COMMENTARY

Reporting Indexicals

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SAINSBURY'S PAPER IS rich in ideas. It would be foolhardy for me to try to do justice to all of them. I shall concentrate on the central subject, which I take to be the semantics of indexical sentences. Sainsbury has two main guiding hypotheses that he uses in his explorations. The first is that constraints on reporting speech can be treated as guides to meaning. This governs all of his contribution. The second hypothesis is introduced in his final section. It is that thoughts differ if either is rationally cotenable with the negation of the other. I am puzzled about certain aspects of the relation between these two hypotheses, and shall try to explain why. Doing this will involve a discussion of the phenomenon of non-detachability, and especially of the role of what Sainsbury calls scene-setting in reporting indexicals. It will also involve discussion of his thesis of reducibility, set out at the start of his §4: 'indexical thought can always be reported by words which, in their content-ascribing role, are not indexical (though they may be anaphoric)'. Sainsbury's example of part of McTaggart's argument for the unreality of time is especially pertinent for assessing the significance of the reducibility thesis, and I shall add a few more pebbles to the mountain of discussion McTaggart's argument has received. That menu is more than sufficient for this reply, and I shall not have anything to say on the other subjects of his §4, namely action, science and God.

1. Non-detachability and scene-setting

In discussing reports of indexical utterances, I follow Sainsbury in using 'said' as an abbreviation for 'strictly, literally and fully explicitly said'. It is useful to start by considering reports in oratio recta, under the requirement that the words used in the report must be the same as those uttered by the original speaker. So questions concerning such matters as translations of oratio recta reports will be ignored. Suppose then that Tom reports an utterance of Jill's as follows:

(1)   Jill said 'There's a bird on that post'.

Suppose also that the report is accurate in that the words within quotation-marks are exactly those that Jill uttered. Clearly, from (1) alone, a hearer may not be able to identify Jill's thought. A hearer will not be able to tell from (1) alone where Jill was when she made her utterance, nor when she made it, nor in which direction she was pointing. The point of the stipulated sense of 'said', however, is this: if we know what a speaker strictly, literally and fully explicitly said, then we are in a position to identify the speaker's thought. If that were not so, then we could not, contrary to the guiding hypothesis, use reported speech as a guide to the meaning of what is reported. So, if we take 'said' in (1) in the stipulated sense, (1) may be untrue, even if the quoted words are exactly those that Jill used. We can claim this in advance of any more specific theory of the identification of thoughts. All that is required is that two uses of the same indexical type-sentences may express different thoughts, and this is a very weak constraint.

We should not, however, require that Tom should always need to add anything to his report to enable the hearer to grasp what Jill said. Indeed, he would vitiate his report if he were to add anything within the quotation-marks. (1) will do its job if the hearer already has enough background knowledge of the right kind. Such knowledge, together with (1), will enable the hearer to grasp the thought that Jill expressed.

The phenomenon of non-detachability already arises in oratio recta. Although the sentence 'There's a bird on that post' is in a sense detached within (1), Tom cannot use that sentence to make himself a samesayer with Jill outside the context created by the words 'Jill said'. He samesays with Jill only through our grasp that he is repeating her words, that he is her mouthpiece. If he is not, then, as Sainsbury says, the context defaults to Tom's own, so that the reference of 'that post' is

determined by an appropriate relation, if any exists, between Tom and a post. Tom then refers to a different post, or to no post, or to the same post but not as Jill referred to it.

It is not surprising that non-detachability is a phenomenon of oratio recta as well as of oratio obliqua, but it is worth remarking, because it brings out that the phenomenon does not depend upon anaphora. 'That post' does not seem to function anaphorically within (1). The role of background knowledge seems to be to enable the hearer to *recover* the content of Jill's utterance upon hearing (1), even though neither Tom nor hearer can *express* it in a free-standing sentence.

