

## REPLY TO MARÍA DE PONTE

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**Abstract:** The author's response to María de Ponte's contribution to the special issue on *The Indexical Point of View*.

I recently wrote a book on the topic of indexical content, In what follows, I will try to respond to de Ponte's queries in the same order in which she brings them up.

### I

The passage from my book that in de Ponte's view requires clarification in several respects is the following:

‘Today is beautiful’, uttered on Tuesday, and ‘Yesterday was beautiful’, uttered on Wednesday, will convey the same cognitive value, i.e. involve the same mode of presentation of **d**, just in case the subject takes **d** as the same from Tuesday through to

Wednesday. This ensures that the subject thinks of **d** under the same mode of presentation from one occasion to the next, which is, in turn, required for the belief with which she began to be retained. [. . .] In so doing, she will associate with **d** a cluster of features and properties she takes **d** to possess. These may include the properties being the present day or being the previous day. Although they respectively amount to the characters of ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’, these properties do not shape the subject’s way of thinking of **d** in the way in which they are supposed to on Kaplan’s and Perry’s views . . . [84]

In response to de Ponte, this was not intended to be my interpretation of Frege’s passage in which he claims that if someone wants to express the same thought today that she expressed by means of ‘today’ yesterday, she must use the expression ‘yesterday’... . While I agree with Frege that the same mode of presentation can persist over time and be expressed by utterances of ‘Today’ and ‘Yesterday’ on two consecutive days, what I take such a mode of presentation to be is not something that I ascribe to Frege. My contention that the subject will think of **d** under the same mode of presentation from Tuesday through to Wednesday just in case she takes **d** to be the same day throughout follows from the criterion of sameness for modes of presentation that I deploy, according to which a mode of presentation is the same as long as the subject unreflectively takes it for granted that it is the same day from one occasion to the next.<sup>1</sup>

This is in line with Kaplan’s view which he states as follows:

I may be tracking the passing days very carefully. I became acquainted with the day yesterday and expressed that *way* of being acquainted in my use of ‘today’. Assuming no recognition or tracking failures and no memory failures, I should be able to continue to have the day in mind in the same way today, though of course I will refer to it as ‘yesterday’. Here we see, ... , that the cognitive significance of an utterance should not be identified with linguistic meaning. ... We need to leave linguistic meaning and turn to industrial-strength *ways of having in mind* to give a proper analysis of the notions in this area. (Kaplan 2012, 138).

Short of having such industrial-strength *ways of having in mind* it is not clear why the relevant subject will (be disposed to) replace ‘today’ with ‘yesterday’.

While de Ponte does not deny that we may need to rely here on the same “industrial-strength” persisting mode of presentation, she does not think of it as the bearer of cognitive significance. She rather holds that in deploying ‘today’ the subject will have a cognitive relation to **d** that differs from the cognitive relation that she will have to **d** in deploying ‘yesterday’. (In keeping with de Ponte, I shy off talking about their meanings, characters, roles in the present context.) She claims that “we can agree on the fact that believing on Tuesday that ‘Today is beautiful’, and believing on Wednesday that ‘Yesterday was beautiful’ is believing the same thing [which can be read as a Fregean Thought or as a Russellian proposition], but in different ways. We can also agree, I think, that these different ways lead to different actions and to further different beliefs”.

To be sure, de Ponte claims that issues of cognitive significance involve the beliefs competent speakers must have to consider a particular statement as true (see also Perry 2012, 24). ‘In the example at hand’, she continues, ‘the beliefs a competent speaker must have to consider that “Today is beautiful” and “Yesterday are beautiful” are true are, or might be, different’. Now, according to my foregoing criterion of sameness for modes of presentation, the fact that the subject who unreflectively takes it for granted that **d** is the same from **d** to **d+1** is expressing the same mode of presentation by both these utterances makes it the case that she is having the beliefs she must have to consider *both* these statements as true, i.e. that the persisting mode of presentation is the bearer of cognitive significance. (This is in line with Kaplan’s foregoing claim that the cognitive significance of an utterance should not be identified with linguistic meaning.)

This being the case, I was confronted with the option that goes de Ponte’s way: to postulate yet another level of cognitive significance that lines up with ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’. (See chapter 7 where I focus on variant cases.) I resisted this move because the cognitive relations to **d** that correspond to ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’ do not meet the criterion of difference for modes of presentation that ‘any candidate must satisfy in order to qualify as a mode of presentation’ (see Schiffer 1978, Recanati 2016). The relevant version of the criterion is:

The modes of presentation *m* and *m*’ are distinct if the subject entertains doubts as to whether, through their deployment, she is thinking about the same thing.

