. It would be wrong, so say Cappelen & Lepore, to report that your colleague said that the talk was really good. Given the context (say, the atmosphere created by sitting through a real dud), it is much more appropriate to say that your colleague didn’t like the talk at all. Here it is not the job of semantics to ensure the complement clause of the report correctly says the same thing as the utterance it is reporting; this is a pragmatic factor. They conclude that our actual practices of indirectly reporting speech have little to do with semantic content; there are simply too many ways to specify “what is said” by someone’s utterance, and no general and systematic procedure

to uniquely pick out “what is said” given that what is said is so wrapped up in pragmatic features. Therefore, the prognosis for the usefulness of indirect speech reports looks bleak.

Richard (1998) responds to each of the above objections in turn, and though his response is sometimes “programmatically” it is not entirely unreasonable. Before considering the first of Cappelen and Lepore’s objections, Richard notes that terminology introduced by Grice already takes a step toward preserving (MR) with minimal modification:

(MR\*) A semantic theory tells us what we *literally* say in uttering a sentence (as opposed to what we say or convey as a pragmatic by-product of utterance); thus, literal indirect speech reports must match the reported utterance in content. (1998, p. 607)

By excluding conversational implicature from the scope of (MR\*) Richard makes an appeal to the genuine “distinction between what’s literally said in an utterance and what is implied in the act of utterance” (1998, p. 607). This supports the conjecture that our indirect speech reports need not be concerned with what is implied, or suggested, or hinted at, or more broadly “meant” by an utterance. One need only report what is *literally* said. Much stock is invested in this first step by Richard, and he positions it against a wide range of Cappelen and Lepore’s counterexamples to (MR\*) (1998, p. 607).

The first and second of Cappelen and Lepore’s objections are handled by positing propositional structures, such that the structure of the semantic content in (6) entails, via some structural relation (DET), the semantic content in the complement clause of (7), e.g. if the structure of  $p$  consists of  $\{x,y,z\}$ , and asserting  $p$  commits one to the existence of something that has  $\{x,y,z\}$  as attributes, then to assert  $p$  is also to commit to  $q$ , the structure of which consists only of  $\{x,y\}$ . As Richard puts it, “if someone asserts  $p$  and  $p$  DET  $q$ , she

asserts *q*” (1998, p. 609). This moves Richard to point out that what is literally conveyed by an utterance is not a single un-constituted bit of semantic information, it is rather a set of pieces of information. The report in (7) is then a perfectly acceptable guide to the semantic content of (6) so long as the semantic content of the latter DETs the semantic content of the former within the reporter’s context.<sup>6</sup>

What of Cappelen and Lepore’s third objection: substitution? Something further needs to be said for (MR1) by Richard in the face of this objection. For it is not the case that the substitution of a co-extensional term in the complement of a belief report can be explained away by recourse to the pragmatics of implicature, neither does Richard here rely on the DET relation.<sup>7</sup> There is, after all, no apparent relation between “Twain,” “Clemens,” or “the author of *Huck Finn*” even though they are co-extensional. Precisely therein lies the issue for this objection.<sup>8</sup> For if A utters

10) The author of *Huck Finn* was a vulgar man.

but has no idea that the author of *Huck Finn* is Twain, one can still report A’s utterance in (10) with

11) A said that Twain was a vulgar man.

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<sup>6</sup> At this point further emendation is made: (MR1) A report *she said that p* of an utterance *u* is correct only if either (1) the semantic content of *u* (according to T) DETs the semantic content of *p* (in the context of the report, according to T), or (2) in uttering *S*, the speaker conversationally implied the semantic content (in the report’s context, according to T) of *p*.

<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the DET relation seems entirely out of place here. Rigid designators aside, I doubt a convincing story could be told as to why a term like “Hesperus” would DET “Phosphorous.”

<sup>8</sup> The similarity of this worry to Frege’s problem should attest to the thorniness of both this issue and its prior namesake.



But the DET relation won't do here, and neither can A have conversationally implied that Twain was vulgar, because A does not know that Twain and the author of *Huck Finn* refer to the same person. Thus (MR1) is in jeopardy.

In order to defuse the situation Richard invokes an ambiguity in the verb "says".<sup>9</sup> Here, *says*<sub>1</sub> has a sense that preserves (MR1), while *says*<sub>2</sub> has a sense such that

12) A *says*<sub>2</sub> that S.

is true iff the semantic content of S is an extensionalization<sup>10</sup> of something A said (Richard, 1998, p. 610). There does seem to be a sense in which (sense<sub>1</sub>) A does not say that Twain was a vulgar man (in referring to "the author of *Huck Finn*" A might well have added "whoever that might be"), but, equally, there seems to be a sense in which (sense<sub>2</sub>) it is perfectly acceptable to report A as having said that Twain was vulgar. But if the one report can be seen as both true and false, then it is likely that it seems this way due to some ambiguity; Richard says that the ambiguity is plausibly found in the verb "says" and that "if positing such an ambiguity is well motivated, then it would seem that C&L's objection is not in the least threatening to the spirit of a principle like (MR1)" (1998, p. 610).

Having, in his estimation, handled each of Cappelen and Lepore's concerns, Richard reiterates the principle (MR) connecting what is said and semantic theory; essentially the received view mentioned above. The debate between the two camps can be summed up thusly: both think that there is some connection between indirect speech reports

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<sup>9</sup> Richard is by no means the only philosopher to note such a distinction, see Recanati (2001), Salmon (1991).

<sup>10</sup> Despite Richard's profession that the modifications he makes in his paper are not *ad hoc*, "extensionalization" seems to be a bit of jargon introduced specifically to cash out this particular response, q.v. p. 610 *f.n.* 10 for a definition of "extensionalization."

and semantic content; neither denies that there is *some*<sup>11</sup> connection between “what is said” and semantic content.<sup>12</sup> C&L think their counterexamples show that a specific connection between indirect speech reports and semantic content does not hold (“what is said” does not wholly constitute semantic content). Richard, conversely, believes that his amendments show that a qualified version of the standard view is tenable. So far, the back and forth between the authors seems to have resulted in stalemate. The rebuttal of Cappelen and Lepore (1998) does little more than restate their original counter examples; and Richard is quite happy to go about his business despite their non-concession. We appear to be at loggerheads and so might appeal to an outside source in an attempt to settle these initial skirmishes.

### 2.3 BORG ON WHAT IS SAID

Emma Borg’s *Minimal Semantics* (2004) takes up the debate in convincing fashion. There she sides with Cappelen and Lepore, but her arguments are more systematic and general than the putative counter examples of the previous authors. Her motivations are programmatic (not unlike Richard’s), but the conclusions that she draws have an air of finality not easily ignored by proponents of the received view. Borg takes it that Cappelen and Lepore’s counter examples provide sufficient reason to dismiss the idea that an unqualified version of (MR) can isolate semantic content from reports of “what is said”;

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<sup>11</sup> See Borg p. 127-9 for her version of the correct connection between the two. One which supports C&L’s position. Roughly: that judgments about indirect speech reports are influenced by the semantic analysis of the sentence being reported on, but the semantic analysis need not take into consideration “what is said”.

<sup>12</sup> In their own response to Richard, Cappelen and Lepore (1998) even claim that there may be many! (p. 617)

there are too many acceptable indirect speech reports that might have been meant by the original utterance, but there still might be a way in which a qualified “what is said\*” plays a role in determining semantic content. For instance:

- (b) Two-way dependence: semantic analyses of a sentence, *s*, are dependent on the content of *appropriate* indirect speech reports (‘what is said\*’) concerning *s*, but which indirect speech reports are appropriate is itself a matter which is influenced by the semantic theory in play.

This approach, (b), is taken by Richard (1998), where, recall, he emphasizes that “what is *literally* said” by an utterance is semantically informative. The purpose of the “literal” constraint is to exclude those reports which are not semantically relevant. For instance, from Watson’s utterance of

13) Holmes lives at 221B.

the following reports might be acceptable on an unqualified view of “what is said”:

- 14) Watson said that Holmes lives at 221B.
- 15) Watson said that his good friend lives at 221B Baker Street.
- 16) Watson said that that man lives there.
- 17) Watson said that the best detective in London lives at 221B Baker Street.
- 18) Watson said that he knows where Holmes is hiding.

The notion of “literally said” is meant to rule out those spurious reports which are informed by non-semantic features, such as (15-18), and so identify only the reports which will be semantically relevant. However, Borg is unconvinced that this is an effective strategy. The two-way dependence of (b) smacks of circularity without further qualification. “What is said\*” is supposed to be semantically informative, but is itself semantically informed, so

there need be more to the story.<sup>13</sup> But even if the appeal to an already semantically informed notion such as “what is said\*” were not circular, there is no reason to think, given a widely varying range of acceptable reports, that we have any consistent intuitions about which reports will count as “literal” and those which will not. *A fortiori*, judgements about the appropriateness of “literal” reports, says Borg (2004),

must surely be secondary to semantic judgements—we don’t, it seems, take *s* and *p* to mean the same because we judge a report of ‘A said that *p*’ as a literal report of some sentence *s*, rather we judge a report as a literal report just in case we think *s* and *p* mean the same thing. (p. 121)

Richard’s attempt to appropriately amend (MR) fails in the face of such objections because the appeal to a notion such as “literal reporting” requires that we already have fairly definitive semantic intuitions; in other words, in order to determine what counts as an instance of correct literal saying we must already have made up our minds as to what we think the original sentence literally means. A charge of circularity is not avoided by an ever more strictly specified version of (MR). In fact, the only way to motivate the addition of further necessary conditions to a principle of “literal saying” is by appeal to direct semantic intuitions, rather than intuitions about “what is literally said.” This objection is notable because it cuts “what is said\*” to the quick. Not only for Richard’s notion of “literally said,” but any notion, (b), of “what is said\*” that is itself informed by semantic considerations is called into question. Accordingly, (b) is a nonstarter; conceptions of “what is said\*” in line with (b) are not semantically informative in any substantive way.

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<sup>13</sup> There are moves here that the adherent to (b) may make to avoid circularity, q.v. Borg (2004), p. 119-120.

However, this is not the only option available to a proponent of the semantic relevance of “what is said\*”. A second approach,

(c) One-way dependency: semantic analyses of a sentence, *s*, are dependent on the content of *appropriate* indirect speech reports (‘what is said\*’), and which indirect speech reports are appropriate is determined by non-semantic features. avoids such circularity by eschewing a semantically informed notion of “what is said\*” for one that delineates the class of appropriate speech reports via non-semantic features. The immediate question then becomes, which exactly are the right kind of non-semantic features for the job? Here I want to depart from Borg’s treatment of the topic. She herself summarily rejects a number of proposed answers to this question.<sup>14</sup> And as such, she believes that “neither of the accounts of the privileged notion of ‘what is said\*’ [(b) or (c)] provides us with the semantically informative notion we were after” (2004, p. 126). My approach differs significantly from the literature on this topic and requires further supplement.

## 2.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The contortions semantic theory is forced to accommodate on Richard’s view are not just increasingly ungainly and cumbersome, but also, if Borg is to be taken seriously, ineffective for salvaging a semantically informative notion of “what is said”. Given their arguments I think we should accept that the detractors of the received view are right, “no account of indirect speech will breathe virgin air into the smoke-filled backrooms of semantic theorizing” (Cappelen and Lepore, 1998, p. 618). But this denunciation is only

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<sup>14</sup> See Borg (2004, p. 122-127) for her further criticism of this view.

correct to a point; note that so far Richard's strategy in response to each worry raised has been to amend (MR), in turn putting constraints on semantic theory which the naysayers in this debate find misleading and unreasonable. This strategy belies an unwarranted commitment to the received view. As its detractors demonstrate *the received view* ought to be abandoned. This does not mean, however, that any and all ascriptions of what is said are a misleading detour on the way to an adequate semantic theory. The problems found in the received view do not inhere in *all* such ascriptions. It is only with indirect speech reports that we find them. What is needed is a more fine-grained partitioning, as some instances of ascription involving "what is said" may be useful guides to semantic theory and some not.

The confounding factor in the debate so far is one easy to miss, given that speech reports are most often regarded as reports of *someone else's* speech. The problem, or so I contend, is not with "what is said" (howsoever qualified) but with who has been saying it, and whom they have been saying it about. Borg, for instance, explicitly identifies what is said with "what *hearers judge speakers* to have said" (2004, p. 122, fn. 69, my emphasis). Cappelen and Lepore (2005b, p. 67) have it that our intuitions surrounding what is said by an utterance are *fixed by acceptable indirect reports*, i.e. any report of another's utterance that we would take as informative constitutes what is said.<sup>15</sup> These suppositions provide a readily available target of criticism. Why should we think that our intuitions about what is said are best accounted for by acceptable indirect reports? If we make this assumption, then

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<sup>15</sup> There is some disparity here between Cappelen and Lepore, and Borg, as the latter author claims that the former author's counterexamples provide us with reason to believe that we simply lack any strong and consistent intuitions about which reports count as acceptable, literal, reports and which ones do not. See Fricker (2003) for the opposite claim: "It is an indispensable commonplace that competent speaker-hearers of a language L will usually know, or be in a position to know, what has been said in an utterance..." (p. 330).

of course it turns out that what is said is semantically uninformative. Working with this assumption, the consequences of Cappelen and Lepore's counterexamples are almost trivial. The antagonists in the debate place the blame upon "what is said". This, however, is a mistake. The issue is not with what is said, but with the indirect reporting of it.