Sainsbury claims that 'In interpreting a use of an indexical, one needs to locate its user's perspective within one's own'. This, together with oratio recta examples such as that above, suggest that the following idea is worth exploring. Opinions may vary about how much is required to locate a user's perspective within one's own, and the stringency of conditions for such location may correlate with stringency of conditions on the identity of thoughts. To explain this idea I need to turn to oratio obliqua reports.

Tom cannot properly report what Jill said in indirect speech by saying

(2)   Jill said that there was a bird on that post.

Even if a hearer has the background knowledge that would enable him to identify Jill's thought from the oratio recta report, that would not operate to make (2) true. In (2) 'that post', if understood as indexical, refers from Tom's perspective rather than from Jill's, and so, even if it refers to the same post, does not do so as Jill did. If not indexical, then it equally fails to capture what Jill said. What is needed is to make some background knowledge explicit through an appropriate phrase that introduces the report. Such a phrase, according to Sainsbury, sets the scene, and I take it that on this view scene-setting is needed to enable a hearer to locate the reported speaker's perspective within his own. Our questions now concern how much scene-setting is required, and how scene-setting relates to the identification of the reported speaker's thought.

Here Sainsbury's second hypothesis may be relevant. This is the hypothesis that thoughts differ if either is rationally cotenable with the negation of the other. Consider again the speaker who utters 'That was built in Japan' and a moment later, speaking of the same ship, utters 'That was not built in Japan', and does so without irrationality. According

to the hypothesis, the thought expressed by the second utterance is not the negation of the thought expressed by the first. As Sainsbury says, it appears that we must assign different meanings to the word 'that' at its two occurrences. He offers as a report:

> (3)   Seeing a ship through a window, he said that it was built in Japan, and seeing the same ship through the same window a moment later, he said that it was not built in Japan.

He then claims that in (3), the two anaphoric occurrences of 'it' must differ in meaning. For otherwise the report would not match the original utterances in meaning, and so would be inadequate.

A curious consequence now appears. (3) indicates to the hearer, on the background assumption that the reported speaker was not irrational, that the meanings of 'it' at the two occurrences are distinct, but it provides the hearer with no way of further identifying what those meanings are, so as to enable him to see *how* they differ. Moreover, (3) by itself makes no claim that the reported speaker was not irrational. (3) could equally be used to report a speaker who was irrational. In that case there would be no call to regard the two anaphoric occurrences of 'it' as having different meanings, and even if it is known that the reported speaker was rational, the hearer is still not empowered to discern what those meanings are.

This suggests that (3) alone is not after all an adequate report. It does not enable a hearer to grasp what was said. One possible remedy would be to require that the background knowledge necessary to enable a hearer to do this be included in the scene-setting for the report. This was not Sainsbury's own intention, as I understand him, but in the light of the considerations just raised it seems worth exploring. The idea is that the informational content of introductory phrases that set the scene for a report of an indexical utterance has a role in fixing the meaning of anaphoric pronouns within the report.

I explore this in relation to simpler examples than that of the twice-seen ship. Reverting to Jill and the post, we already know that some introductory phrase is needed. (2) alone is not an adequate report. We might demand a lot of the scene-setting. We might adopt the requirement that Jill's perspective be located within our own, and place a fairly strict construction on it, so that the hearer, from his own perspective, be put in a position to grasp Jill's own perspective. This could lead to a demand that the scene be set by identifying Jill's spatiotemporal location at the time of her utterance, her orientation, and the relation of the

demonstrated object to her own position. The result might be something like

    (4)   Standing by the back door of Stable House at noon on 3rd July 1995, and pointing to the post in the corner of Hope End Meadow forty yards to the South West of her, Jill said that there was a bird on it.