For, according to my foregoing criterion of sameness for modes of presentation, the subject who thinks of the same day under the same mode of presentation in unreflectively

taking it for granted that it is the same day from one occasion to the next is not in a position to entertain doubts as to whether the same day is in question in respectively deploying ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’. Surely, we also have the non-modal version of the criterion of difference at our disposal that the cognitive relations that ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’ are having to **d** seem to meet:

Two modes of presentation *m* and *m'* are distinct if it is *possible* for the subject to entertain doubts as to whether, through their deployment, she is thinking about the same thing.

But, imagine a subject who takes the day she is unreflectively taking for granted to be the same from 8 pm to 9 pm, being fully aware that midnight has not passed. The fact that it is *merely* possible for her to entertain doubts that midnight has in the meantime passed and at 8 pm accept ‘today’ and at 9 pm accept ‘yesterday’ in order to refer to **d**, seems irrelevant in shaping her way of thinking of **d**. She just keeps thinking about it under the same mode of presentation. Together with some related points that I have made in the book, this has led me to disregard the modal version of the criterion as irrelevant in individuating modes of presentation. On the other hand, if the subject starts entertaining doubts as to whether midnight has passed, she will deploy two different modes of presentation by the lights of the non-modal version of the criterion, independently of what indexicals (if any) she might be prone to deploy. If this is right, then the cognitive relations to **d** that correspond to ‘today’ and ‘yesterday’ do not qualify to be modes of presentation if we observe the relevant criteria of sameness and difference for modes of presentation.

This is not to deny that these different cognitive relations lead to different actions and to further different beliefs. But, in not belonging with the modes of presentation as bearers of cognitive significance of the non-referentialist view that I adopt, I think they are best seen as part of the cluster of features and properties the subject takes **d1** to possess rather than bearers of cognitive significance that are at that additional to those bearers of cognitive significance that play the key role on the view that I develop in the book. That this is where these cognitive relations belong is supported by the view that the reason why the subject performs different actions when thinking of **d1** first as ‘today’ (*the current day*) and then as ‘yesterday’ (*the previous day*) is because the actions that are available to her are different in each case, not because she is distinctly motivated. This is to say that when she thinks of **d1** as ‘today’ (*the current day*), she is pragmatically and epistemically attached to it, which entails that she can perform a series of actions which depend on **d1** being the current day. When she keeps track of **d1** but thinks of it as ‘yesterday’ (*the previous day*), she is no longer pragmatically and epistemically attached to it, which entails that the actions that she could perform (on **d1**) are no longer the same.<sup>2</sup>

## II

As de Ponte puts it, when asking whether or not we can retain a belief over time, we might be asking three different questions:

Question 1: Can we retain the same belief-content, a singular proposition, at different moments of time?

Question 2: Can we believe something (a proposition) in the same way over time; that is, if a belief at **t** and a belief at **t'** can have the same cognitive import on the speaker?

Question 3: Are the belief(s) that a person would most naturally express by uttering “Today is beautiful” and “Yesterday was beautiful” two different beliefs or rather only one belief expressible by utterances of two different sentences that a person has at different times?

As de Ponte notes, I take the second question to be another way of asking the first: the cognitive import of beliefs expressible with sentences containing indexicals is due not to *how* we believe them, but to *what* we believe. She also rightly presumes that in the given example utterances of ‘Today is beautiful’ on December 17 and of ‘Yesterday was beautiful’ on December 18, on my view, have the same mode of presentation, express the same Thought and have the same cognitive value, so they are expressions of one single belief (in line with how I individuate beliefs as discussed in the last section).

In contrast with this, de Ponte thinks that differentiating between the first and second question is the key issue for our purposes here. The key role is played here by Perry’s Reflexive truth-conditions on utterances (Rx) which differ from Referential truth conditions (Rf). This is to say that if on December 17 I produce an utterance **u**: “Today is beautiful”, I end up with:

Rx. That the day of **u** is beautiful

Rf. That December 17 is beautiful

Similarly for an utterance **u'** of “Yesterday was beautiful” on December 18:

Rx That the day previous to the day of **u'** is beautiful

Rf That December 17 is beautiful

According to this view, it is at the Rx level that the difference in cognitive significance of **u** and **u'** resides.

While I dealt with the Rx level in the chapter 2 of my book in relation to the co-reference problem, I did not deal with it at the level of belief retention.<sup>3</sup> In that chapter I made no claims (that I make across the book in referring to Perry's earlier views) that (doxastic) characters or roles are the bearers of cognitive significance. As for my claim that the reflexive content is second-order, all I meant was that utterances such as **u** and **u'** are being mentioned rather than used here and I apologize for the misnomer. (I instruct the reader to have a look at Eros Corazza's excellent contribution to this volume and to my reply, which are almost entirely on reflexive contents.)

