



Meaning and the Self

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Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*

5.631 The thinking, presenting subject; there is no such thing.

If I wrote a book “The world as I found it”, I should also have therein to report on my body and say which members obey my will and which do not, etc. This then would be a method of isolating the subject or rather of showing that in an important sense there is no subject: that is to say, of it alone in this book mention could not be made.

5.632 The subject does not belong to the world but it is a limit of the world.

Artist and Picture

From J.W. Dunne: *The Serial Universe*

- The artist sees a stream in a valley. He paints what he sees. But he has left something out: himself, the one who is doing the seeing and painting.
- So the artist paints a picture of an artist painting the stream in the valley that he sees. But he hasn't managed to put (all of) himself in the picture. He has put in the painter of the picture of the scene, but left out the painter of the painter painting the scene.
- And so on.
- From which Dunne draws many conclusions about space, time and the universe.

The truth or falsity of Bradley's dictum depends upon the meaning it attaches to the word 'reality'. If it refers to reality pure and undefiled by any attempt at translation into terms of human comprehension, his statement, probably, is true (though you must not ask me to give reasons for that belief). But if the word means reality in the scientific sense,—rational *cum* empirical reality,—then the assertion is, definitely, wrong. The difference is that which lies between 'things as they are' and 'things as they seem to be'. Of 'things as they are' we know nothing rational; and, if we suspect Bradley to be right, it is merely because of the feeling of dissatisfaction aroused in us by any regress. But of 'things as they seem to be'—things as they affect an *observer*—we can say a great deal. As I hope to show in this book, we can say, with absolute assurance, that 'reality' *as it appears to human science* must needs be an infinite regress. And it is only when it is expressed in that form that we can treat it as the reality upon which we can rely.

CHAPTER II

ARTIST AND PICTURE

A certain artist, having escaped from the lunatic asylum in which, rightly or wrongly, he had been confined, purchased the materials of his craft and set to work to make a complete picture of the universe.

He began by drawing, in the centre of a huge canvas, a very small but very finely executed representation of the landscape as he saw it. The result (except for the execution) was like the sketch labelled X_1 in FIGURE 1.

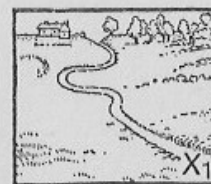


FIGURE 1.

On examining this, however, he was not satisfied. Something was missing. And, after a moment's reflection, he realised what that something was. *He* was part of the universe, and this fact had not yet been indicated. So the question arose: How was he to add to the picture a representation of himself?

Dunne's Painting



THE SERIAL UNIVERSE

Now, this artist may have been insane, but he was not mad enough to imagine that he could paint himself as standing in the ground which he had already portrayed as lying in front of him. So he shifted his easel a little way back, engaged a passing yokel to stand as a model, and enlarged his picture into the sketch shown as X_2 (FIGURE 2).

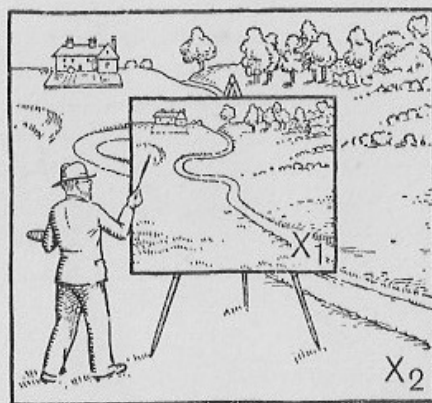


FIGURE 2.

But still he was dissatisfied. With the remorseless logic of a lunatic (or genius—you may take your choice) he argued thus:

This picture is perfectly correct as far as it goes. X_2 represents the real world as I—the real artist—suppose it to be, and X_1 represents that world as an artist who was *unaware of his own existence* would suppose it to be. No fault can be found in the

ARTIST AND PICTURE

pictured world X_2 or in the pictured artist, or in that pictured artist's picture X_1 . But I—the real artist—*am* aware of my own existence, and am trying to portray myself as part of the real world. The pictured artist is, thus, an incomplete description of me, and of my relation to the universe.

