

*About vs concerns**Daniel Morgan*

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I see the familiar form of a tiger emerge out of the long grass. I judge, about it, ‘That is a handsome animal’. Suppose the tiger is Tony Tiger. Tony is something my judgment is *about*. He is an *object* of my judgment. Tony also figures in the *truth-conditions* of the judgment. My judgment is true if and only Tony really is a handsome animal.

How, in general, do claims about what a judgment is about, or claims about what its object is, relate to claims about what its truth-conditions are? Focusing on the example just mentioned, a naïve answer is that they are equivalent. ‘Tony is something the judgment is about’ is equivalent to ‘Tony is something the truth of the judgment depends on’.

We can put pressure on the naïve answer by focusing on three things other than Tony that the truth of my ‘That is a handsome tiger’ judgment appears to depend on. In each case, it doesn’t seem quite as clear that the judgement is really *about* that thing as it is that the truth of the judgment depends on that thing.

First, in the actual world, Tony is handsome. In a different possible world, in which his hair has been badly singed, he isn’t. Pointing this out does nothing to undermine the idea that the ‘That is a handsome animal’ judgement I made is true (rather than false, or neither true nor false). So the truth-conditions of that judgment seem to involve the actual world rather than the different possible world in which Tony has been singed. My judgement is true if and only if Tony Tiger is handsome *at the actual world*. If the naïve answer just given is right, it follows that my judgment is *about* the actual world. The actual world is an object of the judgment.

Second, at the moment of judgment, Tony is handsome. At some earlier point of time, before his hair had grown out after his most recent singing, he was not. My ‘That is a handsome animal’ judgment still seems true. So its truth-conditions must involve the moment of judgement rather than the earlier moment when he his hair hadn’t come in yet. If the naïve answer is right, it follows that the ‘That is a handsome tiger’ judgment is *about* the moment of judgment. The moment of judgment is an object of the judgment.

Third, suppose that ‘handsome’ is context-sensitive in the following way: the extension of ‘is handsome’, as used by me, is those things that are disposed to produce a particular kind of excited shiver in me and my peers. In that case, whether my ‘That is a handsome animal’ judgment is true depends on how me and my peers are (do we experience that kind of shiver when exposed to Tony?). If the naïve answer is right, it follows that the ‘That is handsome tiger’ judgment is *about* me and my peers. Me and my peers are an object of the judgment.

In this paper, I canvass the idea there is no theoretically interesting difference between two ways of being involved in the truth-conditions of a judgment that the example we’ve just looked at illustrates. So, if we say, with the naïve answer, that the judgment is indeed

about not just Tony, but also the actual world, the current moment, and me and my peers, and leave it at that, there isn't any theoretically interesting distinction we've failed to draw. There are, I think, all sorts of *different* differences that the example might be taken to illustrate. I will outline some of them. But, on the face of it, there does not appear to be any single distinction that unifies them in the way that has been widely and, I'll argue, harmfully assumed.

Suppose we call the kind of involvement Tony has in the truth-conditions of the judgment 'about'-involvement. Call the type of involvement the actual world, the present moment, and me and my peers have in the judgment 'concerns'-involvement. I am happy to accept that, even just with the distinction introduced by reference to these examples, there might be some level of agreement about how to apply the distinction in at least some new cases. E.g. consider the property of *being an animal*. I predict that, with the 'about'/ 'concerns' distinction explained by reference to the examples already given, most people will be fairly confident that the property of being an animal should fall on the 'about' side (along with Tony) rather than the 'concerns' side (along with the actual world, the current moment, and me and my peers).

That alone isn't a significant concession to the idea of an about/concerns distinction. We can compare with Quine's attack on the analytic/synthetic distinction and Strawson and Grice's (1956) response to it. Strawson and Grice say the following:

'...those who use the terms 'analytic' and 'synthetic' do to a very considerable extent agree in the applications they make of them. They apply the term 'analytic' to more or less the same cases, withhold it in more or less the same cases, and hesitate over more or less the same cases.... In general, if a pair of contrasting expressions are habitually used in application to the same cases, *where these cases do not form a closed list*, this is a sufficient condition for saying that there are *kinds* of cases to which the expressions apply; and nothing more is needed for them to mark a distinction (1956: 142).

