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INTENTIONAL IDENTITY *

A WELL-KNOWN epigram might serve both as a motto for this paper and (at least arguably) as a serious example of its topic. For if a speaker asserts:

(1) I saw a man on the stair yesterday at time t_1, and I saw him (the same man) on the stair again today at time t_2

in such a sense that it would be compatible with his also saying:

(2) No man but me was on the stair either yesterday at time t_1 or today at time t_2

then the identity he means to ascribe in (1) to the man on the stair is what I am calling intentional identity, rather than actual identity. I am sure that in fact this is a proper example of what I shall be discussing; but the intentionality of the verb 'to see', though I think it can be established, is bound up with matters of controversy that I do not wish to touch upon here; so I pass quickly on from seeing to believing.

Etymology is more often a hindrance than a help in philosophy, but in this case it may be a help to remember the metaphor that underlies the words 'intention' and 'intentional': '*intendo arcum in . . .*', 'I draw a bow at . . .' For a number of archers may all point their arrows at one actual target, a deer or a man (real identity); but we may also be able to verify that they are all pointing their arrows the same way, regardless of finding out whether there is any shootable object at the point where the lines of fire meet (intentional identity). We have intentional identity when a number of people, or one person on different occasions, have attitudes with a common focus, whether or not there actually is something at that focus.

Suppose a reporter is describing an outbreak of witch mania, let us say in Gotham village:

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* To be presented in an APA symposium of the same title, December 29, 1967. Commentators will be L. Jonathan Cohen (Columbia University) and James F. Ross (University of Pennsylvania).

(3) Hob thinks a witch has blighted Bob's mare, and Nob wonders whether she (the same witch) killed Cob's sow.

Quine has distinguished *opaque* and *transparent* ways of construing indirect-speech clauses, but neither sort of construction will give an appropriate sense to (3). For if the indirect-speech clauses in (3) are construed opaquely, then each clause must stand on its own syntactically; this is graphically shown by Quine's way of enclosing such clauses in square brackets; and Quine forbids syntactical liaisons, like the binding of variables, to cross this barrier. But on the face of it we have in (3) a pronoun, 'she' or 'the same', bound to an antecedent, 'a witch', that lies outside the clause containing the pronoun; so unless this *prima facies* can be discounted (and I shall presently consider some possible ways of doing that), the clauses in (3) cannot be construed opaquely.

(In speaking, as I have just done, of a pronoun as being bound to its antecedent, I am deliberately adopting a jargon that serves to express an important syntactical insight of Quine's: that *certain* uses of pronouns correspond very closely to the bound variables of symbolic logic and that the relation of these pronouns to their antecedents corresponds to the binding of variables by quantifiers and other operators. I know that some philosophers and some linguists are opposed to Quine's view, but I am disposed to attach far more weight to the way the view is confirmed by the detailed working out of numerous and varied examples, such as occur in Quine's works and mine. In previous writing I have used the medieval term 'relative pronouns'; but I now think it is awkward, except in writings on the history of logic, to divest this term of its familiar grammatical sense; and I propose that the familiar jargon of binding, scope, and so on should be extended from symbolic language to appropriate pieces of the vernacular.)

On the other hand, there is no obvious way of construing the indirect speech in (3) transparently. We might try:

(4) As regards some witch, Hob thinks she has blighted Bob's mare, and Nob wonders whether she killed Cob's sow.

But (4) would express (what the speaker took to be) the *real,* not the intentional, identity of a witch; and (unlike the wise men of Gotham) our reporter might mistakenly believe that there are no witches (not just that spells against livestock are ineffectual, but that nobody ever casts them); in that case he might, and could with consistency, assert (3) and deny (4). Nor do we fare any better with something like:

(5) As regards somebody, Hob thinks that she is a witch and has blighted Bob's mare, and Nob wonders whether she killed Cob's sow.

For (5) would imply that Hob and Nob had some one person in mind as a suspected witch; whereas it might be the case, to the knowledge of our reporter, that Hob and Nob merely thought there was a witch around and their suspicions had not yet settled on a particular person.

