Generalized Intentional Identity

Abstract

Puzzles concerning reference and attitudes have long bemused and amused the philosophical communities. We forge connections between thoughts and the world through language, especially via use of noun phrases. Our mental life, just as our empirical existence, is however not constant but ever-changing. We can hold various attitudes, even conflicting ones, toward an object; we may also associate different, perhaps apparently contradictory descriptions with the same thing. Further complications arise when we entertain, consciously or not, thoughts about objects that do not exist. Meanwhile, we seek not only expressions of our own mental life, but explanation of other people’s actions; our talks are not limited to our own thoughts, but those of the others too figure prominently. As a result, a general analysis of the truth and meaning of the relevant linguistic phenomena cannot be adequate unless it takes into account the diverse range of things we can think and talk about, as well as the plethora of ways of so doing.

The array of linguistic phenomena that I want to concentrate on concerns intentional identity, a problem first made famous by Peter Geach (1967). Building on Edelberg’s (2006) observation that the intentional identity has both intersubjective and intrasubjective versions, I argue that the phenomena are indeed much more widespread than previously perceived. In fact, what underlies the problem is responsible for many other well-known puzzles (e.g. Kripke (1979), Roberts (1996) and Cumming (2014)), and so the need for a proper analysis is eminently pressing. I will specify a template for the generalized intentional identity, identify the challenges involved, and argue that positing a level of representational entity in both philosophy of mind and language is a promising way to tackle the problem across the board.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews Geach’s original set-up and the limits of traditional responses. I then specify in Section 3 the root of the problem and a template for generalizing intentional identity, a template that connects several well-known puzzles in the literature that are seemingly dissociated. After that I sketch in Section 4 a solution based on the model of object file, and conclude in Section 5 with the ramification this new proposal leads to with respect to the notion of content and linguistic communication.
References