We would do better to look to ourselves; our first personal ascriptions. One might think that first-person reports of one's own speech are in some important sense different than those of indirect (interpretive) speech reports: I seem to be an authority on my own utterances in a way that others are not. For instance, if I claim that "I believe that the dog is in the bog" we would naturally take it that the privilege, or authority, I have with respect to my belief about the dog situates me to be right about what it is that I believe. When someone asserts or exclaims "I'm afraid", it would seem ridiculous for them to then pause and ask *themselves*, "I feel something but is it fear?". There is no such absurdity for a third party to ask this of the frightened person given that the evidence they have about their fellow's emotional state may not obviously read as fear, nor is there any absurdity in asking the pet owner whether or not they do in fact believe their claim about their dog's whereabouts. Similarly, in the case of what is said, when I assert "I say such and such," "I said such and such," or more colloquially "Here's what I'm saying..." "What I'm saying is that...", for whatever such and such might be, there is no reason for me to interrogate myself as to the content of my ascription. At the very least, in ascribing properties to myself it seems much less likely that I should get things wrong, or muck things up, and much more likely that someone else should do so. Might this alleged ascriptive security allow those engaged in the act of ascribing what they themselves have said some connection to the specific semantic content of their utterances that the interpretation involved in third person

ascription—those indirect speech reports we’ve found so unserviceable—leaves open to both underdetermination and error?

To say nothing of Descartes, the idea that first-person attitude ascriptions are unique in some way or other has in fact been the consensus among contemporary philosophers from at least Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* (1968/1953) on.<sup>16</sup> The rest of this essay, in large part, is an attempt to determine if self-ascriptions can shed light on the semantic informativeness of what is said, and, if they can, how they do so.

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<sup>16</sup> Although relatively recent and notable exceptions are found in Devitt (2013), and, what should come as no surprise, Cappelen and Dever (2013). The recalcitrance of Cappelen and Dever will be discussed further below in chapter five.



### CHAPTER 3: SPEAKING OF MYSELF

Allow us to take a more schematic approach to the kinds of situations that the proponent of (MS) holds as the paradigm context for determining what is said. At the outset we have the production of a declarative utterance by one party, followed by the indirect report of that utterance by another, itself presumably an utterance in speech (though it makes no matter if the report were to occur in speech or thought, e.g. one could think to oneself “*x* said that *p*”, so long as it is a report on the utterance of another; let us assume for simplicity that it is an utterance). We represent the exchange thusly:

- 1) A: “*p*”.
- 2) B: “A said that *p*”.

The claim of the minimal semanticist is that the complement clause of B’s report does not need to be semantically equivalent with A’s utterance; there are many acceptable reports and no way to specify some gerrymandered notion of what was literally said which is not itself already semantically informed. Cappelen and Lepore (2005a, p. 199) take this as evidence for the positive principle of “Speech Act Pluralism” (SPAP<sub>1</sub>), which holds that because of the pragmatic factors involved in any instance of verbal communication, for any speech act there are many different things which are said (in fact an indefinite number!), and most of them are not semantically equivalent to the “minimal proposition” of the sentence uttered.<sup>17</sup> This, in turn, supports the negative claim that what is said is not semantically informative, for the minimal proposition of the report need not be equivalent with the minimal proposition of what is reported on. At base then we have the production

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<sup>17</sup> Notice that SPAP<sub>1</sub> applies equally to the utterance in (1) as it does to the report in (2), so that there are many things that are said by the report of an utterance just as there are many things said by the utterance that is reported. Cappelen and Lepore (2005a) accept this consequence.

of an utterance, its interpretation by a third party, and then a report on the original utterance based on that interpretation.

Now, the suggestion at the conclusion of the previous chapter was to disregard indirect reports of what is said in favour of self-ascriptions of what is said. The question then becomes: is the self-ascription of what is said in any way analogous to the situation of indirect reporting? Do we find that in speaking of ourselves we look in on and interpret our utterances in the way that B does in the report of A's utterance? Surely this may happen. I look at a transcript of a conversation I previously had with some court official, and comment on what I said in the conversation; I hear the message that I've previously recorded as my voicemail and report on what I've recorded there, etc. In other words, it seems we can move from (3) to (4) as we did from (1) to (2)

- 3) A: "*p*".
- 4) A: "I said that *p*".

In situations like these it does seem that what A is doing in (4) is very much like what B is doing in (2), and so is liable to the same sorts of indeterminacies, vagaries, and (pragmatic) intrusions, that lead the proponents of (MS) to SPAP<sub>1</sub> and a rejection of what is said. But the exchange modeled by (3)-(4) is not the only way in which we speak of ourselves. Quite often it is natural that we speak of ourselves and how we are at the time we are speaking. We can ascribe to ourselves particular sensations, feelings, actions, or thoughts as we are feeling them or doing them or thinking them.

- 5) "I've got an upset stomach," said as I wretch over the side of a ship.
- 6) When meeting an old friend, I exclaim, "I'm so happy to see you!".
- 7) "I'm working on it," I begrudgingly curse while typing out a draft.
- 8) "I think I'll take the bus today," said (or only entertained in thought) while thinking about how to get to campus.

In (5)-(8) the situation is decidedly not like (1)-(4). These are not reports on how I was or how I felt, what I did or what I thought. What we see in each of (5)-(8) is a statement about how the utterer is at the moment of utterance.

This is what I want to stress in this chapter: the switch is significant. In the former cases, (1)-(4), the success or failure of the speech report depends on *an appropriate relation* between the complement clause following “*x* said that...” and the original utterance; there are many such relations, the worst of which is an incorrect report, which we should certainly not find semantically informative, the best of which is a direct quotation, which is vacuous and so of no help. All those acceptable reports in between are subject to the counterexamples provided by the minimal semanticist. However, when we speak of ourselves in the manner of (5)-(8) there is no relation to be had, and consequently no opportunity for error or misascription. *A fortiori*, these kinds of ascription are not only immune to error, but they are also immune to the kinds of semantic vagrancy that dissuade the minimal semanticist from what is said.

These ascriptions are *expressions* of the sensation had or emotion felt, and, what is more important for our purposes, in the case where I ascribe an occurrent attitudinal state with intentional/propositional content to myself I *express* that content by articulating it. Insofar as this is the case, for me there is no evidential basis for my self-ascription, no recognition that I have made the correct or appropriate relation to some former utterance. The lack of an evidential basis for certain self-ascriptions will turn out to be the key to understanding why these self-ascriptions, called “avowals” by Bar-On (2004), are helpful for our current task.

In this chapter I will explore the particular kind of security that avowals exhibit, that is to say their immunity to error, by drawing out some similarities between the literature on the security of self-knowledge and first personal propositional attitude ascriptions. I will also explain how this immunity is of two kinds and how each can be put to use in looking at traditional problems of “*de se* attitude ascription”. The emphasis should be that avowals are significantly different from ascriptions to others or reports on the goings on of other persons.

### 3.1 A NOTE ON TAXONOMY

My primary source on the significance of self-ascription is Dorit Bar-On (2004). As mentioned in the previous chapter, the literature on self-ascription (at least in the western analytic tradition) derives from Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, and though of course not all of his concerns are those of subsequent authors, Bar-On may be seen to develop some of the points that Wittgenstein makes in that work. Other philosophers who are less indebted to Wittgenstein but who also place importance in self-ascription include Castañeda (1999), Perry (1977, 1979), and Lewis (1979). All of these philosophers are concerned with the same phenomena but have differing aims in their explication. The terminology that each makes use of in their separate discussions therefore needs some streamlining. At the very least, the connections between their work need to be brought out in order that the unique features of self-ascription common between them can be applied to what is said.

Bar-On’s focus is on how one’s expressions of their own occurrent bodily or mental states, their ascriptions to themselves, can be thought to be more epistemically secure than ascriptions to others. Castañeda’s concerns the logic of the self-ascription of propositional

attitudes (knowledge in particular), while Perry and Lewis are concerned “with the problem of finding appropriate objects for [self-ascriptions]” (Lewis, 1979, p. 522). The term “*de se* ascription” is introduced by Lewis (1979) as a way to distinguish an ascription of a propositional attitude to oneself from the ascription of propositional attitudes to others (as he calls them: *de dicto* attitudes).<sup>18</sup> Bar-On (2004) nowhere mentions *de se* ascription, even though it pertains to some of the same phenomena that she is interested in explicating. Her preferred term is “avowal”. What is the connection between the two terms? *De se* ascription, as it is understood by Lewis and Perry, is a rather restricted phenomenon. As we saw above, it is possible to ascribe to ourselves many different kinds of states that are not attitudinal in nature. If by *de se* ascription we mean any ascription to oneself using the first-person pronoun, then *de se* ascriptions countenance a large number of claims, such as

- 9) I have a pain.
- 10) I’ll arrive at noon.
- 11) I tore my sleeve.
- 12) I am the so-and-so.
- 13) My right arm is longer than my left.
- 14) I’m jealous of their success.

But including all of these is far too broad an extension and is certainly not the usage that Lewis had in mind when introducing the term. It appears that *de se* ascriptions are not alone in being ascriptions to oneself. How to bring out what is characteristic of a *de se* ascription as distinct from an ascription in which “I” is used, as we might say, plainly? Wittgenstein provides a helpful distinction in *The Blue Book* (1964). There he disregards the surface grammar of the first-person pronoun and distinguishes between uses of “I” as object and uses of “I” as subject:

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<sup>18</sup> Perry’s term, restricted to one kind of attitude ascription, is “self-locating belief”.

There are two different cases in the use of the word “I” (or “my”) which I might call “the use as object” and “the use as subject”. Examples of the first kind of use are these: “My arm is broken,” “I have grown six inches,” “I have a bump on my forehead,” “The wind blows my hair about.” Examples of the second kind are: “I see so and so,” “I hear so and so,” “I try to lift my arm,” “I think it will rain,” “I have a toothache”. (p. 66-67)

Let us say that any use of “I” as object can be simply called an “I’-ascription,” as this is a fittingly general term. A convenient way to think about I-ascriptions is that, in their use of “I” as object, features of one’s person are “picked out” in the same way as any other object in the world. The basis for ascription is evidential, as when we hop on the scale, observe the total skyrocket, and then say, “I have gained ten pounds!”, or as in the examples in the previous section wherein I talk about what I have said based on the court transcript, or recorded voicemail. These ascriptions, though made by myself to myself, are based on the observation I make about some feature of the world.<sup>19</sup> Conversely, when I say, “I am hungry,” “I am mad at you,” “I hear so and so,” or “I have a toothache,” the self-ascription is not, typically, made based on how I observe myself to be. My use of “I” picks *me* out in a particular way: as the subject of the ascription.<sup>20</sup> Let any ascription that makes use of “I”

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<sup>19</sup> Such an ascription is subject to both error and alternate description. Perhaps the scale is broken, or not calibrated correctly. Perhaps, though the scale reads out lbs. I describe my weight in kgs. or stone, or some fraction of a tonne.

<sup>20</sup> The hard distinction that Wittgenstein makes in *The Blue Book* between uses of “I” as object and subject seems to disappear by the time we get to *The Philosophical Investigations*. It is not so simple to say that subject uses of “I” render avowals, i.e. “there are uses of ‘I’ that seem to cut across the subject-object distinction” (Hymers, 2017, p. 102). Consequently, in the progression of his ideas on the subject, the later Wittgenstein acknowledges a more varied and wider range of uses. See Evans (1982), Hacker (1990), and Hymers (2017) for discussion of this point. However, as will

as subject be called an avowal. Avowals do not simply refer to the self in any sort of way, they are ascriptions to oneself in which the subject picks themselves out *qua* subject, as themselves.<sup>21</sup>

*De se* ascriptions surely fall under the heading of avowals, but not all avowals are *de se* ascriptions as Lewis or Perry understand them. The examples just used are self-ascriptions of phenomenal and emotional states, and these also use “I” as subject, so *de se* ascriptions, insofar as they are meant to deal in attitude ascriptions that have propositional content, are not unique in their use of “I” as subject. Thankfully, Bar-On (2004) is not only concerned with the self-ascription of propositional attitudes and we can look to her work on avowals for a more comprehensive taxonomy of secure self-ascription. She provides this hierarchy:

- I. Phenomenal Avowals.
- II. Attitudinal Avowals.
  - a. Intentional Avowals.
  - b. Propositional Avowals, (*De Se* Ascription).

Phenomenal avowals ascribe the presence of a state to the self-ascriber that does not have any intentional content, such as (9) above; these countenance ascriptions of sensations or feelings.<sup>22</sup> Attitudinal avowals do have intentional content, which is to say that they are directed at something, rather than just being plain expressions of feeling or sensation. One

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become clearer below, the kind of first-person authority we find avowals to possess is connected in some way with the immunity to error that uses of “I” as subject exhibit (Hymers, 2017, p. 102).