Suppose we accept that Grice and Strawson have pointed to some real data – e.g. most people will agree, without being drilled in these two examples, that 'All vixens are foxes' is a better candidate for being analytic than 'All vixens are wily'. Suppose we also accept that it follows that there is some distinction that peoples' use of 'analytic' and 'synthetic' is tracking. It doesn't follow that there is a *theoretically interesting* distinction that people are tracking. It doesn't even follow that there is a *single* distinction that different people who use 'analytic' and 'synthetic' are tracking. One person's use of 'analytic' or 'synthetic' might be keyed to whether the truth in question is one they find *utterly boring*. Another person's use might be keyed to whether they regard the truth as *being close to the core rather than the periphery close to the core of our web of beliefs*. These two peoples' uses of 'analytic'/ 'synthetic' are keyed to different distinctions (and, arguably, neither is keyed to a distinction that has the significance the analytic/synthetic distinction was supposed to have). But one can see how they might habitually use the terms in application to roughly the same cases of the sort Grice and Strawson think significant. Similarly, even if people habitually agree in their application of 'concerns'/ 'about' to some degree – and we'll see that there isn't much agreement in the application of the distinction to cases; to that extent the about/concerns distinction seems *worse off* than the analytic/synthetic distinction – it doesn't follow that there is some single interesting distinction they are tracking.

Why does it matter if there is a *single* distinction that is being tracked by theorists' use of 'about'/ 'concerns'? That, I think, follows from a plausible account of what it takes for an about/concerns distinction to be explanatorily useful. Mark Sainsbury (2002) canvasses a parallel account in relation to the Fregean notion of 'sense'. Sainsbury thinks the following about the term 'sense': if 'sense' is stipulatively tied to a single phenomenon (e.g. 'If a rational subject simultaneously believes, of a given thing, that it is F and it is not F, then she must have two different *senses* via which she apprehends that thing') and nothing further is said, then we can't *explain* that very phenomenon by reference to the notion of sense ('She could believe that *a* is F and *a* is not F without being irrational *because* she deployed two different senses'). That would be like saying that a pill causes sleep because it has a dormitive virtue. This isn't an explanation because our only handle on what a dormitive virtue is that it is something that causes sleep. The notion of 'sense' will earn its explanatory spurs, assuming it has some, by unifying different phenomena – e.g. by unifying a role in rational co-tenability of belief a role in intersubjective communication. As Sainsbury puts it:

The explanatory value of sense lies in its putative subsumption of a number of apparently distinct phenomena. But if we take any one phenomenon, ..., to invoke difference of sense is simply to redescribe the phenomenon in the theorist's preferred vocabulary (2002: 127).

We have more than one 'hook' onto the notion of sense and the interesting thing is that they are both hooks onto the same thing. The idea in the current paper is to see whether there is any distinction between two different ways an element can be involved in the truth-conditions of a judgment that fares well on this kind of test. If we introduce the about/concerns distinction using one 'hook' can we infer anything interesting about where an element stands in relation to some other 'hook' with reference to which we might equally have introduced it? If we can, then the distinction has a clear explanatory use – the same kind of use in subsuming apparently different phenomena that, if Frege and Sainsbury are right, the notion of 'sense' has. If we can't, then to invoke the about/concerns distinction is simply to re-describe a certain phenomenon in the theorist's preferred vocabulary (at best) or (at worst) a way of conflating different differences.

I'll begin by mentioning two target authors for this paper, which should also give a more general flavour of the kind of examples that those drawing an about/concerns distinction have been trying to do justice to.