Assuming that we know which house is Stable House, which field is Hope End Meadow, and so on, we can locate Jill's perspective in relation to our own. It is not of course suggested that the pronoun 'it' in (4) has the content of the entire scene-setting expression. Rather, that expression enables the hearer to understand how Jill thought of the demonstrated post, and hence to identify the thought she expressed more precisely. If Sainsbury is right about the twice-seen ship example, the thoughts of those using indexicals are highly sensitive to differences in circumstances of use. If reports are to capture these thoughts, the circumstances will need specifying in some detail.

One may, on the other hand, doubt whether so much scene-setting is required for correct reporting. If that doubt can be substantiated, as I think it can, a puzzle arises about the relation between the two guiding hypotheses with which I began. A doubter might suggest that a correct report demands very little of an introductory phrase, and that we rest content with

    (5)   Indicating a post, Jill said that there was a bird on it.

Obviously, there are various intermediate possibilites. With a view to evaluating them, I turn to another example. Here is an oratio recta report

    (6)   Jill said 'There's a bird on the post to my right'.

This goes into reported speech as

    (7)   Jill said that there was a bird on the post to her right.

(7) includes no scene-setting introductory phrase, and it seems that none is called for. (7) is adequate as it stands. In the example, Jill's utterance itself tells us a relation between her and the object indicated. We carry that information over into the report, within the 'that' clause. Nothing more seems needed. So, although the report goes some way towards locating the demonstrated object within her own perspective, it does not locate that perspective within that of the hearer. All we need here is

whatever is necessary for the reference to *Jill* to be successful. Further, if (7) is an adequate report, but the content of what Jill said is sensitive to quite small changes in her perspective, then (7) will fail fully to individuate that content. Correct reporting will guide us towards content, but not fix it entirely.

We can confirm that in reporting an indexical and understanding that report, we do not need to locate the reported speaker's perspective within our own, by considering some further examples. The following involve time, a topic I take up from a different angle in the last section.

(8)   Dan said 'Fred will leave tomorrow'.

We can put that into indirect speech as

(9)   Dan said that Fred would leave the next day.

(9) is the natural rendering, and provides all that we require of a report of (8). Yet as with (7) it gives no hint of when or where Dan made his utterance. We interpret the indexical within Dan's perspective, but do not relate it to our own. Similar remarks apply to

(10)   Jack said 'I shall now cut the cake'.

A report might run

(11)   Jack said that he would cut the cake straightaway.

In these cases, (7), (9) and (11), no introductory scene-setting phrase is required, and the reports in indirect speech are uninformative about the relation of the speaker's perspective to the reporter's. This strongly suggests that where an introductory phrase is required, it does not need to be very specific about the speaker's own relation to the indicated object. For nothing very specific about that relation is needed when an introductory phrase is not required, so that in general accurate and adequate reporting does not require a high level of specificity.

Consider this variant on Sainbury's story of the rabbit that was misidentified as a bear. Mark and Jimmy take a walk in the woods. Something moves in the undergrowth, but neither of us is able to identify it. Nervously, Jimmy conjectures 'That might be a bear'. Mark later reports 'Indicating something that moved, Jimmy said that it might have been a bear'. This seems up to scratch as a report, but gives minimal scene-setting. It is fairly unspecific about Jimmy's perspective. Almost all it provides is the minimum to forestall the question 'What did Jimmy say might have been a bear?', and not much is needed

to provide this minimum. The anaphora does not relate to any definitely referring expression in the introductory phrase, but only to an existential quantifier.