<sup>21</sup> This is important to emphasize. The fact that there is *no* evidential basis for self-ascriptions which use “I” as subject will do much work for the line of attack I wish to take against the minimal semanticist later on.

<sup>22</sup> Though these are accounted for by Bar-On in the same way as attitudinal avowals of either kind (and may even be the basis for such an accounting) I leave off the specific discussion of this first kind of avowal hereon, as it is propositional content that we are ultimately after.

can be mad at someone, or happy about something. These two former examples are best classed as “intentional avowals” because though they are outwardly directed they lack the propositional content which is characteristic of (Iib). The familiar “I know that...”, or “I believe that...” are each examples of propositional avowal. The ellipses stand in for the propositional content of the complement clause, and the fact that they are avowals is accounted for by the subject’s reference to themselves as self. The category of propositional avowals best fits with the picture of propositional attitude ascription that we encountered early in chapter two.

Going forward I shall take it that *de se* attitude ascription and propositional avowals refer to the same phenomena: the ascription of states or attitudes with intentional content to one’s self qua self. Depending on the context of discussion I shall speak of each alternately. The problems that arise via a discussion of *de se* ascriptions are best answered through the features of “propositional avowals” that Bar-On emphasizes in her discussion of self-knowledge, or so I contend. In the following sections I will introduce a classic problem of *de se* ascription and analyze it through the lens of immunity to error.<sup>23</sup> Having seen how this analysis works, we can turn to a further feature of propositional avowals that runs in a parallel fashion.

### 3.2 *DE SE* ASCRIPTIONS: AN EXAMPLE

In order to better situate the application of avowals to the debate canvassed in chapter two, I first consider the so-called semantic problem of *de se* ascriptions that grows

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<sup>23</sup> For treatments of *de se* attitude ascriptions that emphasize immunity to error through misidentification see Higginbotham (2003), McGlynn (2016).



out of the work of Hector-Neri Castañeda. The example provided, according to Perry and Lewis, highlights a problem for propositional theories of reference which have it that “I” must function in a proposition in the same way as other referential terms. Given that the examples they consider purportedly show that this cannot be the case, the semantic problem of *de se* ascriptions motivates alternate semantic theories: the property theory of content espoused by Lewis (1979), and also situation semantics (Barwise & Perry, 1983). But the problem need not immediately set us off searching for a new and improved theory of content. For present purposes, the discussion is indicative of the way in which *de se* ascriptions, as self-ascriptions, are more secure than ascriptions to others. This being the case, I maintain that the semantic problem of *de se* ascription is best analyzed via immunity to error through misidentification (IETM<sup>id</sup>).<sup>24</sup>

I find it pertinent to note that while the *locus classicus* on *de se* ascriptions, Castañeda’s “He’: A Study in the Logic of Self-Consciousness” (1999),<sup>25</sup> focuses primarily on attributions of self-knowledge, belief, and the like, Castañeda himself does mention that his “investigation also applies to *linguistic acts* which attribute a self-reference... linguistic acts of the assertive or quasi-assertive kind (‘claim’, ‘hold’, ‘state’, ‘say’,...) (1999, p. 35, my emphasis). Much like philosophers that come after him and are influenced by his work, such as Kaplan and Perry, Castañeda recognizes that *de se*

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<sup>24</sup> The motivations for IETM<sup>id</sup> come from Wittgenstein (1968/1953), via Shoemaker (1968) and Evans (1982). Though my discussion here is again indebted to Bar-On (2004).

<sup>25</sup> Honourable mention to Perry’s “The Problem of the Essential Indexical” (1979), which puts some of some of Castañeda’s observations to work for different purposes.

ascription is significantly different for various kinds of attitudes and the acts involved in ascribing them.<sup>26</sup>

Now, Castañeda's work is notoriously difficult to parse, often involving technical discussion of epistemic logic, of which it is neither desirable nor necessary to go into here. In order to illustrate one of his insights central to our present purpose consider first, as an example of the kind of beast he hopes to tame, a minor alteration to the unfortunate tale of Narcissus.<sup>27</sup> Narcissus looks down into a pool of water and becomes so enamoured with the reflected face looking back at him that he forgets who he is. He no longer recognizes himself; no longer has the belief that he is Narcissus, and so no longer believes of himself that he has the characteristics that he once believed he did. But he does have beliefs about, and attitudes towards, the person reflected in the pool: that, whoever they are, they are the most beautiful person in the world, or that, whoever they are, he (the amnesiac Narcissus) desires them (whoever the person is that Narcissus is looking at). Let's allow his would be lover, Echo, a little agency and personal revenge for an earlier rejection. Narcissus asks aloud the name of whom he sees in the pool, and instead of her usual gimmick Echo tells him true that it is "Narcissus" that he sees in the pool. So we'll assume that Narcissus has as good a reason as any could ask for in the realm of fable to believe that the name of the reflection is "Narcissus". Now consider the following:

- 15) Narcissus believes that Narcissus is beautiful.
- 16) Narcissus believes that the person in the pool is beautiful.
- 17) Narcissus believes that he is beautiful.
- 18) Narcissus believes that he himself is beautiful.

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<sup>26</sup> Supra f.n. 3

<sup>27</sup> See Marshal McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964, p. 45-6) for an interpretation of Narcissus' tale that corroborates the current characterization.

In our story both (15&16) are true of Narcissus, he does believe that the predicate “is beautiful” truly applies to (what he takes to be) the referents of “Narcissus” and “the person in the pool”. (17) is a tricky case. It has two readings which make it either true or false depending on how one treats the pronoun “he”.<sup>28</sup> On the reading where (17) is false, which is equivalent to (18), “he” is anaphoric for the sentence’s earlier token of “Narcissus”. This reading is not necessary and can be replaced with a reading where (17) is true; here “he” refers to the reflection that Narcissus fails to realize is *his own*, he thinks it is someone else, or someone else’s reflection.<sup>29</sup> As for (18), given the specifics of the story it is clear that it is false. The love-struck amnesiac Narcissus doesn’t believe of himself that he is beautiful based on what he sees. If he did realize it was himself that he was staring at, then he would indeed have the belief that he himself was beautiful, which in turn might occasion him to step away from the edge of the pond and walk in beauty elsewhere. As it stands though he just can’t tear himself away and this is because he doesn’t have the right belief, namely that reported in the complement clause of (18), which, for Narcissus, would amount to his realization that “I am beautiful”. Call this case, and those similar (such as those involving emphatic reflexive pronouns like “I” or “I myself” for the first person, “you yourself” for the second, or “s/he herself/himself” for the third), *de se* ascriptions.

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<sup>28</sup> I leave aside questions of which reading of “he” is more “natural” in our every-day discourse, absent any further information about the context of utterance. It is enough that the two readings are possible.

<sup>29</sup> Castañeda notes that “he\*” is a convenient way of disambiguating the two uses of “he” in a sentence like (3). “He\*” is Castañeda’s way of designating the “S-use” of “he”, which he identifies as “a pointer to the object of someone’s self-knowledge, self-belief, self-conjecture” (1999, p. 35). “He\*” stands proxy in *oratio obliqua* for one’s first personal use of “I” in *oratio recta*.

The question to ask is then, whence the falsity in the *de se* ascription of (18), why is it different from (15&16) and (17) on its second reading? We have Narcissus staring himself in the face, believing the owner of that face to be beautiful, but not believing it of himself. Keeping in mind that here “he himself” stands proxy for Narcissus’ own use of “I” as subject to refer to himself (as in his belief “I am beautiful”), the oddity stems from the fact that in our story the proper name “Narcissus”, the definite description “the person in the pool”, the pronominal “he”, and the reflexive “he himself” (as proxy for “I”) are all co-referential. They all refer to Narcissus, but when the *de se* “he himself” occurs in the complement of an attitude report it alters that report’s truth value (it would have been true in the described situation given any other of the co-referential terms). “He himself” in indirect ascriptions, or rather “I” in direct first-personal ascriptions, seems to have a different meaning or content than the other co-referential terms; it could not be replaced *salva veritate* with “Narcissus”, or some description of him, or some other pronominal. The rub is that it is unclear what the content of such emphatic reflexives could be; the domain of content, whatever it happens to be, seems to be exhausted by the kinds of contents that we assign those other co-referential terms, and so the story goes (Castañeda’s not Narcissus’) we have a unique situation on our hands with *de se* attitude reports. Castañeda concludes from his own considerations that the emphatically reflexive “pronoun ‘he\*’ is never replaceable by a name or a description not containing tokens<sub>w</sub> of ‘he\*’” (1999, p. 42).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Where a “token<sub>w</sub>” of “he\*” is any of “I”, “me”, “mine”, “myself” etc. (Castañeda, 1999, p. 37).

An alternative way to tackle the problem of trying to identify the oddity of (4) is to examine exactly that belief that Narcissus does not have. What is going on in the case where Narcissus makes the *de se* ascription of belief in *oratio recta*:

19) I am beautiful.

as opposed to the indirect ascription to Narcissus of a first personal belief that picks out his own way of referring to himself that we see in (18). Indeed, this is properly the place to look because it, rather than the third person report of it, is the source of the idiosyncrasy. Allow us to eliminate for each of (15-17) the attitudinal prefix “Narcissus believes that” and, similarly to (19) only focus on the complement clause which is the intentional object of Narcissus’ belief. Then the emphasis is on each statement as it is entertained by Narcissus, and what we have in each of (15-17) is the possibility, and in the example the actuality, that Narcissus can misidentify himself as someone else when using a referential device that, though it correctly applies to him, does not pick out his own way of referring to himself as himself. As we saw in a previous section this “way of referring to himself as himself” is essentially Wittgenstein’s use of “I” as subject, rather than as object.

Now, returning to (19) we ask, is it possible in entertaining this belief, or in explicitly uttering it aloud, that Narcissus should misidentify himself as the subject of the ascription even when he does not have any idea of who he is—what names correctly apply to him, or what descriptions are accurately satisfied by him? This question amounts to asking whether in uttering (19) Narcissus could possibly mistake the referent of “I” to which he ascribes the predicate. We might imagine such a scenario to be marked by Narcissus’ wondering “Someone is beautiful but is it me?”. This seems eminently implausible so long as Narcissus’ utterance of (19) is a genuine assertion. Contrast the

implausibility of this outcome with Narcissus' thought or utterance in any of (15-17). For these it does appear appropriate, given certain circumstances (of which our amnesiac situation is included), for Narcissus to wonder, e.g. "Narcissus is beautiful, but am I Narcissus?", "the person in the pool is beautiful, but am I the person in the pool?". It appears that the first-person pronoun "I", whenever it is uttered or entertained, provides a much greater degree of security for those who make use of it than any other referential device that could be appropriately used by them; for often, if not always, there does not even seem to be the possibility that one's use of "I" could mistakenly pick out someone other than its utterer. Herein lies the disparity between (19) and (15-17), as entertained by Narcissus. It is the unprecedented identificational security of Narcissus' *de se* ascription that accounts for the disparity.

In the following section it will be my aim to spell out what this security consists in. This will provide the necessary framework to model a similar kind of immunity for the ascriptive portion of certain *de se* ascriptions: IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>. Once we have the latter property we can return to the question of what is said.

### 3.3 IDENTIFICATION & SECURITY

As we saw in the example of Narcissus above the problem was that he could not recognize himself, and so consequently could not properly make a self-ascription concerning his beauty, in the fashion that Wittgenstein identifies, using "I" as subject. The issue then is a *recognitional* one; as Wittgenstein says, in using "I" as subject "there is no question of recognizing a person when I say I have a toothache. To ask 'are you sure that it's *you* who have pains?' would be nonsensical" (1964, p. 67). If Narcissus were to have had the *de se* belief, as in (19), it would have been absurd for him to ask of himself whether

or not he was sure that it was him, and not some other person, who he believed was beautiful. *De se* ascriptions, in making use of “I” as subject, seem to guarantee that the reference of “I” is secured, that it cannot fail, and we now must ask how best to account for the exemption to error that *de se* ascriptions exhibit.

At the outset it may seem proper to say that as “I” is a referential device it needs some object, and, moreover, one that an individual has a particularly secure way of recognizing. However, recall that simply any old regular I-ascription will not do the trick here; an individual cannot always recognize the referent of “I” when it is used as an object in the world. That is, we cannot identify external, bodily, features such as our limbs and torso as the referent of “I”. Indeed, much like other referential devices, proper names, descriptions, pronominals and the like, the use of “I” as object refers to an individual as if the user were external to themselves. It is just these kinds of uses that open up self-ascription to the possibility of error, the possibility of misidentification. This may prompt the belief that we need some special object, some bodiless “Self,” that “I” refers to, and which an individual cannot help but recognize as the referent of a *de se* ascription

Then, *de se* ascriptions, in using “I” as subject, refer to the self, qua “Self” in some Cartesian sense. On this Cartesian view if Narcissus were to believe “I am beautiful,” “I love myself,” or after a while of pond gazing, “Goodness, I’m getting hungry...”, his *de se* ascriptions are exempt from misidentification in a way that ascriptions others make about him are not because he is guaranteed to pick out, to recognize, the right object: the Self, or his Self, his Ego. As Bar-On (2004) puts it, “For the Cartesian, the target of reference of

“I” is (semantically) unmissable because (epistemically) unmistakable” (p. 35).<sup>31</sup> Because we *always* successfully identify our Egos as the unique target of reference in our *de se* ascriptions, the term “I” cannot fail to refer, hence its unique semantic success.

