

Responses to Symposiasts

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Turning now, to the comments of the symposiasts. I can't do justice to the richness and insight of the comments. In each case, I learned quite different things. Here, I'll only reply where I have something to offer.

To Millgram

Millgram notes that *The Situated Self* discusses two notions of self:

1. The minimal Anscombian notion: "The informational envelopes along with the minimal 'I's[that] demarcate jointly deployable bases for inference, whose scopes roughly coincide with the boundaries of the top-level cognitive architectures of organisms," and
2. A richer Dennettian conception, full of descriptive content: "more ambitious notion of the self, ... an ongoing, constantly updated self-representation, one that includes a constantly revised representation of its own past."

How are they related on my view? The first gives rise to the latter through the Hofstadterian whirl of emergent structure when the self-representing superloop is given some external input and allowed to run. Even a trickle of structure sent through this loop over time generates an internal stream that becomes quickly complex and differentiated from other streams. Small differences propagate and compound. Memory exercises a selective and transformative influence.

Millgram's contention is that:

The hardwired architecture is implemented on the assumption that any information floating around in the top-level cognitive

system whose borders are roughly those of the organism can be, for the purposes of inference, freely agglomerated. The flip side of that background assumption is that information floating around *outside* the boundaries of the organism needs qualitatively different and much more cautious processing. The hugely complicated layers of self-modifying code piled on top of the hardwired base behave as though they were implemented on a startlingly different and seemingly incompatible assumption: that information floating around in that top-level cognitive system *cannot* be, for the purposes of inference, freely agglomerated. A related and subsidiary assumption is evidently that, for purposes of keeping track of inferentially agglomerable pools of information, the borders of the organism do not matter all that much.

I certainly agree with Millgram that the reflexive account makes room for multiple, layered and intersecting selves. Any subject of a reflexive mental act is a self. This is one of the virtues of the reflexive account. This multiplicity of coexisting selves is very hard to understand on a view on which the self is an object, or a substantial particular. If the self were a particular, it would seem there must be some particular *thing* that it is.

Millgram's suggestion is that the boundaries of the body are less important for the richer conception of self (which perhaps has an identifiable core that functions as a filtering structure; along the lines described by Frankfurt¹) in two respects; internal boundaries are set up that inhibit the free internal flow of information (when I use "I" in many contexts, self-ascribing attitudes and intentions, for example, I may be using it in my professional voice, or my voice as lover or husband, and these are not the same thing), and also that the distinction between what's literally inside and outside the head is less important for the richer conception of self. This goes both for the onboard cognitive machinery involved in computation (this is a lesson that Andy Clark in particular has argued persuasively), and perhaps also for attitudes. This latter is not something that has been explored as far as I know. I believe (am committed to, am willing to use in inference) whatever my intellectual partner and collaborator believes about X, and I remember what is contained in my memory book, and I know what follows by simple computations from things that I am immediately disposed to assent to, even though they never occurred to me before.

¹ Frankfurt, H. *The Importance of What We Care About*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

There is a lot more to be said here, and it's the place where moral psychologists have done such valuable work. There are some unifying pressures that come both from the need for effective agency, and also from the social environment which needs to stabilize selves as loci of belief and agency. But these fall short of perfect unity. In any case, I certainly agree that the mind is kludge, a tremendously complex one, with all sorts of nooks and crannies, some of them hidden, undergoing continuous construction and reconstruction. How much organization and unity there is a highly personal matter, partly constitutive of what sort of person I am.

To Price

Price expresses surprise that self-location, the unifying theme of *The Situated Self*, turns out to tie together a remarkable range of topics. In my mind, it's not surprising at all. Self-location is the keystone that holds together the reflexive and Fregean layers of representation in the mind and occupies a central place at the heart of human thought. Individual self-locating thoughts (e.g., "I am at Jenann Ismael", "now is such and such a time", "this is what it is like to taste pineapple", and the mother of all self-locating thoughts "this is what is like to be so and so, at such and such a place, in a world like this") exhibit in microcosm the links between the reflexive and representational levels of the mind, and getting that structure right is the key to clarifying the collection of accumulated problems that the Fregean Model of mind was ill-equipped to deal with because they relate in one way or another to context-dependent features of thought.

Price gives a very nice explication of the relations between context-dependent and context-independent reference in *The Situated Self*, the way in which natively context-dependent representations are decoupled from context by making unarticulated parameters explicit. His one objection has to do with my account of identity over time. He offers what he thinks is an alternative diagnosis of the invulnerability of self-reference to failures of reidentification, which he introduced with an example involving school children using the term 'this class'. He writes:

Applied diachronically, He writes: terms such as "this class" or "this group" now have two obvious disambiguations

Used in the Grade 3 classroom, for example, they can pick out a particular group of children (those who are in Grade 3 this year, Grade 4 next year); or the sequence of Grade 3 classes, containing different children each year. "We have big plans for

this class next year” can easily be read in either way. Each disambiguation gives rise to a different form of the problem of diachronic reidentification—but on each, it is analytic that a class’s own uses of “this class” cannot fail to pick out themselves.