Perry distinguishes things that a mental state is *about* and things it merely *concerns* so the label I am using is original with him (see 1986: 213). A famous example of his involves Z-landers, people who live in small isolated community in a place called Z-land and never leave that place. They speak and think about rain but, since they never leave that Z-land, they never have use for the judgment 'It is raining' outside of Z-land. The truth-conditions for that judgment (and for utterances of that sentence) involve Z-land. When a Z-lander judges 'It is raining' what she judges is true if and only if it is raining in Z-land. But, Perry wants to say, the judgment is not *about* Z land, it merely *concerns* it. As he also puts it, Z-land is an *unarticulated constituent* of the judgment. Other examples of Perry's include the thought about time of a 4 year old who hasn't heard of time-zones, or the thought about seasons of northern hemisphere inhabitants who don't understand that what season it is at a given time depends on which hemisphere you're in. The 4 year old in Sacramento judges 'It is 4pm' and the judgment is true if and only if it is 4pm *in the*

time-zone that Sacramento is in even though the 4 year old is not thinking *about a time zone* and has no articulated constituent in his judgment that refers to a time zone. The Northern Hemisphere inhabitant judges ‘July is a summer month’ and the judgment is true if and only if July is a summer month *in the Northern Hemisphere*. But they are not thinking *about* the Northern Hemisphere.

Kriegel (2015) distinguishes between things that are part of the *content* of a mental state vs those that are supplied by the *attitude* (or *mode*) of the state. For example, citing Brentano, he distinguishes that state of *believing in ghosts* from the state of *believing that ghosts exist*. The truth-conditions of the two states are the same – both are true if and only if ghosts exist. But there is still a difference. In the first case, the content is just ghosts, while the commitment to their existence is supplied by the attitude type of the state (the attitude here is something like: ‘believing in’). In the second case by contrast, both the ghosts, and the commitment to their existence, is part of the content (the attitude here is something like: ‘believing that’).¹

The about/concerns distinction applies to judgments, but it doesn’t just apply to them. For example, as the Kriegel case brought out, the distinction applies to *beliefs*. And, it also applies to states that are more naturally thought of in terms satisfaction-conditions than truth-conditions. E.g. some of have wanted to distinguish *John’s intention to dance* from *John intention that he himself dance* using that distinction. Both intentions have the same satisfaction conditions: each is satisfied if and only if John dances. Neither involves John thinking about himself ‘as someone else’ or ‘as another’ in such a way that John would not be able to answer ‘me’ if asked who needs to dance for the intention to be satisfied. But the first intention is about the act of dancing and concerns John, where the second intention is about the act of dancing and about John. In some sense, the first intention is more thoroughly subject-involving: its involving its subject is built into its being the kind of state that it is, and John being its subject, so that John does not even need to be something the intention is about to be relevant to its evaluation. By contrast, involving the subject is not built into the second’s being the kind of state that it is. John could have a state of the same kind about someone else. E.g. *John’s intention that James dance* would be a state of the same kind about someone else.²

We can distinguish those kinds of mental states that have the kind of directedness that makes it possible to evaluate them as true, or as satisfied, from those that do not.³ Pains and pleasures are arguably in the second category. Judgments, beliefs, desires and intentions are in the first category. The ‘about’/ ‘concerns’ distinction applies to things in

¹Recanati (2007) – whose work I don’t discuss in detail in this paper – distinguishes between *complete content* and *explicit content*. If I judge ‘It is raining’ my judgement is true if and only if it is raining at the time of judgment. But the time of judgement does not figure in the *explicit content* of the judgement, only in its *complete content*. If I judge, ‘I am in pain’, on the basis of introspection, my judgment is true if and only if I am in pain. But the *explicit content* of the judgement just involves the property of being in pain. I only figure in the *complete content* of the judgment. This is partly inspired by Hume’s idea that when I introspect I don’t seem to encounter any object that is myself. It is also intended to do justice to the idea when I learn by introspection that someone is in pain there’s no real question about who that person is – I don’t need to check that the person whose pain I’m apprehending is my own. As the point is sometimes put, introspective judgements are ‘immune to error through misidentification relative to the first-person’ (see 2007:23-25 for discussion).