Putting aside the usual worries accompanying a Cartesian ontology of mind-body dualism, this account encounters several problems, the most well-known of which is found in Anscombe (1975).<sup>32</sup> However, I wish to focus criticism of the Cartesian view on the fact that it treats the referential success of the first-person pronoun in much the same way as that of any other referential term; the basis for reference is the same in kind. Insofar as it does this it is ill equipped to explain the kind of security that *de se* ascriptions exhibit. In one sense, we have already seen that “I” is not like proper names etc.; its use as subject excludes the possibility of a referential error. The Cartesian maintains that this referential security is predicated on the fact that “I” refers to an object unique to every individual and that every individual is acquainted with or stands in some epistemic relation to: their Ego.<sup>33</sup> This Ego is the target of reference for “I” in much the same way that a particular table is

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<sup>31</sup> We might alternatively call such an approach an “Epistemic Approach”, for it relies on a “knowledge of” a self, an ego, etc. The Epistemic Approach has seemed attractive to a number of philosophers including Castañeda, the originator of the idiosyncratic *de se* examples. He takes it that what such situations show is that when we ascribe properties to ourselves the process by which we pick out ourselves is discontinuous with other ascriptive practices using the referential mechanisms of proper names, descriptions, or pronominals (excluding “I” of course). Frege (1918) expresses a similar idea that gets at the root of what is going on for fans of this approach: “Now everyone is presented to himself in a particular and primitive way, in which he is presented to no-one else...” (p. 41).

<sup>32</sup> I leave off discussion of Anscombe’s view on first person reference. Though she is correct in her assessment of the Cartesian view, she further takes the Cartesian view’s failure to imply that “I” is not a referential device at all, or that there is nothing to which it refers. This is too strong a conclusion to draw. For an outline of Anscombe’s rejection of a Cartesian view see Bar-On (2004, p. 46-54).

<sup>33</sup> There are also worries about how the Cartesian view can be consistent on this point: given that an individual simply *is* their ego, in what sense could they stand in relation to it. We often talk of *my* ego or having an ego, but if I am it, how can I have it? See Bar-On (2004, p. 31).



the target of reference for “table,” or a particular person is the target of “Bill”. In each of these latter examples, however, it is always possible in principle to misapply the term. I might think I see Bill across the street when in fact it is Bob, I might think there is gin in the martini glass when it is actually water etc. There is a “semantic distance” with normal referring expressions between their intended application and the presumed target (Bar-On, 2004, p. 36). This semantic distance is a commonplace of normal referential devices, so if any term is meant to refer in the same way, to hit the target so to speak, then there must be the possibility of misapplication.

Now these considerations about normal referring terms seem to entail some tension for the Cartesian picture, for “I” is supposed to have a quite extraordinary target of reference, the Ego, and what is characteristic of this target is that it cannot be mistaken; “it is logically guaranteed to be unmissable” (Bar-On, 2004, 36). But if the Cartesian has it that the Ego is the target of reference for “I” in exactly the same way that an individual object is the target of a name, then it seems to throw away its explanation of security, and if it does not then it is difficult to see how the Cartesian can maintain that “I” is a genuine referring expression in the same way as ordinary referring expressions. Its very explanation of security seems to preclude the latter option, while the former option jettisons a commitment to security, the very feature the view is supposed to explain. This is an undesirable dilemma because we do in fact want to maintain that “I” is a genuine referring expression, one that it is semantically continuous<sup>34</sup> with other referring expressions, but we

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<sup>34</sup> “Semantic Continuity” maintains that an avowal “will be true under the same circumstances as any ascription that identified that same individual and ascribed to her the same condition at the same time... Avowals thus exhibit continuity of logico-semantic structure and are interchangeable *salva veritate* (in context) with ordinary, unproblematic statements” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 9).

do not want to cede the security of *de se* ascriptions in their use of “I” as subject, and it seems that we are forced to choose either one or the other on the Cartesian view of things.

The deficiencies of the Cartesian view boil down to a mistaken notion of how “I” refers. It relies upon the inherent supposition “that ‘I’ could only refer if its use were backed up by an epistemic ability of the ‘I’-user to recognize or identify the referent of ‘I’” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 56), and this supposition can only lead to the above dilemma. So we must reject the idea that *de se* ascriptions are exempt from referential error based on some epistemic ability of recognition. It is straightforward to see the consequences of such a rejection, “I” must be a genuinely referential device that *does not* require the employment of some epistemic means for identifying its referent.

In fact, we have already seen, in inchoate form, an explanation of the security of *de se* ascription along these lines in the passage quoted from Wittgenstein’s *Blue Book* at the beginning of this section. Recall that there he says there is *no question of recognizing* a person when we make a self-ascription in the correct way, which is not to say that we require an infallible faculty that always allows us to recognize some thing, e.g. the ego, but rather that in making a *de se* ascription the question of recognition and identification never even arises. Drawing on Wittgenstein, both Shoemaker (1968) and Evans (1982) attribute the referential success of “I”-ascriptions to “Immunity to Error Through Misidentification”. This property of *de se* ascription is meant to account for the referential function of the first-person pronoun.<sup>35</sup> IETM<sup>id</sup> maintains that “I” is a genuinely referential

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<sup>35</sup> Things are not quite so simple. Bar-On (2004, p.86-7) makes a distinction between the semantic success of “I”-ascriptions and their immunity to error through misidentification, i.e. some “I”-ascriptions are referentially guaranteed but do not exhibit a full immunity to error. For my purposes not much will depend on this distinction, so for simplicity’s sake I leave explanation of it out.

device that does not require its users to employ any epistemic means for identifying its referent, because in the case of the first-person pronoun, and perhaps a few other indexical devices, genuine reference does not require identification at all.

In abandoning the position of the Cartesian, we seem to be abandoning any “target” for “I” to refer to, and consequently we might be tempted to suppose that there is in fact nothing at all that “I” refers to.<sup>36</sup> But to draw this conclusion would be a mistake. To see why this is so we must disregard the idea that “genuine reference requires identification in the demanding sense of employing a distinct procedure for identifying or descriptive means of recognizing the relevant target of reference” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 59). That is, we must jettison any appeal to epistemic conditions for the semantic success of “I”. But then we are left with the task of replacing epistemic means of reference with something else, supposing we want the first-person pronoun to refer at all. If “I” does not refer via any epistemic means as do other referential expressions, then how does it do so, and what does this alternative method of reference have to do with the security of *de se* ascriptions?

Though I do not wish to belabour its importance, it is appropriate here to turn again towards Wittgenstein’s insight in *The Blue Book*. As he is often credited there as well as in the *Philosophical Investigations* with providing the impetus for rejecting Cartesianism, many authors seize upon his insights and build upon them. This being the case, I am saved from the burdensome work of innovation. Bar-On suggests what she calls the “Indexical Reference View,” which some have noted gets along happily with Wittgenstein’s views on how “I” refers.<sup>37</sup> Her proposal is that “I” is a referential device intended to mark the *source*,

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<sup>36</sup> This is the stance of Anscombe (1975).

<sup>37</sup> e.g. Hymers (2017, p. 105-6).

or origin, of the ascription, rather than pick out an object or hit a target in the way that other referential terms do (2004, p. 77). She wants to suggest that

Making manifest, or marking, what would otherwise be a mere index can still serve to introduce an object into discourse (or thought)... [T]he user of “I” can still be credited with having a thought about an object (herself), even though she is not herself locating a target of reference (any more than she does when issuing an indexical statement). (2004, p. 79)

We can see how “I” is meant to refer indexically, without substantial epistemic warrant, through the following example that emphasizes its affinity with the indexical “here”. Suppose that the heir to a hefty fortune is kidnapped, blindfolded and thrown into the trunk of a car. The car speeds away. After a while of being stuck in the trunk the kidnapped heir might think or say to themselves, “It’s very dark here. I can’t see”. Now we can assume that in the confusion of the abduction the heir cannot know whether they’ve been thrown in the trunk of a car or been deposited in the back of a van, nor can they be said to know in which direction the vehicle has headed, i.e. strictly speaking they cannot know any information about where they are currently. Does it seem correct to think that in the assertion about place, “It’s very dark *here*,” that the heir cannot successfully refer to their location because they lack knowledge (of acquaintance, description or otherwise) about the exact location? I think not. It seems perfectly legitimate that the indexical pronoun “here” succeeds in referring to a place even in the absence of any descriptive knowledge of the area on the part of the self-ascriber. A similar case might be that of a lost hiker (even carrying a map) throwing up their arms and exclaiming to their bickering fellows “Well, we’re here!”. This is a true statement (albeit not a very informative one) that picks out the

location, the origin, of the utterance, regardless of the utterer's inability to point out their location on the map, as we might say to recognize that "here" is "[pointing] there".

What about the latter half of the heir's utterance, "I can't see"? It seems entirely plausible that "I" should function indexically in the same way that "here" does, i.e. it can successfully refer even in the absence of any ability on behalf of its user to identify themselves as *x*, *y*, or *z*. Such an ascription "does not rely on any identification of myself as the subject to whom I want to ascribe the relevant property" but it still makes a genuine reference (Bar-On, 2004, p. 89). That is, the victim of the kidnapping need not ask themselves "Someone can't see but is it me who can't see?"; they do not need to wonder whether they are seeing (or not) out of someone else's eyes. Nor do they need to think something along the lines of "I, the victim of the kidnapping, cannot see" in order to securely refer to themselves; such an identification can only serve to introduce the possibility of a referential error (perhaps this is no kidnapping at all, in which case "the victim of the kidnapping" refers to no one in this context, and so that non-existent person certainly cannot be said to lack the ability to see).

*De se* ascriptions introduce the "referent" of "I" indexically, and in doing so there is no longer the question of recognizing the person to whom the relevant property is to be ascribed on the basis of any external evidence. Insofar as this is the case avowals of this kind are IETM<sup>id</sup> because they do not rely on a judgement concerning the identity of the ascription's subject. They refer by explicitly marking the source of the ascription, and this is enough to guarantee that in avowing I ascribe the relevant property to *myself* and not someone else, because the epistemic demands on this mode of reference are nil.

### 3.4 ASCRIPTION & SECURITY

The purpose of this chapter is to explicate the immunity to error that *de se* ascriptions exhibit and in section (3.3) we saw that the use of “I” as subject entails the referential success of such ascriptions. In avowing I cannot mistake the subject of my avowal, myself, for some other person because my ascription refers indexically to the origin of the utterance. After both Shoemaker and Evans, we call this kind of security IETM<sup>id</sup>. But as Bar-On is correct to point out:

A full understanding of how an “I”-ascription can be [immune to error] requires ceasing to focus narrowly on the subject component of the ascription and the way “I” refers, and thinking also about the ascriptive component and the way the predicate term is applied. More than that: it requires thinking about the basis for the ascriptive judgment as a whole. (Bar-On, 2004, p. 87)

Here we see Bar-On emphasize that the IETM<sup>id</sup> of avowals is not the only kind of immunity that *de se* ascriptions exhibit, and so it cannot be said that IETM<sup>id</sup> alone provides a full account of their security. What is further required is an explanation of the relation (or lack thereof) between the self-ascriber and the content of the ascription. Her proposed explanation, and one which I will be endorsing, is that just as the identificational security of avowals is *non*-relational insofar as IETM<sup>id</sup> indicates the absence of recognitional identification, so too is it with the ascriptive portion of propositional avowals. Call such security immunity to error through misascription (IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>). Accounting for this further security of *de se* ascription is a crucial insight on the part of Bar-On. One which other discussions of first-person authority and immunity to error, such as Shoemaker’s and Evans’, leave out. IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> is not only important for Bar-On’s task of explaining self-

knowledge, but, as I will argue, can also be applied to unrelated questions concerning the specification of content within propositional attitude ascriptions, i.e. self-ascriptions of what I myself have said, and this in turn may countenance the idea that such ascriptions are semantically informative. Beforehand, what we want is an account of IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> that works for avowals with propositional content generally, and once we have an explanation of this, we can apply IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> to talk of our own speech.

We began chapter three by spelling out in what sense *de se* ascriptions are unique with respect to the way they refer to the subject of the ascription. In avowing, “I hear the bell,” “I am nervous,” “I believe that Frege made a mistake in the Begriffsschrift,” there is no question, as far as I am concerned, as to whom I am making the ascription to. My use of “I” as subject refers to the origin of the utterance indexically and thereby avoids the errors in identification that may arise even when I ascribe properties to myself using coreferential terms. This perceived security was the motivation for the classic problem of *de se* ascriptions.

