

## Reductions and Caring

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Some philosophers are fond of criticizing philosophical reductions using the following argument form. “The reductionist says that Xs are merely Ys. But we don’t care about Ys, so if Xs were merely Ys, we wouldn’t care about Xs, which we very much do. Therefore Xs are not merely Ys.” Examples: Personal identity and psychological continuity of course. Moral rightness and what would be preferred by an ideal observer. *De re* possibilities and what happens to counterparts of me at other concrete possible worlds (Lewis). Even mental states and brain states.

This sort of reasoning is either fallacious or question-begging, depending on whether “care about” is taken *de dicto* or *de re*. If “care about” is read *de dicto*, then we care about this or that only under a description. We may not care about personal identity under the description “psychological continuity”; we do care about it under the description “personal identity.” That we don’t care about it under the description “psychological continuity” does not even suggest that personal identity is not identical with psychological continuity.

If “care about” is taken *de re*, so that it means “care about under some description or other,” the foregoing argument form simply begs the question.

Back to the *de dicto* case, because there was some confusion about it in class: The logical point is that despite the a posteriori reductive identity of states of affairs, there are two distinct and nonequivalent corresponding propositions: that  $S_2$  at  $t_2 = S_1$  at  $t_1$ , and that  $S_2$  at  $t_2$  is psychologically continuous with  $S_1$  at  $t_1$ . Therefore the propositional attitude, caring-that, can be borne to the one proposition without being borne to the other.

Suppose I say a terrible, hurtful thing to my mother. That speech act is one and the same event as the displacement of certain air molecules just so. I feel guilty that I said what I did. I don’t feel guilty that I displaced the air molecules. Compare intending: I (regrettably) intended to say what I did; I did not intend—and could not have intended—to displace air molecules just so. Similarly, I care that I said what I did; I do not care that I displaced the air molecules.

Now, what happens if the reductive identity in question is *known*? First, notice that this question is not urgent in the context, because every philosophical reductive identification is controversial, and no one can claim to know it. But suppose in any case that the identity is known. That does not affect the logical point; there are still two different and nonequivalent propositions in play.

All the same, constraints on rationality may cut in. Once I know the identity, as Rosen suggests, I *may* be rationally required to adjust my affect. I know that water spilling is one and the same event as the motion of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules. Say I care about water spilling; I don’t want it to. Should I then care about a motion of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules? *De re*, of course (actually there’s no “should” about it, because *de re* I already and ipso facto do care about the molecules); but it’s *de dicto* that’s the issue. Now, if someone asks me, “Is it OK with you for those molecules to move in that way?,” I guess I should say no. But it seems to me there’s still a *qua* qualification: I don’t care about the molecular motion per se. To the extent that I do care about it, I care only because I know it constitutes water spilling, which is what I really care about.

What I’ve said in the preceding paragraph may be controversial, and I’m not entirely sure of it. What should not be in the least controversial is the logical point.

Mild concession re the original issue: I suppose someone might urge that a reduction ought to *explain why* we care about the reduced phenomenon. The “caring” objection then could be put more modestly as the complaint that the reduction in question fails to provide the required explanation. But I do not see why a reducing theory should do that. When we care about something, we (normally) care about it under its familiar macro-description, and because of its macro-relations to us. The explanation of our caring will be in terms of those relations; we would not and should not expect an explanation of our caring couched at a lower level of nature. (Though there might be an explanation connecting the thing’s microstructure to the brain state that constitutes our caring, if we had any idea what state that was.)

I wish people would stop using that stupid argument form.