² See Rumfitt (1994) for discussion of the idea that intentions can have acts as their objects. In relation to this kind of example, Recanati uses the evocative phrases ‘the implicit *de se*’ and ‘the explicit *de se*’. He thinks the intention *to dance* is implicitly *de se* where the intention that *I dance* is explicitly so (2007: 25-26).

³ I will use ‘state’ in a catch-all sense to cover act- and event-like mental phenomena as well.

the first category. As applied to things in the first category that have truth-conditions, like judgment, it's a distinction between two ways in which something can be involved in the state's truth-conditions – by being about it, and the judgment concerning it. As applied to things in the first category that have satisfaction-conditions, it's a distinction between two ways in which something can be involved in the state's satisfaction-conditions.

Even so, the case of judgment is, in this broader area, especially illuminating. Judgments ought to be a particularly clear case for the distinction since it's so natural to think that we individuate judgments by their truth-conditions. Conversely, much of the historical and contemporary controversy about judgment in particular has focused on the right way of thinking of issues concerning the 'object' and/or 'content' of judgment.⁴ So, in getting the right account of judgment, it's especially important to have a firm grip on terms like 'object', 'content' and 'aboutness'. This paper is intended to clear up some of the rules of the game concerning the use of those terms.

The paper is structured by consideration of two different ways in which the about/concerns distinction might be drawn and seen to be illuminating – 'innocent commitments' (section I) and 'parochialism' (section II).

(I) About vs concerns: regular commitments vs innocent commitments

I'm going to discuss, as a locus for what I will call the 'innocent commitments' way of thinking about the about/concerns distinction, some work by Uriah Kriegel (2015) on the nature of temporal experience. Kriegel notes that, intuitively, perception and episodic memory differ in their *felt temporal orientation*. In episodically remembering rain outside one's window, the rain is experienced as *past*. In seeing rain outside one's window, the rain is experienced as *present*. This phenomenological datum appears to conflict with our best metaphysics of time, the B-theory. For, at least on one understanding of what B-theory says, if B-theory is true, there are no such temporal properties as being past, being present and being future. So, if B-theory is true, on this understanding, the rain shower can't have the temporal properties the experience presents it as having.

There seem to be just three options. One might abandon B-theory. Or one might regard one's experiences as illusory in what temporal properties they present things as having – one might accept error-theory option. Or one might adopt an understanding of what B-theory says according to which it doesn't say things don't have properties of a sort that experience presents them as having: e.g. perhaps all B-theory is committed to is the claim that things do not have *monadic* properties of pastness, presentness etc and all our experiences do is present things as having properties like being past, or present without weighing in on whether these temporal properties are monadic. Kriegel wants to do none of these three things. Instead, he says:

I want to offer a fourth approach that 'squares the circle': it does justice to the A-theoretic phenomenology while respecting B-theoretic metaphysics, yet without involving error theory. The very coherence of this alternative approach will expose a suppressed assumption that makes the three main approaches seem exhaustive (2015:408).

⁴ See B. Ball's illuminating introduction to this volume [pp. 8-10] for further discussion of this.

Clearly, if there is a distinction that help us see the possibility of a whole new approach to a familiar debate that is a significant contribution. Kriegel sets out the background for his view as follows:

To appreciate the alternative approach, let us take a detour through existential belief. Consider the following two belief reports:

(1) Aaron believes that ghosts exist.

(2) Baron believes in ghosts.

If we take these reports at face value, they appear to report two similar but structurally slightly different mental states. The similarity is this: both states commit to the existence of ghosts. The structural difference is this: while the commitment to ghosts' existence is built into the *content* of Aaron's mental state, it is built into the *attitude* of Baron's. What Baron believes in is not ghosts' existence, but simply ghosts; the commitment to their existence is built into the very attitude of believing-*in*. We may put this by saying that while Aaron's belief *represents ghosts-as-existent*, Baron's *represents-as-existent ghosts*. In the former the existence- committing element is a component of the represented, in the latter it is a modification of the representing. Thus while in Aaron's belief, existence is part of *what* is represented, in Baron's it is rather an aspect of *how* it is represented (2015: 408).