However, when we make ascriptions to ourselves we do not only avoid errors of identification. If this were so then even though in making an avowal I am guaranteed in ascribing some attitude with some content to *myself*, and not someone else, it could still be up for grabs *for me* as to what that attitude is and what its contents are. Such a supposition, I think, flies in the face of common sense. Quite to the contrary, it is reasonable to suppose that when I make the ascription, “I believe that Frege made a mistake in the Begriffsschrift” it is in fact *belief*, not desire, that I ascribe to myself, and further the content of my belief is in fact *that Frege made a mistake in the Begriffsschrift*, and not some other proposition, say, *that Wittgenstein made a mistake in the Tractatus*. At the very least it seems that in

ascribing intentional attitudes with propositional contents to myself I am much more likely than you or some third party to ascribe the very content of the state I am in when I make my self-ascription. What we are further required to explain, then, is that in the ordinary course of things the semantic contents of my intentional ascriptions are in fact much more likely to be truly ascribed in my own case than my pronouncements and reports on many things in the external world, e.g. when I say, “I am hungry,” it is *hunger* and not *exhaustion* that I feel, alternatively it is *gin* which I believe is in the glass rather than *water* when I say, “I believe that she’s drinking gin”.<sup>38</sup> Whereas, in ascribing intentional states to others I have far less of a warrant to suppose that I am correct in my ascriptions. When the subject of my ascription is another person it seems that there is always the possibility of my being in error not only regarding the identity of the subject, but also regarding the attitude, and its content, which I ascribe to them.<sup>39</sup> This is not so in my own case; when I make a *de se* ascription. With avowals there is always the presumption of truth. Now, in no way do I wish to imply that we are incorrigible or infallible with respect to our own mental states. Such a proposal would be straightforwardly refutable. I only wish to point out that there is a perceived asymmetry between avowals and ascriptions to others that calls out for explanation, and that identificational security alone is not sufficient to the task. More is needed.

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<sup>38</sup> No matter if it is actually water in the glass, what is important here is the content of my belief and my expression of it.

<sup>39</sup> Given the discussion in (3.2) and (3.3) this will go equally for when I ascribe an attitude or mental state to myself using my own name or some description that I alone satisfy, and for the same reasons of relying on recognitional means of identification.



Again, we must ask whence this security? How is it that I am more assured that the contents of my self-ascriptions are what I say they are, and I am much less assured that the contents which I ascribe to you are what I say they are? In order to answer this question, it is helpful to look at the basis for the distinctive security of *de se* ascriptions. To that end I consider an explanation of the distinctive security of propositional avowals that emphasizes their immunity to error through misascription.<sup>40</sup>

In exhibiting immunity, *de se* ascriptions are *invulnerable* to certain recognitional errors that arise when we ascribe contentful intentional states to others because *de se* ascriptions are not based on the internal identification or recognition of propositional content. It is not that we possess some robust faculty, such as introspection, that allows us a special route to the content of an intentional state, but simply that we avoid identifying spurious content because in our self-ascriptions there is no such identification going on at all. Bar-On sums it up thusly:

In the case of immunity to error through misascription, the relevant ascription “I am in M (with content *c*)” is not grounded in an independent recognitional judgment concerning the character of my present state or its content. I can be said to ascribe to myself being in state M with content *c*. But I have no grounds for thinking I am in some state or other (or for thinking it has some content or other) that are independent of my grounds for thinking I am in state *M* (with content *c*). (2004, p. 197)

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<sup>40</sup> Bar-On (2004, p. 95-102) considers a few epistemic approaches to the ascriptive security of avowals but rejects them on the same grounds that warranted rejecting the Cartesian conception of the identificational security of *de se* ascription.

The basis for the truth of an avowal of desire, say “I want a cup of tea,” is not the correct judgement that I am in some state, *desire*, and that my desire is for something, *a cup of tea*, because I may then have a reason for thinking that I am in some state that only appears to me to be that of wanting a cup of tea. Rather, the only basis for my desire and its content being what they are is simply my thinking that I want a cup of tea. It would be out of place for me to wonder “I want something, but is it *a cup of tea*?”. Any basis for self-ascription that allows for this possibility cannot be a sufficient explanation of the security of avowals. Thus, in *de se* ascription there is no room for me to question whether the attitude I ascribe to myself is some state or other with some content or other. The state I ascribe to myself (and its content) is not up for grabs as far as I am concerned. To use a phrase from Bar-On, errors of ascription are simply “crowded out” when we view the security of avowals as IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>.

But now we run into the difficulty of explaining how it is that we refer to content in *de se* ascriptions. For recall that in the case of IETM<sup>id</sup> it initially seemed that once we gave up the Cartesian picture we were stuck with Anscombe’s view that there was in fact nothing that “I” referred to at all; a No Reference view. Similarly, we might think that giving up an epistemic basis for the ascriptive portion of avowals entails that we are in fact assigning no content to ourselves whatsoever. That is, there is no genuine ascription going on at all. Ending up with a “No Ascription view” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 204) would be an unfortunate consequence of the current explanation of avowals’ security but it is one that I do not think we are required to accept. What we need then is an explanation of how “expressions such as ‘thinking/wishing/hoping/etc., that *p*’ ...as they are used in avowals, genuinely refer to the relevant mental states [and their contents], even though they are not

applied on the strength of recognitional judgments concerning those states” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 205). This task requires answering two questions:

- I. How is it that a *genuine* ascription is made without recourse to epistemic or recognitional judgments concerning its presence or content, i.e. how do we single out (refer to) a particular content?
- II. What makes it that such ascriptions are especially apt to be *true*, i.e. how do we assign the right content?

In order to answer these questions Bar-On (2004, p. 206) considers the special case of “self-verifying avowals”.<sup>41</sup> Consider the case where I entertain the thought,

(SVA) I am thinking that the fly is nearly out of the bottle.

To start, in making this *de se* ascription I cannot fail to refer to myself or misidentify myself as the subject of the ascription. That much we have seen through our discussion of IETM<sup>id</sup>. The claim of the proponent of IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> is that, additionally, I cannot fail to ascribe to myself some *thought* or other that is crossing my mind. I am surely *thinking* rather than hoping or wanting. Also, I cannot fail to ascribe to myself a thought about *the fly being nearly out of the bottle*. But then, how do I ascribe the thought to myself without recognizing any particular object that is my thought, and further, why is the ascription the right one? That is, how do self-verifying avowals help us answer questions (I) and (II)?

The answer is to be found in the explanation of exactly how (SVA) is self-verifying. Note that when I think to myself, “I am thinking that the fly is nearly out of the bottle,” there is a reflexive element to my *de se* ascription. (SVA) is a thought about thought. And

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<sup>41</sup> Bar-On takes self-verifying avowals as an explicit example of the ascriptive immunity to error that avowals exhibit, but she does so in order to generalize this kind of security to all avowals, both attitudinal and phenomenal. I am only concerned with self-verifying avowals, as much of what can be said for the self-verifying avowal of thought, can be said for the avowal of speech, i.e. what is said.

not just any thought, it is about the very one had by me at the moment I make the ascription.

Burge (1988) is helpful here:

When one knows that one is thinking that  $p$ , one is not taking one's thought (or thinking) that  $p$  as an object. One is thinking that  $p$  in the very event of thinking knowledgeably that one is thinking it. It is thought and thought about in the same mental act. (p. 654)

Now, it should be clear that these observations by Burge are decidedly not in agreement with an epistemic conception of ascriptional security. In (SVA) I do not take my thought as an *object* that I stand in some relation to. The act of avowing (SVA) is "thought and thought about in the *same* mental act". And this conflation has the startling consequence that the act of articulating the content of the thought (in thought) "yields an instantiation of the ascribed state: viz., an episode of entertaining a thought with that content" (Bar-On, 2004, p. 209). Because the act of avowal itself involves an ascription of thought in thought one thereby makes a genuine self-ascription, i.e. one cannot articulate the thought without entertaining that very thought at the same time. It is in this sense that (SVA) is self-verifying. From these reflexive considerations, in response to (I), we should conclude that *explicit articulation* is an acceptable method of referring to intentional contents, (moreover, one that cannot be understood on some epistemic basis of reference). For in the act of articulating the avowal I yield an instantiation of the content that the avowal ascribes. But this does not involve any recognition on my part, as evinced by Bar-On's comments:

When one avows a presently entertained thought, one does not need to identify the content one ascribes to the thought in any epistemically rich sense in order to single out that content. One's reference to the content need not be mediated by some way

of representing the content to oneself, which, moreover, must be correct, if one is to succeed in picking out that content. Even if one does not use any means of identifying the content as the one content wishes to assign to one's thought [*sic*], one's ascription can still latch onto (and be semantically about) that content, simply in virtue of the fact that one articulates *that* content. (Bar-On, 2004, p. 211)

and

When ascribing to myself a state with content *c* in the ordinary way, there is no need for any recognitional identification on my part of *c* as the content I wish to assign to my state. I can thus assign a particular content to my state in an epistemically immediate way. I single out *c* simply by *explicitly articulating c*, rather than some other content, in the course of articulating my state's content (in speech or in thought). (Bar-On, 2004, p. 213)

I single out the content of my ascription simply through articulating it. So in (SVA), when I make the avowal I am putting to use my ability to articulate my thinking that *the fly is nearly out of the bottle*, and this articulation is a legitimate way of singling out *that* content rather than some other because the act of ascription, the thought, is an instantiation of the content ascribed. Insofar as this articulation is not based on any recognition of the content of ascription on my part it is immediate, rather than mediated through observation of my intentional state.

With explicit articulation as an answer to the question of (I), it is clear how consideration of the reflexive structure of self-verifying avowals will allow us to proceed in answering (II). When we ask, why are *de se* ascriptions, and in this instance self-verifying ascriptions, apt to be true, we can conversely ask how it is that such ascriptions

could be false? There are two ways in which any self-ascription could be false: firstly, I might ascribe the correct intentional state to myself but assign the wrong propositional content to the state, and secondly, I might incorrectly ascribe the intentional state itself, in which case whether the content of the ascription is correct or not plays no part in the truth or falsity of the avowal. The interesting thing about self-verifying avowals such as (SVA) is that they cannot succumb to falsity of either kind.

If we concede that we can legitimately refer to *some* content through explicit articulation, then we are capable of making a genuine ascription in thought or speech or what have you. But then if we consider that I may ascribe a thought (with some content) to myself by thinking, it doesn't seem plausible that I should thereby wonder as to whether I avow a thought or some other intentional state; in the case of (SVA), say, that "I *hope* that the fly is nearly out of the bottle". The opportunity for the second kind of error is crowded out in the case of self-verifying avowal. And equally so for the first kind of error, where I am mistaken as to the content of the correct state. Here it is implausible in my own case, *for me*, that I should avow "I think *that the fly is nearly out of the bottle*" but the content of my ascription of thought is actually *that the gnat is far from the jar*, because the latter content is not the content that is articulated by me in the making of the ascription. Where the articulations differ the specified content differs, and so any other articulation will serve to specify a different content. Put slightly differently, in Bar-On's terms:

In order to succeed in making a genuine *and* true self-ascription of the entertaining of the thought that *p* is to entertain the thought that *p*. But this I am bound to do as I ascribe the thought explicitly, by articulating its content. So explicit articulation of the thought suffices for making the self-ascription true... *articulating the content*

*serves directly to give voice to my present state; it constitutes expressing the very thought I am ascribing to myself.* (2004, p. 215)

It now seems that we have good reason to hold that the comprehensive security of *de se* ascriptions is accounted for by two differing kinds of the same phenomenon: immunity to error. In the previous section we saw that IETM<sup>id</sup> was a good first step, and in this section I showed that given some plausible intuitions about what first-person authority consists in the security of *de se* ascriptions is sufficiently accounted for by including IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>. Importantly, the reflexive character of self-verifying avowals was spelled out, and it is this aspect of avowal that will play a major role in the argument for the semantic informativeness of self-ascriptions of what is said that is to come.

### 3.5 CONCLUDING REMARKS: IMMUNITY

Let us take stock. In this chapter I exploited some of the main features of avowals in order to make sense of a classic problem concerning first personal propositional attitude ascriptions. We saw that propositional avowals are on par with *de se* ascriptions, and that insofar as this is the case the idiosyncrasy of *de se* ascriptions can be analyzed in terms of their exhibiting immunity to error. IETM<sup>id</sup>, not some infallibly secure recognitional faculty, was seen to explain the asymmetry between third-person ascription and *de se* ascription in the case of Narcissus. Furthermore, and importantly for the question to be settled, IETM<sup>id</sup> is not the only kind of immunity that *de se* ascriptions exhibit, and the immunity of *de se* ascription cannot be accounted for by IETM<sup>id</sup> alone. Additionally, they are immune to error through misascription, i.e. in making avowals concerning the content of one's own occurrent state the avowing subject singles out that content solely in virtue of expressing it. Just as in the case of IETM<sup>id</sup>, the ascriptive immunity that avowals exhibit is based in

the fact that they are non-recognitional. It is this latter property that is helpful for the task at hand, for it pertains to ascribing content to oneself in a way that is immune to error, and this is the route that I have suggested the proponent of what is said take in response to the various worries that the minimal semanticist raises.