2. Cotenability

Sainsbury's strategy involves investigating the constraints upon accurate and adequate reports of utterances containing indexicals, with a view to regarding these as constraints upon meaning. This strategy will only work if the constraints are fairly definite, and if they are sufficiently strong for the task, intuitively regarded. Considering the cases where an introductory phrase is required if the report is to be satisfactory, the constraints on the reports are constraints on the introductory phrases. For what occurs inside the 'that' clause itself remains the same, whether we insist on full scene-setting or are content with little. Both in (3) and in (4) we have only 'there was a bird on it' within the 'that' clause. The fuller the scene-setting, the tighter the constraints. If these are also constraints on meaning, then the tighter the constraints on reporting, the tighter will be those on meaning, at least in some respects. If the previous section is right, however, the constraints on reporting, where an introductory phrase is required, do not require very much of that phrase. So the corresponding constraints on meaning will be slack. Constraints on reporting alone do not determine any differences in meaning that might arise from a fairly wide range of differing relations a speaker might have to an indicated object, including differing beliefs about it. Within wide limits, *how* the speaker is thinking about the indicated object makes no difference to how a report can accurately be made.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Sainsbury adds to the criteria derived from the constraints of reported speech another one, the Fregean test in terms of rational cotenability, in order to individuate meanings in an intuitively satisfying way. My concern here is to point out how much of the work is being done by rational cotenability. The example of the twice-seen ship brings out the point. Where 'that was built in Japan' and 'that was not built in Japan' are rationally cotenable, no constraints on reporting yield a distinction of meaning. All the work is done by the test of cotenability.

There is a disappointing side to this conclusion. For one might have wanted a notion of meaning that could be used to *explain* rational

cotenability in the puzzling cases, by showing us *what* the meaning of the one sentence is, and what the meaning of the other, and from that enable us to see that the meanings are different in a way that allows for rational cotenability. Some notion of mode of presentation might have been hoped to do this job, but I agree with Sainsbury that it cannot. Since constraints on correct reports also do not provide the answer, we remain much in the dark.

3. Reducibility and time

Sainsbury's thesis of reducibility is that all indexical tokens are reducible: indexical speech can always be reported by words which, in their content-ascribing role, are not indexical (though they may be anaphoric). He has illustrated this thesis quite widely. I confine my discussion to some points about time.

Suppose one were to start an argument as follows: 'lepidoptera are unreal. For it is essential to their reality that each of them should be subject to the determinations caterpillar, chrysalis and butterfly. These characteristics are mutually incompatible, but every organism of the order has them all'. This argument is not impressive. It is in this case a good riposte to resolve any appearance of contradiction by pointing out that no organism is at the same time a caterpillar, chrysalis and butterfly. If we make the same move in reply to McTaggart's argument, as he supposes that we will, then we have fallen into a trap, enmeshing us in the famous vicious infinite regress. The corresponding move about lepidoptera does not involve us in a regress, and this difference itself hints that there is something special about the determinations past, present and future. Let us, however, stay with the butterflies a little longer, and consider a different reply to the argument. Instead of objecting, we ask for explanation. We ask how 'has' is being used when the propounder claims, for instance, that every Painted Lady has all the characteristics, namely being a caterpillar, a chrysalis and a butterfly. The propounder cannot intend merely to claim that a Painted Lady has each of them at some time or other, for then there is not even a smidgeon of an appearance of contradiction. Nor can 'has' be intended as a temporal present tense, since then the claim would be too obviously false. The idea must be that 'has' represents a tenseless copula. Then the claim implies, where PL names a Painted Lady,

> (12)   PL is a caterpillar and PL is a chrysalis and PL is a
>   butterfly.

In (12) the occurrences of 'is' are to be understood tenselessly. The
trouble is that it does not seem possible to understand (12), as intended,
so as to make it true. If it were, then I could point to a particular Painted
Lady flying around my buddleia and assert truly 'That is a caterpillar'.
But I cannot do this.

What I have done is not to object to the argument directly by giving
a reason why one of its premises is false. Rather, I have asked for
clarification of the premise, and simply noted that on each possible
reading it is obviously false or irrelevant.

To revert to time. McTaggart himself asserts that every event has all
of the characteristics past, present and future. This is one of *his* pre-
mises, not something derived from a theory of another philosopher. He
has therefore to make that premise to some degree plausible to the
reader if the reader is to take him seriously. There has to be some
pre-theoretic understanding of the concepts involved that gives the
premise some appearance of being worthy of belief. But, if it has
such an appearance, it is proper to probe it by asking for clarification,
in case the appearance trades on some ambiguity or unclarity. So it is
proper to ask how *McTaggart* is using 'has' when he claims that every
event has all of past, present and future.