In taking this view about existential belief, Kriegel is following Szabo (2003) and, ultimately, Brentano (1874). His original move is to take an analogous view about temporal experience as a means to the end of not having to give an error-theory about temporal experience. Focusing on perception, but referring back to Baron's belief in ghosts, Kriegel writes:

Consider a perceptual report such as:

(3) Caron perceives rain.

The idea is that we should read (3) on the model of (2): Caron's perception encodes commitment to the rain's presentness, just as Baron's belief encodes commitment to ghosts' existence, but this commitment is built into the attitude rather than content. Caron's perception does not represent rain-as-present, but rather represents-as-present rain. The rain's presentness is thus not part of *what* is experienced in Caron's perception, but part of *how* the experiencing is done in it. This means that no property of presentness is attributed to the rain in Caron's rain perception, just as no property of existence is attributed to ghosts in Baron's belief (2015: 410).

Kriegel does not use the about/concerns terminology. He contrasts 'content' and 'attitude' and the 'what of representation' with the 'how of representation'. Suppose we initially introduce the about/concerns distinction by reference to these notions:

A state *is about*_{content} a particular thing if and only if: that thing is relevant to the evaluation of the state in virtue of the *content* of the state – it is part of *what* is represented. (CONTRIBUTED BY CONTENT)

A state *concerns*_{attitude} a particular thing if and only if: that thing is relevant to the evaluation of the state in virtue of the *attitude* the state involves – it is part of *how* the state represents. (CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE)

There is no obvious connection between the about/concerns, introduced in this way, and the project of avoiding error theory. Still, Kriegel clearly thinks that making that distinction, and arguing that a perception's commitment to presentness derives from the attitude not the content, is enough to fend off error-theory. That suggests a *different* way of thinking about the distinction. I'll put it as follows:

A state *is about*_{regular commitments} a particular thing if and only if: that thing is relevant to the evaluation of the state. And: if the thing isn't how the state presents it is as being, the state involves error (REGULAR COMMITMENTS).

A state *concerns*_{innocent commitments} a particular thing if and only if: that thing is relevant to the evaluation of the state. But: even if the element isn't how the state presents it as being, the state does not involve error (INNOCENT COMMITMENTS).

As in the discussion of the Fregean term 'sense', one possibility is that introducing two hooks onto the notion of 'concerns' simply induces an ambiguity in the word 'concerns' – the two relations are distinct (and similarly for the dual notion 'about'). The other is that they are two different hooks onto the same relation. What Kriegel needs is that the second of these is the case. Only if that is true could he be right that buying his 'attitudinal' account of felt temporal orientation is a way of escaping temporal error theory. There are two reasons though to think it isn't true.

First, on the INNOCENT COMMITMENTS understanding of 'concerns', the notion of 'concerning' seems paradoxical in a way that suggests nothing ever falls on that side of the distinction. Suppose the perception of the rain shower concerns the presentness of the rain shower in the INNOCENT COMMITMENTS sense. The rain shower is still presented-as-present. In that sense, the perception *commits* to the presentness of the rain shower. But also, even if B-theory is true and there is no presentness (i.e. nothing ever instantiates presentness, in particular no rain shower ever does), the experience is supposed not to involve error. In that sense, the perception is *innocent* of the commitment to the rain shower being present. A flat-footed question is: how is this combination possible? It seems to clash with the tautology that if a state represents-as-F X and X is not F, then the state involves error with respect to whether X is F.

There is a second, independent problem. Assume that there could in principle be some things that fall on the 'concerns' side of the distinction, on the INNOCENT COMMITMENTS understanding. We still need a reason to think that we can infer from something's falling on the 'concerns' side of the distinction, on the CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE understanding, to the claim that it also does on the INNOCENT COMMITMENTS understanding. The very example Kriegel uses as a comparison to introduce his account of felt temporal orientation, seems to illustrate that that inference isn't safe. That is, the following seems like bad reasoning:

The existential commitment to ghosts involved in Baron's believing in ghosts is built into the attitude of believing in. So, even though ghosts don't exist, Baron's belief in ghosts does not involve error.