And he continues, “Each disambiguation gives rise to a different form of the problem of diachronic reidentification—but on each, it is analytic that a class’s own uses of ‘this class’ cannot fail to pick out themselves.”

I’m not sure I understand what the example is supposed to show. The sort of immunity to error that “I” exhibits is not *just* the kind of immunity that is exhibited by indexicals of the form ‘this x’; e.g., this day, this thought, my family, this class, this place. The story that works for other indexicals is that the indexical has a descriptive content that supplies criteria of individuation; ‘today’ means ‘this day’ and criteria of individuation for days determines whether a pair of temporally separated ‘today’ occurrences corefer. In cases like ‘here’ the conversational context and other pragmatic factors tell us whether ‘this city’, ‘this country’ or ‘this building’ is meant, and whichever is meant will determine criteria of coreference for separated ‘here’ occurrences. My claim was that ‘I’ doesn’t have an associated descriptive content that supplies criteria of co-reference over time and yet it nevertheless succeeds in referring unambiguously to one among the innumerably many different candidates for a temporal continuant that could be reflexively identified on any occasion of use.

In Price’s example, ‘this class’ is simply ambiguous; there are two distinct notions of class with non-equivalent criteria of identity over time, corresponding to different potential referents. Either ‘this class’ refers over time to whatever collection of students is based in this room, *or* it refers to the collection of students that is *currently* based here however they distribute themselves in years to come. A student in the class who doesn’t know which of the two disambiguations is intended will not be a competent user of ‘this class’. She will not know how to answer questions about whether she will be in this class next year, though she may know perfectly well which desk she’ll be sitting in, i.e., where she will be found in spatial terms.

“I” doesn’t have these kinds of ambiguity. We use “I” un-self-consciously and unambiguously without application of criteria of diachronic identity. How? In order for the term to be used unambiguously intersubstitution has been governed in one of two ways: (i) by the deliberate application of criteria of identity, or (ii) by external constraints that keep one from entering contexts that might misplace

intersubstitution. Just as there are two ways to keep a child from wandering into a prohibited area. You can give her rules (tell her ‘don’t go outside’). For this to work, she will have to understand the difference between inside and outside and know how to distinguish them. Alternatively, you can let her roam without constraint, locking the door so that roaming freely will not take her outside. My suggestion was that there are external constraints that keep intersubstitution of “I”-occurrences confined to psychologically connected streams of thought and experience.

In the last part of his comments Price queries whether we might think of expressivism as a form of tacit frame-dependence. The idea is that we often find ourselves in apparent disagreement about matters of fact, making statements that look like logical contradictories of one another, but it turns out that we differ in the value of some contextual parameter whose value is relevant to the truth conditions of what is said and agreement is resolved. Like Price, I believe that context plays a tacit and indefinite role in most conversational contexts.²

When we communicate, we take for granted a lot of common fixed background; every conversation sets up a tacit, unexpressed frame of reference that can be made explicit when disagreement arises. You say “P(A)”, I say “not (P(A))”, and it remains to be seen whether we disagree on a matter of fact. It might be instead that there is a feature of context relevant to the truth conditions of A so that this is more like a case in which you are in Tucson and say “The Grand Canyon is 350 miles away” and I am in Sydney and say “The Grand Canyon is over 8000 miles away”. We both speak truly in this case, and there is no genuine conflict. Or it might be that the disagreement is not a disagreement over a matter of fact, but an expression of a difference in attitude, so that it is more like a case in which you say ‘oysters taste delicious’ and I say ‘oysters taste foul’.

The more radical view that Price offers for consideration is that we relinquish the notions of truth and reference entirely in favor of an account of developing impersonal representations of a jointly experienced world as touchstones for coordinating across our various and varied personal perspectives. As he says,

We might ... regard the expressivist’s account of the (apparently) referential character of expressive maps as the only

² As a point of terminology, however, I reserve the term ‘indexicality’ for explicit frame-dependence. The difference between cases of indexicality and tacit forms of context-dependence is that in cases in which there is an articulated semantic constituent of a proposition or thought whose semantic value is delivered by context.

account we *ever* need of referential vocabulary.... We've stopped thinking of centered and expressive maps as useful but flawed imitations of genuinely representational maps, and dispensed with the pure case altogether, in favor of a plurality of "abusive" cases, each merely a solution to a particular coordination problem, differing only in scope.