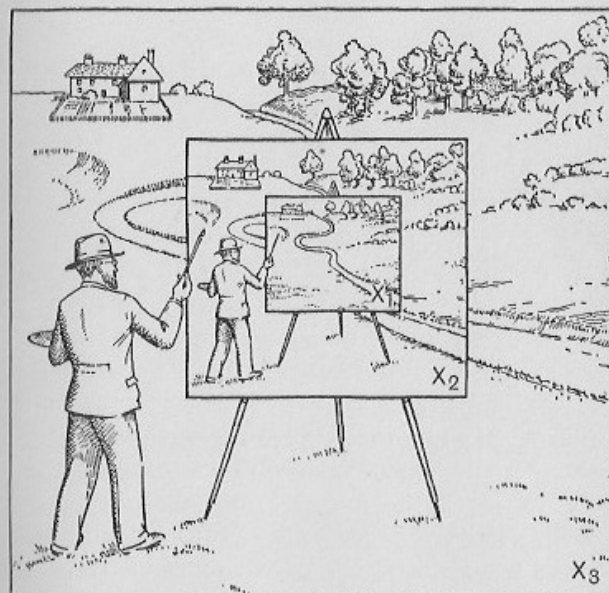


FIGURE 3.

So saying, he shifted his easel again, seized his brush and palette, and, with a few masterly strokes, expanded his picture into X_3 (FIGURE 3).

Of course, he was still dissatisfied. The artist

Basic Ideas

1. The subject is always part of the (full) truth-conditions of a thought or other mental episode; truth puts conditions on the episode and its subject, i.e. the self that is thinking etc.
2. The subject need not be part of the subject matter of a mental episode, that is, an object the episode is about, that the subject refers to or thinks about. But he can be. Then the self will be involved in the truth-conditions as subject *and* as object.
3. One cannot *replace* the self-as-subject (the person as the thinker of the thought) with the self-as-object (the same person as the person thought-about). (This is what Dunne keeps trying to do).



John Perry, 'The Self as Subject and Objects

February 2014
(APA)

1. Proto-chickens

- A proto-chicken looks like an ordinary chicken, except that it lacks eyes or other ways of sensing the external world.
- When it is hungry, it walks around the barnyard pecking and swallowing.
- If it pecks where there is a kernel of something edible --- corn or millet, perhaps--- this results in gaining nutrition.
- Proto-chickens thrive only in ecological niches where there is a lot of grain scattered around.

Proto-chicken's Peck: Success Conditions

There is a complex movement on the part of the chicken, the pecking and swallowing movement.

In certain conditions this is successful, relative to the goal of nutrition.

Conditions below the horizon (things the chicken doesn't
need to keep track of):

- (i) Environmental conditions: the way things work --- gravity the weight of kernels of corn and millet, etc.
- (ii) Architectural conditions: how proto-chickens work.

Proto-chicken's Peck: Incremental Success Conditions

Above the Horizon
(The chicken needs to keep track)

Where **a** is an episode of pecking by a proto-chicken, **a** will be successful, *given* normal environmental and architectural conditions, if:

$(\exists x, l)$ such that

x is a proto-chicken

$x =$ the agent of (**a**) &

$l =$ the spot on the ground right in front of(x) &

l is occupied by an edible kernel of something or other.

Episode
Relative Role

Agent
Relative Role

2. Near-Sighted Chickens

Near-sighted chickens pick up information via their eyes about what is going on in front of them, and then use it to guide their action. That is to say, they use perception to discover whether or not the success conditions of pecking are satisfied.

With fewer wasted pecks, they can survive in less kernel-rich environments.

Veridicality Conditions

Where episode **s** is a having of the sort of sensation normal near-sighted chickens have when there is something kernel like in front of them,

s is veridical iff,

($\exists x, l$) such that

x is a near-sighted chicken &

x = Subject(**s**) &

l = The spot on the ground in front of (**x**)

l is occupied by an edible kernel of something or other.

Episode-relative
role

Subject-relative
role

Near-Sighted Chicken Cognitive Architecture

Typical
Causation:

Hunger and
K-sensation

Internal
state

Pecking

Veridicality
conditions:
kernel in front of
perceiver

=

Truth conditions:
kernel in front of
subject

=

Success
conditions:
kernel in front of
agent

Role-Linkage

We have five episodes here: the hunger, the sensation, the doxastic state, and the pecking, and the episode of swallowing, digesting and getting nutrition

So there are five different episode relative roles:

The hungry chicken

The perceiving chicken

The “believing” chicken

The pecking chicken

The swallowing and digesting chicken

These roles are architecturally linked. The chicken doesn't need to worry about making sure that the same thing occupies all of them.