But, in that case, the following reasoning, which instantiates the same pattern, must also be bad:

The commitment to presentness involved in a perception of rain is built into the attitude of perceiving. So even though nothing is present, that perception does not involve error.

On the face of it, the question of whether Baron represents-as-existent ghosts or represents ghosts-as-existent has no on impact on what needs to be the case for Baron to avoid error. The fact that the commitment to existence falls on the ‘concerns’ (CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE) side of the distinction does nothing to suggest that it falls on the ‘concerns’ (INNOCENT COMMITMENTS) side of the distinction. They are just two unrelated properties.

We can also make the point in relation to an example like my ‘Tony is handsome animal’ judgment. On a standard treatment, this judgment is supposed to concern (CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE) the actual world. But, how things are in the actual world is entirely relevant to determining whether the judgment is in error. If Tony is not handsome at the actual world, then my judgment is in error.

Summary: Arguably, the notion of concerns_{innocentcommitment} is incoherent and nothing instantiates it. Even if it is coherent, it doesn’t relate to the notion of concerns_{attitude} in any obvious way.⁵ Kriegel’s discussion of time is an example of the harm done by the assumption that there is a single unified distinction between two ways in which an element can be involved in the truth-conditions of a state. We might define the about/concerns in a way that has something to do with being contributed by the attitude rather than the content of a state. Or we might define it in a way that has something to do with the innocent commitments idea. Neither of these is clearly problematic. The problem comes when we assume they are tracking the same distinction. Kriegel’s approach to temporal experience assumes this. As a result, a false impression of a new, fourth solution to a problem that seemed only to have three possible solutions is

⁵ Perhaps there are some domains that provide a more fertile application for the innocent commitments idea than the one to which Kriegel applies it. Consider ‘tastiness’ judgments. I judge ‘Rhubarb is tasty’ and you judge ‘rhubarb is not tasty’. Rhubarb is tasty relative to my standard of taste, rhubarb is not tasty relative to your standard of state. Suppose we have the intuition that this really is a case of *disagreement* (so my judgment shouldn’t be regarded as the judgment that rhubarb is tasty-to-me, and your judgment shouldn’t be regarded as the judgment that rhubarb is tasty-to-you, in which case the idea of disagreement would be lost). But also there is no good sense in which either judgment could be *at fault*. (See Kölbel 2003 for discussion.) There is something many will find paradoxical in that suggestion. If I judge rhubarb is tasty and you judge it isn’t, why isn’t it the case that I am fault if and only rhubarb isn’t tasty and you are at fault if and only if rhubarb is tasty? But suppose we set this kind of objection aside – perhaps this domain of tastiness judgment just is a bit paradoxical. So we might assume that, at least in the case of judgments like ‘Rhubarb is tasty’ the notion of faultless disagreement makes sense. It might be possible to use that to introduce a notion of ‘concerns’ that works roughly the way the INNOCENT COMMITMENTS notion is supposed to (it does seem to be that, on Kriegel’s picture, B-theory and experience conflict but somehow there is no fault). But, of course, doing that wouldn’t do anything to suggest that paradigmatic faultless disagreement cases are interestingly like cases in which a commitment is built into the attitude a state involves – e.g. believing in cases. If you believe in ghosts, and I disbelieve in ghosts, then one of us is clearly *at fault*. The faultless disagreement idea has no purchase and it would be a bad thing if the concerns/about distinction made it seem as though it must do.

generated. The effort to decide which of the three existing solutions to the problem is best is abandoned prematurely.

(II) *About vs concerns: catholicism vs parochialism*

Perry would say that a benighted northern hemisphere inhabitant who judges ‘July is a summer month’ without awareness of the hemisphere-relativity of being a summer month makes a judgment that concerns but is not about the Northern Hemisphere. The judgment concerns the Northern Hemisphere in that the judgment is true if and only if July is a summer month *in the Northern Hemisphere*. But, Perry wants to say, the judgment is not about the Northern Hemisphere. Other examples – e.g. the child in Sacramento who judge ‘It is 4 O Clock’ – work similarly. This suggests something like the following understanding of the about/concerns distinction.

