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OBJECTIVE SUBJECTIVITY: ALLOCENTRIC AND EGOCENTRIC

REPRESENTATIONS IN THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE

by

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Overview of the Chapters

One common use of the notions of objectivity and subjectivity is to demarcate kinds of judgment (or thought or belief). On such a usage, prototypically objective judgments concern matters of empirical and mathematical fact such as *the moon has no atmosphere* and *two and two are four*. In contrast, prototypically subjective judgments concern matters of value and preference such as *Mozart is better than Bach* and *anchovy ice cream is disgusting*. In chapter 1, I examine various theoretical proposals for how to account for the objectivity and subjectivity of judgments. The theory I argue for—a correspondence theory of objectivity—explicates the objectivity/subjectivity of a judgment in terms of the mind-independence/mind-dependence of the properties picked out by the predicates in the judgment. Among the proposals that I argue against are the suggestions that the objectivity of a judgment requires that the judgment is agreed upon (the consensus theory) or that the judgment not have indexical constituents (the indexical theory).

Central to my arguments in this chapter is the question of what the bearers of the properties of subjectivity and objectivity are. I consider three candidates. The first holds that entire judgments are the bearers of objectivity or subjectivity. The second and third candidates hold that the bearers are the conceptual constituents of judgments, that is, conceptual equivalents of general and singular terms respectively. I argue for the view

that general (predicative) concepts (construed as mental representations) are the ultimate bearers of objectivity and subjectivity. I then argue that this result is best explained by a correspondence theory, for indexical theories locate objectivity and subjectivity at singular term constituents of judgment and consensus theories treat entire judgments as the bearers of objectivity and subjectivity.

In chapter 2 I turn to further develop the correspondence theory of objectivity against a backdrop of naturalized accounts of mental representation. Using examples drawn from cognitive scientific research on visual object recognition, navigation, and mental imagery, I develop a notion of subjectivity modeled on the point-of-view or perspective embodied in imagistic representations. To see how pictorial representations embody a point of view consider two photographs of the same object taken from two different angles. Compare, for example, two photographs taken of a person's face: The first may be head-on, the other may show the head in profile. The camera that produced the photos occupied two different points of view with respect to the person's head. The different positions and orientations of the camera constitute the points of view of the camera with respect to the subject. The representational contents of the photographs produced include content about these points of view. We can tell by looking at the photographs whether the camera was in front of or to the side of the person's face. I offer that the distinction between subjective and objective (egocentric and allocentric) representations is a distinction between representations that have and representations that lack this kind of point of view. The essence of this kind of point of view is a property of

mental representations that include in their content the representing subject. Spelling this out further yields the following definitions. A subject S has a subjective representation R of X if and only if the representational content of R includes relations S bears to X . A subject S has an objective representation R of X if and only if the representational content of R does not include relations that S bears to X .

In this chapter I also sketch a way of understanding the objective/subjective distinction within naturalized accounts of representation that construe representational content as being determined by causal relations between representations and what they represent. I show how the above definitions may be spelled out within a framework that explains R 's representing X in terms of R 's having the function of carrying information about X . I show how these kinds of approaches fit with the correspondence theory by discussing cases in which what is represented exists independently (or dependently) of the representing subject.

In chapter 3 I take up the topic of the subjectivity of conscious experience. Central to my discussion is the infamous Nagel-Jackson 'knowledge argument' and the indexical theory of subjectivity that has grown largely as a response to it. I show how the correspondence account is able to deal with the considerations raised by the knowledge argument without falling prey to problems that befall indexical theories.

The gist of the knowledge argument is as follows. A person that has never had any experiences as of seeing a red thing may nonetheless have exhaustive knowledge of the physical goings on in the nervous system of an individual seeing red. Such a knowledgeable person may know all the physical facts about seeing red without having a red experience. But suppose this knowledgeable individual was to finally have a red experience. Many find it intuitive to suppose that such an individual would learn something new, namely, they would learn what it is like to see red. Anti-physicalistic conclusions are supposed to follow on the supposition that learning what it is like to see red involves learning some new fact. Prior to having the experience, the subject knew all the physical facts; thus in learning a new fact after having a red experience, the subject learns a non-physical fact. Thus, allegedly, physical facts do not exhaust all the facts, since they do not include certain facts about experience. Knowledge of physical facts leaves out knowledge of subjective facts.

One kind of physicalist response to the knowledge argument has been to grant that something new (and subjective) is learned, while giving a physicalistic account of what subjectivity amounts to. Foremost among such responses is the indexical response due to philosophers such as Lycan (1987, 1996) Tye (1995) and Rey (1997). To take one instance as representative: Lycan's account of subjectivity is as follows. Experiences are representations. My visual experience of my blue coffee mug is a mental representation of the mug as being blue. When I introspect my experience, I form a second-order representation of the first-order representation of the coffee mug. Other people may form

syntactically similar second-order representations, but those representations will be about their first-order states, not mine. The crucial analogy here is to the use of indexicals in speech. When I say “my leg hurts” I am referring to my leg, and only I can refer to my leg by using that utterance. You may use a syntactically, morphologically, and phonologically similar construction: you may utter the words “my leg hurts”, but in doing so, you would be representing your leg, not mine. Analogously, only I can represent my first-order states by the introspective application of self-referential indexical concepts. And this, according to Lycan, is the ultimate explication of subjectivity.

One pressing problem for the indexical account is whether the indexical/nonindexical distinction can be accounted for in naturalistic, yet alone neuroscientific, terms. A prevalent characterization of indexicality is that it arises when the content of a representation depends on context. Many naturalistic accounts of representation are externalist, in that they favor a view of content whereby a representation has its content in virtue of certain relations it bears to environmental states. If the representation bore different relations to different environmental states, then it would have different content. The problem is that such an externalist account of representation makes all representation look indexical, thus there is no indexical/nonindexical distinction with which to reconstruct a subjective/objective distinction. I propose to circumvent this and other problems by showing how the correspondence theory is able to handle the considerations raised by the knowledge argument at least as well as indexical theories of subjectivity.

In chapter 4 I examine several ways in which the topic of spatial representation bears on the offered account of objectivity/subjectivity. There is a long tradition of discerning deep connections between the notions of space, objectivity and subjectivity. Much of the importance of this chapter is to reevaluate the alleged connections. I address arguments due to Peter Strawson and Gareth Evans that space is a necessary requirement for objectivity. I find their arguments wanting and argue instead that on several interpretations of their thesis, it is false.

Though my project is largely concerned with metaphysical as opposed to epistemological questions (“Are all *Xs* also *Ys*?” as opposed to “How do you know all *Xs* are also *Ys*?”) I do not wish to remain silent on epistemological questions. I turn to such questions in chapter 5. I address the question of how one comes to know whether something is objective or subjective. The answer to this question is given by way of showing how the correspondence theory accounts for the traditional association of the objective with the public and the subjective with the private. This account grows directly out of my explication of metaphysical objectivity and subjectivity.