I resist this move because I think that there are reasons for preserving a distinction between expressive and referential vocabulary and the concomitant distinction between differences in situation, taste, or attitude and disagreements over matters of fact. Different responses are appropriate to disagreements over these matters and there are different ways of resolving such differences. Price would say that these are ultimately pragmatic differences, and I would agree. When we decide to call our disagreement a disagreement of fact rather than a disagreement of attitude, that makes a difference to whether and how we approach resolution, and there may be nothing more to it than that. But I don't see why that should make me want to relinquish the distinction between expressive and referential vocabulary. I suspect that Price's target is not the distinction between referential and expressive vocabulary, but the metaphysical picture that often goes along with that distinction: i.e., the idea that there is a world independent of discourse, and the distinction between referential and expressive vocabulary is a difference between vocabulary that *corresponds* to things in the world and vocabulary that does not. This metaphysical accompaniment is, however, optional.

To Teller

Teller begins his remarks by saying that he is going to argue that Perry's examples of essential indexicals do not show that demonstrative, indexical, or first person thought are required for action or the formation of intentions. "Thereby", he says, "I will undermine any use to which some might try to put such claims," and he points to arguments that purport to show that there are non-objective facts by arguing that action is impossible without first person or demonstrative identification. I am in agreement with Teller that use of the first person is not ineliminably required for acting or forming intentions, but I'm not sure that we have the same argumentative opponents. The arguments that I targeted in the second section of *The Situated Self* used cognitive and epistemic gaps between facts about oneself or the subjective features of one's mental states and facts that can be represented in third person terms to argue that the former are distinct from

the latter. So, for example, Descartes argued that I can't be identical with anything whose existence is not made known to me in the act of trying to deny that it exists. And Chalmers (as well as Jackson, Levine, and others) argued that phenomenal properties can't be identical to physical properties because knowledge of physics doesn't translate into phenomenal knowledge, and knowledge of the physical workings of a system doesn't tell us whether it is conscious or what its conscious life is like. My strategy against these interlocutors was to argue that the cognitive and epistemic gaps used to establish the ontological distinctness of physical and phenomenal facts are explained in another way, i.e., with their being indexical.

That said, I think Teller's examples do illustrate one of the themes of the book, which is that indexicals have a special role mediating between coupled and de-coupled representation, rather than representing a special class of non-objective fact. Decoupled representation, rather than being a necessity for the use of information in guiding action, is a rather special and characteristically human strategy for coping with information. Coupled representations, whose informational content is implicitly relativized to the context of use, do not require any form of first person or demonstrative representation.

There is one misunderstanding that, although it doesn't play a large role in Teller's comments (it's mentioned only in passing in a footnote), I want to take the opportunity to correct. I take responsibility for the misunderstanding. Teller says that he takes the argument of *The Situated Self* to be that intentionality can be treated naturalistically.³ I don't believe that it can be fully explicated in the terms that are introduced in *The Situated Self*, because I don't think a full account of intentionality can be given without talking about language and the properties that language acquires from its public role, i.e., its *interpersonal* use as a medium for exchanging information about a common environment and the social practices that go along with that use. We need to distinguish (i) the information-bearing properties that internal states have in virtue of tracking (and being designed to track, or having the function of tracking) features of the environment, and (ii) the richer notions of content associated with judgment and inference. I believe that the former can be understood in the terms discussed in *The Situated Self*, involving environmental tracking and self-modelling, but not the latter. It is plausible to say that a frog's mental image of a fly represents the fly in the first sense, but not in the latter sense, and this has something to do with the fact that frogs don't talk to one another,

³ But he's not mistaken that a lot that I said might have given the impression that I was attempting to do so.

they don't engage in the kind of discursive scorekeeping practice described by Brandom in *Making It Explicit*.⁴ Brandom has made a powerful case that the kind of full-blooded normative intentionality that human thought possesses depends on what he calls the 'game of giving and asking for reasons', a complex set of social practices involving the acquisition and attribution of commitments and entitlements to one another acquired in conversational contexts, by making, disavowing, and challenging assertions. He is building here on work of Sellars, and there is a long tradition before Sellars, that emphasizes the normative aspects of intentionality. A number of people have begun to see the need for a more finely articulated vocabulary that distinguishes these two notions.⁵ Self-modelling in the terms it is discussed in *The Situated Self* is part of the pre-intentional background to intentionality, but the real deal—the full-blooded normative notions that Brandom takes as his subject—requires language and culture, and sociality. I did say this in the book, but I can now say it with more emphasis and conviction.

⁴ Harvard University Press, 1994.

⁵ See, for example, Price, H., *Naturalism Without Mirrors*, Oxford University Press, 2009.