As with the butterflies, 'has all' cannot mean 'has at some time or
other each'. That would dissolve the appearance of contradiction before
the argument got going. Nor does McTaggart intend a temporal present
tense, as his premise would be too obviously false. As before, 'has'
must be intended as a tenseless copula. So, for example, what he is
claiming implies the truth of the conjunction

> (13)   The Battle of Hastings is (tenselessly) past, and the Battle
>   of Hastings is present, and the Battle of Hastings is future.

But I seem no more able to refer to the Battle of Hastings and truly
assert that it is future than I am able to refer to my fluttering Painted
Lady and assert truly that it is a caterpillar. I can assert truly, tense-
lessly, that I am a human being, but not that I am a baby. The attribution
of a predicate denoting a developmental stage requires a tensed copula.
One suggestion might be that the only way of *understanding* the copula
in a statement of the form '*e* is past' is as tensed. In which case (13)
would not make sense, as it would purport to give the copula a reading

it cannot bear. But that is a bad line to take, since the copula can be understood tenselessly. Here the special features of temporal predicates come into play. All we have to do, but also what we must do, is to think of 'past', 'present' and 'future' as taking over all and only the function of the corresponding tenses. (13) is then just another way of saying

> (14)   The Battle of Hastings happened, is happening, and will happen.

But McTaggart is not going to look us in the eye with a straight face and sincerely assert (14). It is notable that when he gives his own support for the claim that every event has all of past, present and future, he resorts to tenses. He says 'If M is past, it has been present and future. If it is future, it will be present and past', and so on. These propositions are of course unexceptionable, but they do not support the claim that every event *has* all of past, present and future, on any understanding that we have yet found of it.

It seems to me that we have here a philosophical illusion of meaning, in some ways like the illusion that we can say 'sensations are private' and mean something that is both logically necessary and a deep metaphysical fact about sensations. When someone says to us that every event has all three of the properties of being past, present and future, we are inclined to assent. It seems to be saying something true, and indeed conceptually necessary. But when we try to spell our that claim, we persistently find it turning into an obvious falsehood. Hugh Mellor's discussion (1981, pp. 89–102) is a case in point. Mellor claims that our concept of tense commits us to thinking that every event has all three temporal characteristics, and he represents this claim as his

> (15)   P*e* & N*e* & F*e*

(15) is read '*e* is past and *e* is present and *e* is future'. He is explicit that in it the copula is tenseless, and that '*e* is past' is equivalent to '*e* has happened', and so on for the other conjuncts. It follows that (15) is equivalent to

> (16)   *e* has happened, is happening, and will happen.

and that Mellor is claiming that our concept of tense commits us to the truth of (16). But (15) in its intended reading, is unwarranted. The only possible warrant is what McTaggart offered, that if M is past, it was present and future, etc. But that does not support (15). If we were committed to (15) by our concepts of tense, the conclusion would be

a very strong one, that if ever anybody uses a tensed sentence, such as that he had Shredded Wheat for breakfast, he is committed to an absurdity. This is far stronger a conclusion than Mellor is aiming for. His goal is the much more limited one of proving that there are no tensed *facts*. The illusion here seems to be that (15) has a sense in which it is true both that we are committed to it by our concept of tense and that it is equivalent to (16).