If from here the route I am taking seems obvious then I will consider what is written so far to have been serviceable. However, up until now I have only gestured at the strategy and built up the vocabulary needed to make it work, but more needs to be said with respect to how *de se* ascriptions function when we ascribe to ourselves the property of saying, and how it is exactly that, in these instances, content is secured via the immunity to error of the ascription. To that end, in the following chapter I will narrow the focus of the present discussion of *de se* ascription. The considerations in this chapter, if there is any truth to them, have provided us with some very powerful features of self-ascription and now they can be put to use in the argument for the semantic informativeness of what is said.



## CHAPTER 4: RETURNING TO THE DEBATE

The disparities between ascription to oneself and ascription to others are then well founded; anchored in immunity; and now the motivation for circling back to the debate canvased in chapter two. In my *de se* self-ascriptions I cannot mistake myself, neither can I mistake the content of my ascription because talk of mistaking is entirely unwarranted. I refer but I do not recognize; I ascribe but I do not assess. Which is to say that in my own case, the basis for *de se* ascription is not similar to the recognitional judgements I make concerning states of affairs in the external world, for such adjudications leave one open to error in ways that are not commensurate with the immediacy of self-ascription. Here we have a marked difference between the view that I wish to advance and the received view concerning what is said that was introduced in chapter two. Recall that on the received view there is “some kind of connection *from* (certain) judgements of what a speaker has said by her utterance of a given sentence *to* a correct semantic theory” (Borg, 2004, p. 114). Borg’s emphasis aside, what is important to note is that the received view relies on *judgements of what a speaker has said*. But in the case where I myself am the speaker, and I ascribe to myself what I am saying, there is *no* judgement of what is said at all.

In this chapter I will take the previous considerations concerning ascriptive immunity to error and apply them to what is said. By focusing on *de se* ascriptions I show how the semantic informativeness of what is said can be maintained. Following this I will demonstrate how the objections which Cappelen and Lepore (1997) raise against the received view are neutralized by the *de se* approach. Once the switch to a model of self-ascription is made the basis for them falls away.

## 4.1 WHAT IS SAID & IMMUNITY TO ERROR

Consider again

- 3) A: “*p*”.
- 4) A: “I said that *p*”.

On the received view it must be that the utterance in (4) is an indirect report on the utterance in (3). The speaker looks back upon their previous utterance and considers it as an object in the world. The complement clause of the report in (4), “that *p*”, is judged by the self-ascriber to be faithful to the content of the original utterance, and when this is in fact the case then it can be taken as being semantically informative. The trouble raised by the minimal semanticist is that as far as our actual practices of reporting go it is entirely acceptable to report on the original utterance with any number of sentences, and so reporting on what is said cannot specify the content of (3). For instance, we can imagine the following scenario

- 5) A: Professor X. is moving to Berkeley next semester.
- 6) B: What was that?
- 7) A: I said that she’s moving to northern California.

Now, A’s utterance in (7) is a report on their previous utterance in (5) that is intended to inform B of what was said there. Cappelen and Lepore claim that we should expect no objection to the claim that (7) is an acceptable report of the utterance of (5), but equally we should *not* say that (7) is an acceptable guide to the meaning of the sentence uttered in (5). They conclude that indirect speech reports are not semantically informative, and it appears that certain I-ascriptions will not be able to escape this criticism

But as we saw in chapter three, *de se* ascriptions are not indirect reports because they are not based on the judgement or recognition of something external. There, I made the case for the unique status of *de se* ascriptions and spelt out their distinctive security in

terms of immunity to error. All that remains now is to turn our attention to how *de se* ascriptions of what is said may exhibit IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>, and how this implies that these are instances of what is said that specify semantic content.

In abandoning third person reports of what is said we abandon the use of “I” as object. For even though these uses are self-ascriptions they do not exhibit the immunities to error that characterize *de se* ascriptions. Then we must also abandon self-ascriptions like (4) as the model of a semantically informative utterance. My utterance of (4) reports on what I said in (3) based on my judgement that the complement clause of my self-ascription is communicatively informative of (3). But this is exactly the kind of epistemic basis that we found amenable to all sorts of error, and further, if we allow ourselves this possibility we find that along the way we are prone to the worries of Cappelen & Lepore et al, i.e. we must countenance indirect reports with intuitively alternate contents. What is needed then is a locution concerning one’s own speech that conforms to Bar-On’s conception of avowal:

8) I am saying that *p*.

(8) is not an indirect report, but neither is it merely direct speech because it is a self-*ascription* of something to oneself. It conforms to Bar-On’s familiar formula for propositional avowal, i.e. *de se* ascription: I am in M (with content *p*), where “saying” is the intentional state one is in, and *p* is the content expressly articulated in the act of avowal. I noted above that if (8) feels too artificial it may be parsed in a more colloquial manner as

9) What I’m saying is that *p*.

Now, as (8) and (9) are *de se* ascriptions they have the benefit of being immune to error. In the first case this just means that in ascribing to myself the state of saying that such and

such I cannot mistake myself for another person. My ascription is IETM<sup>id</sup>, and for the usual reasons; my use of “I”-as subject refers to myself indexically. But it will not do to dwell exclusively on the identificational security of *de se* ascriptions, as this will no more help us specify the content of *p* when found in *de se* ascriptions of what is said, than it does explain the entirety of the perceived security that such ascriptions exhibit. More important for the task at hand is the fact that my *de se* ascription of what is said is IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>. In the previous chapter I emphasized that *de se* ascriptions which are self-verifying, such as those of thought, are unique in that they exhibit a reflexive element. In ascribing an occurrent thought (with a certain content) to myself I cannot help but have the thought that I so ascribe. I now claim that *de se* ascriptions of what is said are equally self-verifying, and so equally IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>. Then how does the parallel explanation run for what is said?

Take the analogue of (3.4)’s (SVA)

(SVA\*) I am saying that the fly is nearly out of the bottle.

When I utter (SVA\*) I make a genuine ascription to myself that serves to refer to some content, *that the fly is nearly out of the bottle*, via explicit articulation. Explicit articulation is not a quotation of some utterance I previously made, or some thought I had moments before. If this were the case then (SVA\*) would be an indirect report like (4). Rather, “I exercise my ability to *use* the relevant content [in speech], by... competently deploying the relevant concepts” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 213). A *de se* ascription of what is said refers to the intentional content of the state ascribed by explicitly articulating that content, as opposed to picking it out in some epistemically mediated fashion. In this case there is no question for me as to whether my *de se* ascription of what is said refers to that content or some other; or whether there are acceptable paraphrases and translations of the content that I so ascribe.

Even if there are as far as others are concerned these cannot factor into my *de se* ascription of what is said simply because I have not articulated those contents.

The idea is this: one may refer to their utterance simply in virtue of making it. This is markedly different from when I refer to your utterance, or what some third party has said, even up to and including the instance when I report on my own utterances, as in (4)/(7). The idiosyncratic method of reference which self-verifying avowals exhibit is due to their reflexivity. In the case of what is said, it is right to conclude that my saying that I am saying is a paradigm example of reflexivity, so at the very least we can see how a *de se* ascription of what is said secures the state that I self-ascribe. Thus, the avowing subject makes a genuine reference to the intentional content of their avowal, and, what is more, in the act of doing so they produce the conditions which serve to make their ascription true. When I utter, “What I’m saying is that *p*”, I am in fact saying *that p* and I cannot even so much as make the ascription without articulating that particular content. Any other articulation in the complement clause of the ascription would be a separate avowal of what is said. Not one, mind you, that would be false, only a different one with clearly individuated contents that could not be mistaken by me for the avowal of what is said that I do in fact make.

When I make a *de se* ascription of what is said, I say what I mean, no more and no less. This is because my explicit articulation of a sentence suffices for giving expression to the intentional state from which I produce that sentence. So (SVA\*) is immune to error through misascription, i.e. it cannot be the case as far as I am concerned that when I ascribe to myself the state of saying that such and such I can mistake *such and such* for *so and so*. My utterance of that content is not based on my recognition of it as the meaning of the utterance that I produce. It is only based on the expression of my intentional state, but this

entails that the possibility of errors of ascription are excluded from the ways that content can fail to be specified in my *de se* ascription.

Then, we have on our hands a set of speech acts that do seem to have determinate contents, and also a particular locution that serves to specify them. Should we think that *de se* ascriptions of what is said are semantically *uninformative*, as would Borg, and Cappelen and Lepore? Recall<sup>42</sup> that in the considered opinion of Cappelen and Lepore (2005a) their previous counterexamples (1997) to a semantically informative notion of what is said give cause for the principle of Speech Act Pluralism:

SPAP<sub>1</sub>: No one thing is said (or asserted, or claimed, or...) by an utterance: rather indefinitely many propositions are said, asserted, claimed, stated, etc. (p. 199)

A corollary of SPAP<sub>1</sub> is that reports of what is said cannot be taken as semantically informative because there is a proliferation of propositions that are said by any one utterance, and so, *a fortiori*, there is no one thing said by the report of the original utterance. Hence, the inability of indirect reports to specify semantic content. This is all very well and good for indirect reports of what is said, I am happy to admit it. But what of the self-ascriptions of what is said? Surely something must give here. As it happens Cappelen and Lepore at least initially seem prepared for this rejoinder and consider a further corollary of SPAP<sub>1</sub> that stands in opposition to what they call Original Utterance Centrism (theories according to which the speech act content is fixed by facts about the speaker, his audience, and their common context (2005a, p. 201)). I take it that the view that I am advocating for which focuses on “facts about the speaker” (e.g., their ability to specify content through

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<sup>42</sup> q.v. p. 27.

the explicit articulation of *de se* ascription of what is said) falls under the purview of Original Utterance Centrism. On their view, Original Utterance Centrism is mistaken because facts not known to the speaker (or audience) can make a difference as to the propositional content expressed by an utterance.

This might be thought to cause some trouble for the view I have been espousing, insofar as that if they are right to claim that factors which I am not aware of can play a part in the semantic content of my self-ascription *even for me* then the propositional content of avowals of what is said is not specified, and so cannot serve as evidence for a semantic theory. Cappelen and Lepore (2005a) call this further corollary SPAP<sub>5</sub>: “speakers don’t have privileged access to all the propositions they assert or say in uttering a sentence” (p 202). Which is to say that, because there is always more than one proposition expressed by a speech act there is no way for an individual who makes an utterance to deduce *all* the propositions expressed by their own utterance, i.e. in certain contexts of utterance there might be some propositions that others are better suited to pick up on than I am even though I am the one to make the self-ascription. So perhaps it can be the case that even though I make a genuine avowal there are extraneous factors which I am not aware of that determine the content of my *de se* ascription.

While SPAP<sub>5</sub> is plausible for my own self-ascriptions that make use of “I” as-object I see no reason to concede the point in the use of “I”-as subject, for they do not seriously consider the avowal of what is said. They prefer to stick to indirect reports of what is said that are acceptable but not semantically equivalent. I stress again that *de se* ascriptions of what is said are not modeled on indirect reports. Given that *de se* ascriptions are IETM<sup>ascip</sup>, i.e. self-verifying, it is difficult to imagine the extraneous factors that I myself would be

unaware of that would influence the content of my self-ascription. Indeed, if awareness is meant to be akin to recognition it doesn't even seem right to speak of "awareness" of the conditions contributing to semantic content for *de se* ascriptions of what is said. Recall that the conditions which satisfy the content that I ascribe to myself are produced by my act of ascription. These conditions are not judged by me as the "right" conditions that satisfy the content of my avowal. There is no adjudication by me of the "relevant" interpretation of my utterance based on contextually salient features of the states that give rise to my ascription; my explicit articulation of "I say that *p*" is a genuine ascription about *that* content, *p*, and it is a true ascription because my uttering it produces the conditions that make the ascription true. There is no evidential basis for my ascription that I recognize as the correct one, so though explicit articulation of what is said happens within some context, if I make a genuine *de se* ascription (an avowal proper) of what is said, no factors *that I am aware of* (recognize, identify, judge, etc.), internal or external, can play a role in determining the content of my ascription as far as I am concerned. It is only my making the self-ascription, employing the sentence uttered to speak from my intentional state, that factors in the specification of content. But the use is not based on some introspective awareness.

To take an example from Cappelen and Lepore, if Justine is French (and Jack is ignorant of her nationality) and Justine buys a picture, and Jack utters the sentence "Justine bought the picture," there are contexts where one would say something true by saying *that Jack said that a French woman bought the picture* (and so one makes a true ascription despite the fact that Jack doesn't know this is something he said). There are even contexts where Jack himself could truly say *that Jack said that a French woman bought the picture*,



e.g. if he finds out Justine is French but forgets that he is Jack or mistakes his previous utterance for that of another Jack, in these situations Jack would be taking himself and his utterance as object, and this is just the view that I have been attempting to inveigh against. Alternatively, if Jack himself says, “What I’m saying is that Justine bought the picture” then there is no question *for him* as to what he says, or the content of the ascription.<sup>43</sup> Regardless of Justine’s nationality, or occupation, or height, etc. what Jack has said is *not about* a description of Justine that makes mention of these. Cappelen and Lepore nowhere seriously consider the case of *de se* ascription and its attendant immunity to error. Even though they take a step in the direction they are still looking outward and considering the first-person authority one might have over their pronouncements on the external world. But it is natural that there should be contextual factors that people are unaware of concerning these kinds of speech acts. Where this becomes less convincing is when we earnestly consider our own states and their contents. One of these states that we may ascribe to ourselves is in fact the state of saying, and here we have seen that for the individual making the *de se* ascription of what is said the content of their ascription is secured by the immunity to error of their ascription.