The difference between (3) and (4) corresponds to a difference that was much discussed by Jean Buridan and illustrated with numerous examples; (3) and (4) correspond respectively to the first and the second member of such pairs as the following:

(6) I owe John a horse
(7) There is some horse that I owe John

(8) John wants a stamp
(9) There is some stamp that John wants

The difference is gropingly brought out by saying 'Just *a* so-and-so, not necessarily a definite so-and-so' for examples like (6) and (8), and 'I mean a definite so-and-so' for examples like (7) and (9). Similarly, it would be quite natural to insert the adjective 'definite' before 'witch' in (4), or again after 'somebody' in (5). No clue is to be found here to the real logical difference; for of course witches, horses, and stamps do not come in two species, the definite ones and the indefinite ones. Frege indeed remarked that 'referring to an indefinite so-and-so' often really means 'referring indefinitely to a so-and-so', and we might try to interpret similarly the phrase 'a definite so-and-so'; but there is no *definite* reference made by the "some" phrase in (4), (7), or (9), so this is no clue either. Buridan's own attempt to characterize the difference is made in hopelessly obscure terminology. He speaks of the object phrase in propositions like (6) and (8) as calling up, *appellans,* a certain *ratio.* But the criterion of identity for a *ratio* remains quite obscure; and the semantical term *'appellatio'* neither has a consistent technical use in medieval logic generally (different authors use it differently), nor is carefully explained in Buridan's own text. The most one can say is that *appellatio* of a *ratio* in Buridan is *something like* a term's having *ungerade Bedeutung* in Frege—but of course Frege's theory is very obscure too.

All the same, I am strongly inclined to think that Buridan was here on to an important logical distinction—and that the *same* difference of logical structure is involved in all these contrasted pairs; for it is easy to catch on to what the intended difference is and transfer the learning to a fresh example; we have not got to learn it anew for each intentional verb or context. Only at present we (or I at least) are not able to say what the difference is. We are in the same position as the medievals were in about the contrasted pairs they used to show the differences between *suppositio confusa* (the first members of the following pairs) and *suppositio determinata* (the second members):

(10) In order to see, I need an eye
(11) There is an eye that I need to see with

(12) There always has been a man alive
(13) There is a man who has always been alive

This difference can be clearly explained in modern logic as a difference in the order of application of two quantifiers or other operators. We have no such clear view of the other problem. Even the difference between this pair:

(14) Hob thinks some women are witches
(15) There are some women Hob thinks are witches

is not *clearly* explicable in terms of a difference in scope for the quantified phrase 'some women':

(16) Hob thinks that, as regards some women x and y, x and y are witches
(17) As regards some women x and y, Hob thinks x and y are witches

For Quine has raised some difficulties about the quantification in (17) and the like; though others (Hintikka, Prior, and myself) argue that they need not be insuperable. But (3) raises an even worse difficulty: a pronoun in one indirect-speech clause is on the face of it bound to a quantified phrase in *another* such oblique context; the scope of the quantified phrase thus seems *both* to lie wholly within the earlier oblique context *and* to cover something in the later context. I cannot even sketch a structure of operators that would make good logical sense of this; I go on to consider a couple of ways of evading the difficulty.

First, it might be suggested that 'she' in (3) ought not to be glossed as 'the same witch', but should rather be regarded as an anaphoric substitute (what I have called a pronoun of laziness) to avoid repetitious language; (3) would then be a substitute for something like this:

(18) Hob thinks a witch has blighted Bob's mare, and Hob wonders whether the witch who blighted Bob's mare killed Cob's sow

This suggestion is easily dismissed: for our reporter might be justified in asserting (3) if he had heard Hob say 'The witch has blighted Bob's mare' and heard Nob say 'Maybe the witch killed Cob's sow', even if Hob had not thought or said anything about Cob's sow nor Nob about Bob's mare. Of course our reporter would somehow have to know that when they used the words 'the witch' Hob and Nob *meant to refer to the same person.* But this would not necessarily mean his knowing that there was some ("definite") person to whom they both meant to refer; rather, the italicized phrase is itself yet another example of our problematic intentional identity.