A state *is about*_{catholicism} a particular element if and only if: that element is relevant to the evaluation of the state. And: the subject has the conceptual capacity to be in states to whose evaluation other values of the same parameter are relevant (CATHOLICISM).

A state *concerns*_{parochialism} a particular element if and only if: that element is relevant to the evaluation of the state. But, the subject lacks the conceptual capacity to be in states to whose evaluation other values of the same parameter are relevant (PAROCHIALISM).

There is some vagueness to the about/concerns distinction, on this understanding. Children who clearly lack the concept of a time zone turn into adults who clearly have that concept. At some point in the transition, there will be indeterminacy as to whether the child really has the conceptual capacity to represent other values of the same time-zone parameter. So it will then be indeterminate whether the state concerns or is actually about a particular time zone. But that doesn’t do anything to undermine these notions. The notions, as explained, are perfectly meaningful. They just don’t have any obvious explanatory use yet. One can’t say that the reason that the Northern Hemisphere is relevant to the evaluation of the ‘July is a Summer month’ judgment is *because*, although that judgment isn’t *about* the Northern Hemisphere, it does at least *concern* them. That would just be a dormitive virtue style explanation, at least so far.

What happens though if we hook up this way of thinking of the about/concerns with a different way of thinking of it – in particular, the (CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE) way we have already looked at:

A state *is about*_{content} a particular thing if and only if: that thing is relevant to the evaluation of the state in virtue of the *content* of the state – it is part of *what* is represented. (CONTRIBUTED BY CONTENT)

A state *concerns*_{attitude} a particular thing if and only if: that thing is relevant to the evaluation of the state in virtue of the *attitude* the state involves – it is part of *how* the state represents. (CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE)

That makes for a potentially explanatory connection. The two ways of introducing the distinction might permit what Sainsbury calls the ‘subsumption of a number of apparently distinct phenomena’ (2002:127).

The problem is that, on investigation, the phenomena do seem to be actually distinct. For example, when the northern hemisphere judges ‘July is a Summer month’ the attitude type is the attitude type *judgment*. That attitude type no more intimately involves the northern hemisphere than the southern. So, it isn’t the case that the northern hemisphere is something the judgment ‘concerns’ (CONTRIBUTED BY ATTITUDE). But it is the case that the northern hemisphere is something that the judgment ‘concerns’ (PAROCHIALISM).

Of course, it isn’t completely obvious how much should be built into the ‘attitude’ part of a state. Attitude-verbs are a natural guide to attitude types. One reason it seems obvious the attitude of, e.g., *judging* that *p* differs from the attitude of *supposing* that *p* is that ‘supposing’ and ‘judging’ are different words and they clearly are not synonyms. We might also think that supposing and judging are associated with different functional roles and that is a further reason for regarding them as different attitudes. But, really, there is nothing to stop us from being much more fine-grained in how we individuate attitude types. We could say that when a Northern Hemisphere inhabitant judges ‘July is a Summer month’ the fact that this judgment is the judgment of a Northern Hemisphere inhabitant, and even the fact that it’s the judgment of someone who never represents values of the hemisphere parameter other than the northern hemisphere, is built into the kind of attitude that their state involves (*parochially-judging-month-of-year-Northern-Hemisphere-wise*). On that way of saying what kind of attitude the state involves, it won’t be true the attitude type is too coarse grained for it to be plausible that the attitude type contributes the Northern Hemisphere to the truth-conditions of the judgment. But that is only because we’ve gerrymandered a notion of attitude type to fit our purposes. An analogy would be with someone who introduced the notion of ‘sense’ by reference to rational co-tenability of belief and then claimed that the notion of sense, thus introduced, had some role to play in understanding intersubjective communication – e.g. perhaps understanding someone always involves thinking about the same thing as they are thinking about using the same sense. In response to apparent counterexamples – e.g. a case where I intuitively understand you perfectly well but we don’t deploy the same sense – they reply that, on the notion of ‘understanding’ they mean, this isn’t a case of understanding. This is unexplanatory if the notion of understanding they mean stipulated to involve two people thinking of the same thing using the same sense.