## 4.2 AVOIDING THE USUAL CHARGES

In chapter two I outlined Cappelen and Lepore’s objections against a semantically informative notion of indirect speech reports.

- (i) Partial semantic overlap.
- (ii) Summarization.
- (iii) Substitution

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<sup>43</sup> And this should be the basis for others to take his ascription seriously, i.e. he means just what he says because his *de se* ascription is not vulnerable to error.

(iv) Pragmatic Intrusion (e.g. irony)

While there is some reason to think that Richard (1998) was able to respond adequately to some of the concerns of Cappelen and Lepore it is less clear that the strategy of making ever more cumbersome stipulations to indirect reports of what is said is a wholly effective strategy. But the proposal in chapter three was to leave behind talk of indirect speech reports and focus on *de se* ascriptions of what is said, so we might now wonder to what extent these same objections apply to self-ascription. I think that the approach is significantly different enough that I am safe in saying the answer is none at all. *De se* ascriptions of what is said entirely avoid objections (i)-(v), and I now consider what the appropriate response is to each.

Firstly, consider that in each of (i)-(iii) in order for the objections to apply to a self-ascription of what is said the model instance of each objection *must* be that of a report.

Recall:

- 3) A: “*p*”.
- 4) A: “I said that *p*”.

Insofar as (4) is about the former utterance (3), it is a past tense I-ascription. But I’ve already stated that this is not the kind of self-ascription that I am making use of. Though it is certainly possible that we may report on our own utterances this way, these kinds of self-ascriptions do not exhibit the immunity to error that *de se* ascriptions are characterized by.<sup>44</sup> There is no reflexive element in (4). That is, the complement clause of (4) is about the original utterance in (3). In the present tense act of avowing, however, there is no such relation between (3) and (4), no relation between the former and the latter that we must

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<sup>44</sup> Though, I will temper this claim in chapter five section one.

recognize and judge to be appropriate or inappropriate. For in avowing, for example, “I say that *p*”, one is expressing the content of the utterance by articulating it, not reporting on an utterance made in the past.

It seems to me that (i)-(iii) are automatically excluded as objections to a semantically relevant notion of what is said that is based on *de se* ascription. The nature of IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> implies that none of these will work. There can be no partial overlap *between* an avowal and the content that it expresses because there is only one thing, the act of avowal, and something cannot be partially identical to itself. Nor can a *de se* ascription summarize itself in fewer or more words than are used to make it. Substitution equally fails to make sense for *de se* ascriptions, for there can be no opportunity to make a substitution in the content of the avowal. If I were to make a self-ascription that was intended to capture the content of a previous avowal of mine but in co-referential terms, then this self-ascription would be excluded as an instance of *de se* ascription. Even if we eased up on this count, then the explicit articulation of a co-referential expression would suffice to differentiate the contents of the two expressions, such that I would be expressing a different contentful state of mine, i.e. one that was not an acceptable report. All of (i)-(iii) fail as objections to my position for the same reason: they rely on the model of *indirect reporting*. But *de se* ascriptions of what is said are not reports on what a former self has said. They are expressions of one’s occurrent intentional attitude that involves a particular content, namely the one expressed in the uttered avowal.

So if any of the objections that worked against the received view of Richard and Reimer are to apply to my proposed alternative it must be (iv). Cappelen and Lepore used an example to elicit our intuitions about what an acceptable report of an ironic utterance

would be: “The talk was *really* good” should be reported as “A said the talk was really bad” because we’ve all just sat through a particularly tedious presentation and, given that A stresses *really* in just such a way it, is reasonable to report that they took a dim view of the speaker’s efforts. But this is not what the sentence means strictly speaking, and so the report is no guide to the semantic content of the original utterance. It appears then that acceptable reports of ironic utterances wreak havoc for indirect reports, but can the same be said for *de se* ascriptions? Again, I believe that we have reason to doubt that this is the case.

To begin with let us ask, can an avowal be ironic *for me*? It is difficult to imagine what an ironic *de se* ascription would even look like, let alone an ironic avowal of what is said. As a first pass we might try belief. If I think to myself without uttering, “I believe that talk was *really* good,” what does IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> entail? It excludes the possibility that *for me* I may mean “bad” by “good” as I normally understand the meaning of “good”. One cannot make an ironic utterance without the intent that the opposite should be inferred, but in *de se* ascription there is no room for inference because there is only one party involved in the production of the avowal. There is no “audience” that is meant to pick up on the intention that the avower wishes to communicate the opposite of what their words mean: “avowals proper are not acts that subjects deliberately undertake to perform with a specific audience-directed goal in mind” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 214). Even if this were the case, and I was in some sense the intended audience of my own avowal, could I seek to fool myself, to dissimulate my meaning under the auspices of irony? But the first steps cannot be taken, for it must already be clear to me what I wish myself to infer from my ascription, and if this is the case then I can no more find the content of a *de se* ascription to mean its opposite

than I can intend that when I say “I’m so angry!” my rage is tranquility, or that when I say “I believe you,” my belief is doubt. If my self-ascription is IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>, then my utterance is a sincere expression of the emotion, a sincere expression of belief, and in the case of avowals of what is said, a sincere expression of saying.

Though *de se* ascriptions are genuine ascriptions that are semantically continuous with those we make to others, the unique features of avowals serve to side step the worries that arise when we focus on indirect reports. This is a welcome result of the immunity to error that avowals exhibit; not only do we avoid outright errors of ascription, but it is also not even possible that one could make a propositional avowal that they themselves would find semantically divorced from the production of the ascription. If there are any objections to the account I have been advocating for, and undoubtedly there are, then they have not been supplied by the regular grievances aimed at indirect reports.

#### 4.3 CONCLUDING REMARKS: CONNECTION WITH A SEMANTIC THEORY

In the case of *de se* ascriptions of what is said, I mean exactly what I say, and say exactly what I mean. What we have on our hands is an instance where the unique features of self-ascription, namely IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>, provide a way to specify the semantic content of sentence type through the tokening of explicit articulation. But this flies in the face of the suppositions that minimal semanticists maintain. Cappelen and Lepore (2005b) summarize their considered position as follows:

- a) The truth conditions of a sentence S need not correspond to what’s said or stated by an utterance of S.
- b) What’s said by an utterance of S can be true, even though the truth conditions for S aren’t satisfied (and vice versa).
- c) What’s said by an utterance of S can be ‘about’ something... even though the truth conditions for S make no reference (to that thing).

- d) Because of (a)-(c), intuitions about utterances of sentences can in no simple and direct way be used as guides to the truth conditions for those sentences. (p. 66)

But again, these authors think that intuitions about what is said by an utterance are fixed by acceptable indirect reports:

When we try to represent or articulate what's said by an utterance we aim to characterize a speaker's act (that utterance). In so doing, our interests often are not in systematicity or generality, but rather our aim is to determine something about a particular act in a particular context C in order to pass it along onto... a particular audience. (p. 68)

When we reject this assumption and turn to an explanation of *de se* ascriptions of what is said, where the utterance of which I am speaking is the one I am saying, we emphasize IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>. But if IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> holds for these utterances then (a)-(c) fail in such cases, and where these fail the semantic informativeness of what is said can be maintained, i.e. (d) is false. In speaking of ourselves we are not "trying to characterize" our act of utterance in this way or that. Rather, we are speaking from our intentional state about our intentional state, and this serves to specify the content of the utterance in such a way as to make our utterance apt to be true.

The reasons (a)-(c) fail with respect to *de se* ascriptions of what is said are readily found in the preceding sections of this chapter: (c) fails because the truth conditions for the utterance of a *de se* ascription/proper avowal of what is said must be about the object specified in the making of the utterance, and no other, (b) fails because in the making of the avowal the conditions that suffice to make the *de se* ascription of what is said true are produced, and (a) fails because there is no correspondence between "what is said" by an utterance and the truth conditions for that utterance that is judged by me to be correct or

incorrect. The conditions that in fact do suffice to make my ascription of what is said true arise in conjunction with the making of it.

I have claimed that

- I. The focus of the debate surrounding the semantic informativeness of what is said should properly centre on *de se* ascriptions of saying.
- II. The distinctive security of *de se* ascriptions, IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>, serves to specify the content of such ascriptions.
- III. Insofar as (2) is true, *de se* ascriptions of what is said are linguistic acts that we can take to be semantically informative because they crowd out the possibility of alternate contents.

Given these considerations, I now think that there is sufficient warrant to put forth the following principle, which I might call a *De Se* Constraint on Content:

*DSCC*: It is possible to give a semantic analysis of a sentence, *S*, based on the content, *p*, of an appropriate *de se* ascription of what is said (by *S*), and which ascriptions/avowals are appropriate is determined by IETM<sup>ascrip</sup>.

I want to stress just how weak a principle *DSCC* is. It does not imply, for example, that all adequate semantic analysis must take what is said as the evidence or data from which a theory is extracted (although for my part I find it difficult to imagine that any semantic theory that ignores what is said wholesale could give an adequate account of the meanings of the expressions of a natural language, this is another argument altogether). What *DSCC* does entail is that, insofar as it is not possible for me that my *de se* ascriptions of what is said should have an alternately acceptable content, we should reject the conclusion reached by Cappelen and Lepore: that the notion of what is said (however construed) will be of little or no theoretical interest to giving a systematic and general account of “certain features of linguistic expressions... in a way that captures general truths about our linguistic practice” (1997, p. 289). For it is a general truth about the linguistic practice of *de se* ascription that its basis is immune to error through misascription, and this just implies

that when we say what we mean we are exploiting a locution that specifies truth conditions systematically and generally.



## CHAPTER 5: OBJECTIONS

I take it that the ability of the first-personal approach to avoid the objections levelled at indirect reports of what is said by the minimal semanticist has now been laid out in detail, and as such we have secured a semantically informative notion of what is said. However, the cogency of the position itself does not rest solely in these evasions. I imagine that the minimal semanticist will have new objections to raise, and, further, there may be worries that come from without the minimal semantic framework. I will now turn to some initially worrisome considerations in order to head these new objections off.

### 5.1 THE TENSE OBJECTION

Bar-On maintains that the distinctive security that we ordinarily assign to avowals applies to a very circumscribed domain; applying “only to mental states of mine, and only to states of my mind that are *contemporaneous* with my ascription” (Bar-On, 2004, p. 123). This latter condition requires that avowals can only be made in the present tense. Accordingly, one may avow that “I am feeling a pain”, “Ouch!”, or “I believe such and such” whereas the past tense counterparts of these, “I felt a pain”, “That hurt!”, “I believed that such and such” do not count as avowals. The content of these latter past tense self-ascriptions is not contemporaneous with the ascriptions themselves. At such a remove there is introduced the possibility of error, and the possibility of error disqualifies such ascriptions from the kind of security that we typically believe our avowals to have. One does not consult with oneself as to whether or not one feels pain at grabbing the poker from the fire; they exclaim “Ouch! That hurts!”. Alternatively, though it is in principle possible to get things right, it is easy to misremember now even those states of mind that seemed most vivid and pressing in the past. I may firmly believe, hope, or desire that my favourite

sports team will win the next game, but after they inevitably lose, I unfailingly downplay my prior convictions: “I knew they would never win”. Here though, my ascription of this knowledge to my prior self is mistaken—before the game had begun I “just knew” they would.

What should we make of this in regard to “what is said”? For it seems that here we have a notion that resides in the past, and if we wish to help ourselves to the ascriptive immunity to error that marks out avowals, then we must either show why Bar-On is generally mistaken in thinking that avowals only apply to occurrent mental phenomena in the present, or if this line should prove unmotivated, we must focus directly on the case of ascribing to oneself the property of having said (that such and such).

Let us begin with the former, for if it should prove to be the case that avowals can accommodate self-ascriptions of past states altogether then we will have provided some principled way to secure the content of “what is said” without attending to the notion directly. Now, it is interesting to note that even Bar-On herself discusses what she calls “non-evidential reportive avowals”. It seems that we may put avowals to “a partially reportive” use in our communications with others in order to report upon our occurrent attitudinal states of affairs. For instance, if I’m rummaging around the fridge, my present tense avowal, “I want a beer” is a present tense expressive articulation of my desire for a beer. But suppose that, mishearing me, an interlocutor asks, “What are you looking for?”. I may use a non-evidential reportive avowal in order to inform them of the content of my desire both as it was when I made the *de se* ascription, but also as it is. For instance, if before I get around to answering the question of what I am looking for, I find that there is no beer in the fridge, I can close the fridge door then respond, “I wanted a beer”, and this

will still readily serve to express both what my desire was for and what my desire still is for, because the latter non-evidential reportive avowal is inferred by the self-ascriber *from* the original avowal “whose authority we already have reason to believe” (Hymers, 2017, p 115). In such cases, Bar-On suggests, “the self-ascriptive utterance may seem to shade readily into ordinary reports” and that “if we regard non-evidential reportive avowals as more secure than other reports... this is still because, or *to the extent that*, we regard them as directly expressive of the self-ascribed state” (2004, p. 301).