This in fact points up the importance of intentional identity as a problem in the philosophy of logic. We very often take ourselves to know, when we hear the discourse of others, that they are meaning to refer to some one person or thing—and that, without ourselves being able to identify this person or thing, without our even being certain that there really is such a person or thing to identify. What we are claiming to know in such cases—let alone, whether the claim is justified—must remain obscure so long as intentional identity is obscure.

There is another objection to this proposed method of analyzing away an intentional identity in (3). Although I see no reason to doubt that:

(19) The witch who blighted Bob's mare killed Cob's sow

is analyzable as:

(20) Just one witch blighted Bob's mare and she killed Cob's sow

it seems doubtful whether these two are mutually replaceable *salva vertitate* in a context like 'Nob wonders whether'. If we prefix 'Nob wonder whether' to (19), the result seems to be analyzable, not as:

(21) Nob wonders whether (the following is the case:) just one witch blighted Bob's mare, and she killed Cob's sow

but rather in some such way as this:

(22) Nob assumes that just one witch blighted Bob's mare, and Nob wonders whether she (that same witch) killed Cob's sow

It is not easy to be sure about this, because it is easy to confound the analysis (21), which I have just rejected, with the following:

(23) Nob wonders whether just one witch blighted Bob's mare and (Nob wonders whether) she killed Cob's sow

Objections to (23) as an analysis of 'Nob wonders whether the witch who blighted Bob's mare killed Cob's sow' naturally do not carry over to (21). (If the words in parentheses are omitted, as they might easily be, from (21) and (23), we get a verbally identical sentence that could mean either; hence the likelihood of confusing the two.) But even allowing for this, I think (22) is the right sort of analysis rather than (21). Now if so, the analysis of the second conjunct in (18) would introduce intentional identity over again; for (22) manifestly does so—'she' or 'that same' is bound to an antecedent, 'just one witch', in another oblique clause. In that case (18) is quite useless as a way of getting rid of intentional identity.

This objection to (18), if it is sound, also serves against another possible way of trying to deal with (3): namely, to say that (3) is true just in case the following is true for *some* suitable interpretation of '*F*':

(24) Hob thinks that the (one and only) witch that is *F* has blighted Bob's mare, and Nob wonders whether the witch that is *F* killed Cob's sow

For supposing we have such a reading of '*F*', we should have exactly the same difficulty over the second conjunct of (24) as over the second conjunct of (18): it looks as though intentional identity, which was to be analyzed away, recurs in the analysis.

There is further trouble about (24). On the face of it, if (24) *is* true for some suitable reading of '*F*', then (3) is true; there are, I think, some difficulties about this, but I waive them. Anyhow, it is very doubtful whether the converse holds; whether, if (3) is true, (24) is true for some suitable reading of '*F*'. For, as I said, the truth of (3) could be established (in a suitable set of background circumstances) if Hob said "The witch has blighted Bob's mare" and Nob said "Maybe the witch killed Cob's sow"—provided that, in using the phrase 'the witch', Hob and Nob meant to refer to the same person. Now is it in truth necessary, if Hob and Nob are to mean to refer to the same person as "the witch," that they should both have some one definite description actually in mind, or even, one producible from each of them by a suitable technique of questioning? This appears to me to stand or fall with the corresponding theory, held by Russell and by Frege (cf. his article "Der Gedanke"), that any ordinary proper name is used equivocally if it does not go proxy for some *one* definite description; and in spite of these great names, such a theory seems to me extremely ill-founded and implausible.

I have only stated a problem, not tried to solve it; it seems to me interesting and important. It surely brings out how much is obscure in the logic of quite simple constructions of ordinary language. Strawson has spoken of ordinary language as a maze whose paths we tread unhesitatingly. 'Maze' suggests something in a gentleman's formal garden, with neat box hedges and a discoverable plan; to my mind it would be better to speak of a clearing in a jungle, whose paths are only kept free if logicians work hard with the machete, and where he who does not hesitate may none the less be lost.

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