There are cases where it is genuinely unclear whether we should regard there as being two different attitudes or not. E.g. in the example Kriegel discusses, it isn’t clear whether we should (as Brentano, Kriegel and Szabo think) really think that the state of believing in ducks involves a different kind of attitude from the state of believing that ducks exists. An alternative hypothesis is that English just possess two different ways of ascribing the very same mental state. Similarly, it isn’t clear whether we should think that John’s state of intending to dance involves a different kind of attitude from the state of intending that John dance. Are there two kinds of attitude here – a more primitive kind of intention that perhaps animals can share with us (‘intentions to’) and a more sophisticated kind that only humans can have (‘intentions that’)? Or is there just a shorter and a longer way of ascribing an identical mental state? It isn’t clear. The answer might depend on whether we can find a distinctive functional role for the two putative kinds of intention. But, however that kind of dispute turns out, it really doesn’t seem as though there is any non-gerrymandered notion of attitude-type that is fine-grained enough to connect up with a notion of ‘concerns’ explained by reference to PAROCHIALISM.

It's worth pointing out that the PAROCHIALISM idea I've just looked at is tied to fairly *stable features* of an individual – whether they lack the concept of a time zone, for example. We could also introduce a notion of ‘concerns’ by reference to a kind of MOMENTARY PAROCHIALISM. I am an adult and I understand the time-zone relativity of time of day. On the other hand, most of the time, time-zone isn't very salient to me. I judge ‘It's 4pm’. My judgment is true if and only if it is 4pm in GMT but GMT is probably not something I would think of if asked what the truth of my judgment depends on. If I voice my thought in inner speech there won't be any term in inner speech corresponding to GMT. My judgment doesn't concern_{parochialism} GMT (because I can think of other time zones) but we might say that it concerns_{momentaryparochialism} GMT (because on this occasion my judgment involved GMT as a kind of default). Again, there's nothing wrong with a notion introduced in this way. But it only becomes explanatory when hooked up to something else. And it's clear that concerns_{momentaryparochialism} is no better a candidate for linking up with concerns_{contributedbyattitude} than is concerns_{parochialism}.

Summary: The kind of examples discussed in relation to PAROCHIALISM are striking and interesting. It's interesting that sometimes I make a judgment whose truth depends on what time-zone I am in even though the time-zone relativity isn't at that moment salient to me. It's interesting that some people make judgments whose truth depends on what time-zone they are in even though the time-zone relativity is *never salient to them* because they lack the capacity to represent different values of the time zone parameter. We shouldn't think though that pointing out that there are such cases, or even introducing a label to refer to them, does anything to *explain* their possibility. Analogously, it's striking and interesting that someone can rationally believe, of the same thing, that it is F and that it is not F. But merely pointing out that there are such cases, and introducing a label for them (e.g. ‘sense’), does nothing to *explain* their possibility. Neither does introducing a label enable us to draw any conclusions that we weren't in a position to draw before introducing it, or disable us from drawing any conclusions we were in a position to draw before. For example, as mentioned at the outset, a naïve idea is that a judgment is about some thing if and only if that thing is one of the things that the truth of the judgment depends on - so if you know that some element is one of the things that the truth of a judgment depends on you can infer that that element is one of the things the judgment is about. None of the examples discussed in relation to PAROCHIALISM do anything to undermine this naïve idea about what ‘aboutness’ is.

Conclusion:

I've argued that there is no explanatorily interesting distinction between two ways that an element can figure in the truth-conditions of a judgment. This is based partly on a general account of what it would take for the distinction to be explanatorily interesting (inspired by Sainsbury's account of what it takes for the notion of ‘sense’ to be explanatorily interesting). It's also based partly on an examination of individual examples. Those examples are striking but they don't work out nearly as neatly as is generally supposed. On the face of it, they illustrate a number of different differences.

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