Then by Bar-On’s own lights there is a way to generally conceive of avowals as functioning as partially reportive in the first-person case because “many first-person reports inherit their first-person authority from spontaneous avowals from which those reports may be inferred” (Hymers, 2017, p. 115). We could make the same case for avowals of what is said *mutatis mutandis*. However, even if we regard the former explanation deficient then there is still another way to maintain the usefulness of *de se* ascriptions of what is said in the past tense. In one way, at least, first personal speech reports are different from other sorts of propositional attitude ascriptions such as believing, knowing etc. One may report on one’s prior belief, while not currently holding that belief to be true, even in uttering it. This is not the case with avowals of what is said. Self-ascriptions of having said that such and such are different than other past tense self-ascriptions ascriptions. For in attributing to oneself the property of having said that such and such, the utterance itself is akin to “I *say* that such and such”, now, currently, presently; for that is what one is doing. Indeed, the attitudinal prefix “I said” is not even necessary. When one is asked what they have said, instead of replying with the locution “I said such and such” one might just as well drop the prefix altogether and simply reply with “Such and such”, where this is *not* a quotation of

the previous expression but the very expression itself. One cannot assert that they said that then without thereby saying that now. When one makes an utterance and is then questioned by another as to what they have said, whatever one's reply, one cannot help but *say* something, and this something is expressed by the utterer in very much the same way as if simply asserting it. Contrast other past tense ascriptions, of belief for example: "I believed that so and so". In uttering such an ascription of belief, one is not thereby asserting their current belief that so and so; ascribing to oneself a past belief does not commit one to it. But in avowing that one has said something the very act of avowal guarantees that it is fulfilled.... When you say that you've said so and so at some past point, you also say it now. We find similarity here with Wittgenstein's comment: "Think of the expression 'I say....', for example in 'I say it will rain today', which simply comes to the same thing as the assertion 'It will....'" (1968/1953, p. 192). The tense makes no difference to the locution, for the utterance is a saying. As we saw in (3.4) IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> is explained, in the limiting cases, through the reflexive element of self-verifying avowals. It further appears that for some self-verifying avowals, like those of what is said, the reflexive element extends to past-tense ascriptions as well.

## 5.2 THE INESSENTIAL INDEXICAL

Sometimes it is argued that we need essentially *de se* propositional attitudes to account for our changes in behaviour or action, and this is thought, in part, to motivate their inclusion in our theorizing. But if we find that we can provide alternate explanations for the same circumstances then we have less reason to think that *de se* attitude ascriptions capture any actually existent phenomenon. Since my argument rests on *de se* attitude ascriptions being unique any attack on them outright is an attack on the position I wish to

advance in the present work. Accordingly, after Cappelen and Dever (2013), we might not think that we need distinctly *de se* propositional attitudes to explain behaviour or action. Those authors claim that there is no need for an appeal to irreducibly *de se* attitudes. Suppose that Francois and Dilip are out hiking in the woods, when in the middle of their stroll Francois gets chased by a bear, while Dilip watches helplessly from a distance.<sup>45</sup> Francois has the belief *that Francois is being chased by a bear* and the desire *that Francois not be mauled by a bear* and so he climbs the nearest tree to safety. Dilip also has the same belief, *that Francois is being chased by a bear*, and the same desire, *that Francois not be mauled by a bear*, but he does not climb the nearest tree to safety, he instead runs for help. Each of the two has the same pair of attitudes, so how do we explain their differing behaviour without appeal to essentially *de se* attitudes? Cappelen and Dever say that we can explain the behavioural differences of the two hikers by noting that the options for action that are available to each of them differ. Even though Dilip has the same set of attitudes as Francois, he is in no position to climb the nearest tree to safety. Of course, we need to further suppose that Dilip and Francois both have the desire *that Dilip run for help*, but since Dilip is the only one of the two who is in the position to execute this action, he is the only one who does. So it is in the difference in the availability of actions that explain why they do not act the same; no mention of essentially *de se* attitudes needed.

But this explanation is entirely misplaced. It seems implausible that simply having an action available to you can explain why you perform it. Cappelen and Dever's explanation of the situation neglects the fact that the attitudes of the two hikers do in fact

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<sup>45</sup> I take this example from Torre (2013), though he attributes it to Cappelen and Dever's (2013) modification of an example from Perry (1977).

differ *with respect to the actions available to them*. Stephan Torre (2013, p. 4) makes it clear, “It is true that Francois is in a position to perform the action *that Francois climb the tree* and Dilip is not, but this is not sufficient for explaining why, for example, Francois performs this action and Dilip does not”. According to Torre what is needed to explain Francois’s tree climbing is his further belief *that I myself am Francois* (and *I am near a tree*) in addition to the belief *that Francois is being chased by a bear* and desire *that Francois not be mauled by a bear*. Similarly, in Dilip’s case what is additionally needed to explain his running for help is the further belief *that I am Dilip* in conjunction with the desire *that Dilip run for help*.

Torre is correct to reject Cappelen and Dever’s alternate explanation of action, but it does not appear that this particular appeal to *de se* attitudes is correct given our discussion of how propositional avowals work. Talk of the *additional* belief which identifies oneself with the object of a previous *de dicto* belief about some named individual is misguided according to the line I have been pushing here. In Francois’ case it is not true that he believes *that Francois is being chased by a bear* and desires *that Francois not be mauled*, and then realizes that *I am Francois* by identifying himself with the object of his previous attitudes (and a good thing too, for all this would take time which would be better spent scrambling to safety!). As we have seen this additional step will not do in explaining the immediacy and security of self-ascription that so strongly motivates action. Such a recognition is surely possible but doesn’t seem at all psychologically actual in the immediate sense of ascribing occurrent states to oneself. Imagine noticing that a bear was bounding down the trail at you. One doesn’t think “The so and so is being chased by a bear, and also it appears that I am the so and so”. One thinks immediately, “*I am being chased*”

by a bear!”. Our names do us a disservice, for in referring to ourselves with them we open ourselves up to the possibility of misidentification. This is not so when we use “I” as subject, as an indexical device of reference that is IETM<sup>id</sup>.

### 5.3 THE UNIQUENESS OBJECTION

Suppose that the proponent of (MS) would allow that avowals of what is said do in fact specify semantic content. They might go on to argue that there is nothing unique about avowals of what is said in this regard, because if these kinds of avowals pick out semantic content then any propositional avowals will do. It may be possible to ascribe to oneself what one is saying, and such an avowal may specify content, but this will be equally so for any avowal with propositional content whatever. There is no reason to pick out ascriptions of “what is said” as semantically informative. Avowals of belief, or knowledge, or desire will work just as well. These avowals all have propositional content, and insofar as avowals exhibit IETM<sup>ascrip</sup> their propositional contents are also secured for the self-ascriber. But it seems intuitively correct to exclude avowals of belief and desire, for example, from the semantic running. We don’t want to say that our semantic theories must accommodate a principle like: “T will assign  $p$  to S in L iff in uttering S a speaker would avow their belief in  $p$ ”, or “T will assign  $p$  to S in L iff in uttering S a speaker would avow their desire for  $p$ ”. In other words, it doesn’t seem that a semantic theory should accommodate a principle that relies on a speaker’s belief, nor does it seem right that a semantic theory should accommodate a speaker’s desire. If these do not seem plausible candidates for the basis of a semantic principle, then neither should avowals of saying or having said that such and such.

I find this objection unconvincing for at least two reasons. Put simply, on its own, the fact that there might be more than one way in which we can specify the content of our linguistic expressions should not discourage the thought that a particular one of them is up to the task, even if some alternative that shares features of our preferred route turns out to be defective. As they say, there is more than one way to skin a cat. This colloquial consideration, though I think it is enough, is bound to be unconvincing to anyone pushing the objection from uniqueness.

How then to respond? What, if anything, makes self-ascriptions of what one is saying viable and other propositional avowals like those of desire impracticable? Take any avowal of desire that expresses a want, “I want the glass of water” for example. The avowal serves to express the desire of the individual making the avowal, it is about the desire of the individual for the glass of water. What this avowal is not about is what the individual is doing in the avowal. The avowal of desire does not refer to the act of avowal; that is, it lacks a reflexive component. The same can be said for avowals of belief and most propositional or intentional avowals, e.g. you can want the glass of water without saying you do, you can be mad at someone without articulating your emotion linguistically, you can believe the dog is in the bog without telling someone that you believe it. Though the content of these avowals is secure for the speaker when they are made, the lack of a reflexive element for most propositional avowals means that the various attitudinal verbs which characterize them cannot serve as functional replacements for what is said, i.e. we cannot rely on what is believed or what is desired or what is known as an appropriate proxy for what is said. This is because the avowal of the desire is about what it is a desire for, the



avowal of the belief is about what it is a belief of or in, but this is not the case with avowals of what is said.

In opposition to these attitudinal/propositional avowals, avowals of what is said are “self-verifying”. Contrast, “What I’m saying is that the water is in the glass”, with the avowals above. Just as much as the utterance is about the propositional content of the complement clause, the production of the utterance is about the utterance; the saying is about the saying. In making the avowal of what is said its truth is *guaranteed* simply in virtue of its production. Recall that Bar-On (2004) makes a similar point for the avowal of a presently held thought:

When one makes a self-ascription of an articulated entertained thought (with sincerity and comprehension), one thereby makes a true self-ascription of that entertained thought. This is because, as one makes the relevant self-ascription, one *ipso facto* entertains a thought with the ascribed content... The act of articulating the content itself yields an instantiation of the ascribed state. (p. 209)

The same goes for avowals of what is said; as one self-ascribes saying that, one *ipso facto* makes an utterance with the ascribed content. So we have two kinds of avowals that might serve our semantic purposes, but wasn’t the objection just exactly that avowals of what is said are not unique in explicitly specifying the intentional content of the ascription? Again, I see no reason to concede to the complaint. The correlations of speech and thought are well taken and welcome. It is enough to exclude those other propositional/intentional attitudes, like desire, that would seem too spurious.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

What does all this singing of myself come to? I hesitate to report. Throughout I have argued that the contemporary debate surrounding what is said is misguided. Though some have tried to maintain the semantic informativeness of indirect reports of what is said, there is good reason to believe that this is a fool's errand. The counterexamples of Cappelen and Lepore do give us reason to doubt that a theory of meanings can be sensitive to indirect reports. However, the failure of indirect reports should not disabuse us of what is said altogether, for, as I have shown, there is at least one sense in which what is said is indeed semantically informative.

The investigation of the issue requires that we turn towards ourselves (although the efficacy of the explicandum requires that we shun such talk as "turning towards"). First-person ascriptions are significantly different from those we make to others, and I exploited this difference in order to specify semantic content. It is our *de se* ascriptions that provide a coherent way to maintain the semantic informativeness of what is said. As was shown in chapters three and four, expressive uses of *de se* ascriptions, which derive their immunity to error from the subject-use of "I", can serve as the basis for a theory of meanings, and insofar as this is the case, what is said is rightly construed as a semantic phenomenon. Such ascriptions explicitly articulate the semantic content of the regular communicative uses of our expressions, e.g. the difference between saying, "*p*" and saying, "What I'm saying is *that p*".

In large part the rift over what is said has to do with the commitments held by each party to the debate. The minimal semanticist wants nothing more out of a theory of meanings than that it should be extensional. I have shown that it is possible to specify

content through an intensional notion like what is said if we consider it in the context of *de se* ascription. The following passage from Grice captures much of what I think is misguided about the talk of excluding what is said from the purview of semantic theory:

First, I am not sympathetic toward any methodological policy which would restrict one from the start to an attempt to formulate a theory of meaning in extensional terms. It seems to me that one should at least *start* by giving oneself a free hand to make use of any intensional notions or devices which seem to be required in order to solve one's conceptual problems, at least at a certain level, in ways which (metaphysical bias apart) reason and intuition commend. If one denies oneself this freedom, one runs a serious risk of underestimating the richness and complexity of the conceptual field which one is investigating. (Grice, 1989, p. 137)

What is said does seem, pretheoretically, to be in the business of meaning, and so, as reason and intuition commend, a theory of meanings ought to, at the very least, begin by trying to accommodate it. Cappelen and Lepore take their counterexamples to show that an intensional notion such as what is said cannot satisfy the constraints that they assume a theory of meanings must meet: out and out extensionality. But given that it is possible to speak of my speech—to exploit the immunity to error of misascription that *de se* ascriptions exhibit—theories of meaning of the sort that the minimal semanticists prefer then appear, as Grice says, to underestimate the richness and complexity of language. For when we use language we can speak of our use and from our use, and in so doing it is possible to establish the basis for a semantic theory.

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