More to the point, if it is at the Rx level that the difference in cognitive significance of **u** and **u'** resides, we seem to be back to square one. If **u** and **u'** differ in cognitive significance as 'today' and 'yesterday' were supposed to differ on Perry's earlier view (see also Perry 2020, 51-52 which I discuss in note 2 below), short of having an underlying way of having in mind of December 17 from December 17 to December 18, it is not clear why the relevant subject will (be disposed to) replace **u** with **u'**. As before, it is not clear what accounts for the continuity of the subject's belief in the relevant sense (since having the same Referential truth-conditions (Rf) is not enough): **u** and **u'** would be better off having the same cognitive significance!



### III

From the citation from Perry (1980, 80) with which de Ponte opens her section 4, in the book I extracted the following part:

Suppose that Smith, whose watch is an hour fast, accepts ‘Today is my husband’s birthday’. But just before 11, she realizes she got it wrong. It is March 1 and not March 2. She glances at her watch, at 11, and it shows midnight – she thinks to herself ‘so *today* is my husband’s birthday’ (p. 25).

My primary concern was to show that the character or role of ‘today’ was too coarse grained to capture the differences in cognitive significance as in the case of ‘that’ in a true informative statement ‘That<sub>1</sub> = that<sub>2</sub>’ that I deal with beforehand. To be sure, Perry (1980, 80) also considers the Smith case as a variation on the Evening Star/Morning Star case. Making no claims about other consequences that this case might give rise to, I am happy to agree with what de Ponte says in relation to the Smith case from the standpoint of the reflexive-referential theory which was still a long way away when Perry thought of this case.

### IV

Again, I am happy to agree with de Ponte. I just want to make one clarification. In claiming that senses or modes of presentation are wholly independent of characters, I meant just that identity and existence of (doxastic) characters are not tied to the identity and existence of belief states and *vice versa*, in the context of belief retention and the Rip Van

Winkle case (in section 5.3 and its subsections). In holding this, I did not mean that actions can be systematically linked to senses or modes of presentation. If, as we saw above, the subject thinks of **d** under the same mode of presentation over time while associating with **d** a cluster of features and properties she takes **d** to possess, which will not be stable across time and will depend on many background beliefs and desires, many different factors will conspire in motivating her to perform one course of action rather than another. To put it differently, two different subjects may think of **d** over time under the same mode of presentation while associating with it different features and properties which may motivate them to perform different courses of action.<sup>4</sup>

## Notes

- 1 Naturally, the day needs to be the same. It is not enough that the subject represents **d** as the same from one occasion to the next; her thought also needs to have **d** as its sole causal source (see, e.g. p 70). If the subject is unbeknownst to her “thinking” both of **d** and **d'** in de Ponte’s sense, she will think a confused thought of a kind that I appeal to in chapter 3 in relation to spatio-temporal objects. Since I do not hold that relevant modes of presentation are object-dependent, the object referred to by a singular term is not a constituent of the Thought expressed by a sentence. On a different note, de Ponte correctly assumes that by “cognitive value” I mean “cognitive significance” and “cognitive impact”. (See also Perry 2020, 24, who claims: ‘I was interested in differences in *cognitive significance*, my term for what Frege called “cognitive value”’.)

- 2 I wish to thank Matheus Valente for alerting me to this variation of the Action Inventory Model which Cappelen and Dever (2013) deploy in relation to the first person singular pronoun in arguing against there being essential indexicals in the sense of Perry and Lewis. While my view does not have this commitment, I wish to take this opportunity to note that Perry, on whose view de Ponte relies, thinks that in the foregoing kind of case the subject is distinctly motivated and that the cognitive significance of her relevant beliefs is different. Here is what he says:

Now consider the relation between the two true utterances, of “The midterm elections be today” on Tuesday and “The midterm elections be yesterday” on Wednesday. Frege says:

Although the Thought is the same its verbal expression must be different so that the sense, which would otherwise be affected by the differing times of utterance, is re-adjusted.

But should the Thought be the same? The belief expressed by “The midterm elections be today” on Tuesday motivates responsible citizens to go to the polls. The belief expressed by “The midterm elections be yesterday” on Wednesday will not motivate responsible voters to go to the polls. It seems the cognitive significance of the beliefs are different (Perry 2020, 51-52).

- 3 To be sure, Perry 2019 and 2020 became available only after I submitted my book manuscript to the publisher.
- 4 I would be more than happy to take up with de Ponte the issue of the role of background beliefs and desires in the messy shopper case as well as in the interpersonal “bear attack” case, but space does not allow me to do this.

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