What we should say instead is that the decisive mistake has already been made when one asserts, or assents to, that every event has all of the characteristics past, present and future. Perhaps there is some such implicit train of thought as this: for each of '*e* is past', '*e* is present' and '*e* is future', there is some possible token that is true. Each of these true tokens must be true in virtue of something. They will be true in virtue of the facts that *e* is past, *e* is present and *e* is future. But then there must be these facts, all three of them. And then the conjunction '*e* is past and *e* is present and *e* is future' will be true. This is (15). We must stop the argument getting to (15). We can see where the illusion comes in. When the train of thought gets to the point of citing alleged facts that *e* is past, *e* is present and *e* is future, it falls under the illusion that in so doing the use of the sentences '*e* is past' etc ceases to be indexical. The illusion is dispelled by remembering that '*e* is past' is just another way of saying that *e* happened. Then it is clear that there is no such trio of facts as that *e* happened, is happening and will happen.

The claim that every event has all the three characteristics is supposed to capture what Sainsbury calls the thesis of *passage*, but it fails to do so. He puts forward a version that mixes the use of tense with the expressions 'past', 'present' and 'future'. But with McTaggart in the background, this may be a dangerous thing to do. Might we try making do with tenses alone? Compound tenses are needed.

(17)   Of every event, (it is the case that it will happen, or it was the case that it will happen, or it will be the case that it will happen), and (it is the case that it is happening, or it was the case that it is happening, or it will be the case that it is happening), and (it is the case that it has happened, or it was the case that it has happened, or it will be the case that it has happened).

One clause in the first and last conjunct is redundant. E.g. it will be that *e* will happen if and only if *e* will happen. Further, the occurrences of 'it

is the case' are redundant: it is the case that *e* will happen, if and only if *e* will happen. Simplifying thus leaves

(18)   Of every event, (it will happen or it was the case that it will happen), and (it is happening, or it was the case that it is happening, or it will be the case that it is happening), and (it has happened, or it will be the case that it has happened).

Sainsbury illustrates his reducibility thesis for the case of time by means of the example 'Our finest hour lies in the future', claiming that in the report 'He said that our finest hour lies in the future' indexicality gives way to anaphora. We should compare this example with an utterance having the same content but using tense instead of the phrase 'in the future'. So consider 'Our finest hour will come'. The report of this is just 'He said that our finest hour would come'. In this we have a change in the mood of the verb instead of anaphora. Or is the change in the mood of the verb tantamount to anaphora? I am unsure about this, but the question needs answering if we are to be confident of Sainsbury's thesis.

My principal worry about the reducibility thesis, however, relates to something I have already expressed. The thesis is expressed as one about reports of indexicals, namely that indexical speech can always be reported by words which, in their content-ascribing role, are not indexical. The thesis gains significance, however, in the context of Sainsbury's first guiding hypothesis, that constraints on reporting speech can be treated as guides to meaning. If that guiding hypothesis is taken to imply that an accurate and adequate report, not containing indexicals, is sufficient to identify the thought the speaker expressed using an indexical, then the thesis of reducibility, together with the hypothesis, implies that there are no essentially indexical thoughts. But the example of the twice-seen ship, together with an appreciation of how lax are the requirements of indexical reports from the point of view of identifying the speaker's perspective, seems to show that an accurate and adequate report does not suffice to identify the speaker's thought. (3) is offered, rightly, as a correct report, but the words of that report are correct not only for the envisaged situation, but would also be correct in a number of other situations in which the original speaker's thoughts were different from those in the envisaged situation. They would be correct even in the case where the original speaker was irrational. If the two occurrences of 'it' in (3) are to be assigned different meanings, as they

are in the envisaged situation, we cannot rely on the correctness of the report to supply those meanings. If so, this leaves open the possibility that the meaning of the anaphoric pronoun is dependent on that element in the original speaker's thought corresponding to his use of an index-ical. And that in turn leaves open the possibility that the original speaker's thought was essentially indexical.

If this is correct, the reducibility thesis is of lesser importance than one might think, for it will not after all be possible to use it to show that there are no indexical thoughts. It is unclear whether these con-siderations apply to tensed utterances. If, as I suspect, they do, the significance of the reducibility thesis is lessened in this case too.

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