Harnessing Information

- The organism detects facts about its environment,
- This leads to actions that benefit the organism, given those facts.
- AND all the other facts below the horizon, that the organism doesn't need to keep track of, as they are architecturally and environmentally fixed
- Or, as we might say, there is transcendental unity of organisms relative to an environmental niche.

Role Linking

How does the chicken know, or “know”:

That the perceiver is the agent?

That the hungry chicken is the one that will receive nourishment?

That, if it sees a kernel, it will peck a kernel?

All of this is necessary for the practice of using the information gained by perception to guide action to make sense.

All of this is below the horizon. These things are fixed by the combination of environment and chicken architecture. So the chicken doesn't need to keep track of these things.

3. Kind Chickens

- Kind chickens are near-sighted chickens, except that they aren't quite so near-sighted, and they have buddies, who are basically proto-chickens, except they have a bit of hearing. In the less generous environment of near-sighted chickens, proto-chickens would starve, except for their kind buddies.
- Kind chickens go around the farmyard together with their proto-chicken buddies. When they see that here is a kernel of corn in front of their pals, they cluck. When the proto-chicken hears a cluck, it pecks.

Self-Attribution?

So Kind chickens can tell:

- a) When there is a kernel of corn in front (of themselves);
- b) When there is a kernel of corn in front of their buddy

We might say, in case b), that the buddy chicken *attributes* the property, “having a kernel of corn in front” to its proto-chicken pal. Should we then say that, in case a), the buddy chicken attributes, “having a kernel of corn in front” to itself?

To say this would be to suggest some common element between the two situations that kind chicken keeps track of. But this is a mistake.

Self-Attribution?

When a Kind Chicken attributes “having a kernel in front” to his buddy, that is because his buddy is playing a subject-relative role in its life; being the chicken seen and attended to.

When a Kind Chicken realizes that there is a kernel in front of it, that is because visual episode provides the information that the chicken it is an episode in the life of, has a kernel in front of it.

To attribute a property to itself, the chicken would need some way of thinking about itself as itself.

What we need

Our cognitive needs are more complicated than the hens. We need two represent ourselves in two ways:

- Primitively, as the hen does, as the subject who perceives, imagines, etc.
- As an object in the situations represented.

We need this because:

- We get information about ourselves not just as the subject, but as a public objects (our name, e.g.)
- For planning: we are not only agents, but objects the agent needs to deal with and plan around

BACK TO WITTGENSTEIN

We get into the truth-conditions of our own beliefs in two different ways, into the full truth-conditions as subjects and, sometimes, into the incremental truth-conditions as objects.

- We are in the truth-conditions of our own thoughts and belief-states *as subjects*, simply in virtue of being the owners of those states, as being the subjects who are in them.
 - We have to be for things to make any sense.
 - To be in the truth-conditions of our belief states as subjects, we need have no concept of ourselves, no mode of presentation of ourselves.

BACK TO WITTGENSTEIN

- We are in the truth conditions of our mental states as objects, when we think of ourselves via some subject-relative role that we in fact occupy.
 - When we think via the role of self, identity with the subject, we have beliefs and thoughts that are about the self in the ordinary sense.
 - When we think of ourselves via other roles we may occupy, say, “the person the my wife is annoyed with”, we may or may not realize that we are thinking about ourselves.

BACK TO WITTGENSTEIN

This is the elusiveness of the self, and the sense in which the self, that is the person doing the thinking and perceiving, is not in the world as the self finds it as other things are, but as the limit of that world.

However, it doesn't show that the self isn't just the person.

Elusive Subjects

- Every episode of thought, and every utterance, has a *full* subject: agent, time, place, as part of its truth-conditions, *below the horizon*.
- These can be articulated, so they are *also* above horizon, but they are not thereby eliminated. See Dunne.
- The Philosophy of Time is rife with such attempts, together with realizations that they have failed. Perhaps Ethics too.