

More on Stampe

The story so far

1. We start with Stalnaker's (1984) analysis (p. 150). Stampe offers his counterexample to its sufficiency, based on the nonclosure of desire under causal consequence. More on this later.

2. Stampe notes the apparent circularity problem for Stalnaker (p. 151). [N.b., the standard and perfectly sound way to beat the circularity charge is through Lewis' Ramsification.] Stampe correctly points out that circularity is avoided if "satisfaction of" desire can be defined without reference to belief. And it can: "Satisfaction of" a desire, in what I called the semantic sense, is just the truth of the desire's content proposition; satisfaction of a desire is the precise analogue of: truth of a belief.

There is still the issue of what Stalnaker should say distinguishes a desire from a belief. Not a problem, though; see 4 below.

3. Stampe's adequacy condition about rational behavior (pp. 152-53, picked up again on p. 157): A theory of desire must explain... --what, exactly? He formulates the putative explanandum in each of several different ways, and it is never clearly put or defended. Project for sympathizers: Put the adequacy condition clearly and defend it.

4. There is after all an asymmetry in Stalnaker's analysis that distinguishes the desire from the belief, indeed a double asymmetry (p. 153, 2nd full paragraph), that as Katie said could easily be read off the analysis' Ramsey sentence.

5. The alleged datum about satisfaction (pp. 153-54): Though a true belief is true at any time so long as its content proposition is true at all, a desire must wait to be satisfied, to *come* "true," until its content proposition's reference-time has arrived.

"Satisfied" *here* must mean something stronger than mere semantic satisfaction as in 2 above; call it "Stampe-satisfaction." For some reason Stampe does not acknowledge this; but he goes on to offer an alleged explanation of the alleged datum.

6. He offers his *differential* psychosemantics for the belief that P and the desire that P (p. 154). [All standard ("box"-type) psychosemantics has assumed *uniform* treatment of attitude contents, attitude types differing only functionally. We should bear in mind that Stampe's alternative is an option, since then overlooked.]

And the differential psychosemantics allegedly would explain the alleged datum about Stampe-satisfaction (pp. 154-55). But I do not see how the explanation goes. First, the point about belief and its ideal causes is a fudge: Who says those causes "are such that I will win"? Second, the claim about desire made in the sentence that spans the page break seems to me a gigantic non sequitur.

That's as far as we (officially) got in class.

The alleged adequacy condition

The explanandum on p. 157 is tolerably clear: Why does your having a desire that P constitute a reason for your acting "accordingly" (i.e., presumably, for your trying to make it the case that P)?

Stampe offers a trial-run explanation of the fact that your holding a particular *belief* is a reason for acting "as if it is true." The explanation appeals to "indicator" psychosemantics for beliefs. It's very compressed, and not at all convincing in its present form. The paragraph would make a good Proto exercise.

The explanation for the case of desire can't be perfectly parallel, because Stampe rejects indicator psychosemantics for desires. But it is largely parallel, because (Stampe maintains) desires have "ideal causes" just as beliefs do, even though their ideal causes do not determine their contents. The ideal cause of a desire that P is the fact that it would be good if P. (Which makes me wonder why that *wouldn't* do as a psychosemantics for desires; why do we need also to allude to the desires' effects?) Now, the fact that it would be good if P is a reason for you to try to bring it about that P (in the sense of "reason" in which facts as opposed to mental states can be reasons). "And, a fortiori, one's being in a state ideally caused by that fact... would be a reason to do such things as well—certainly to whatever extent it was reasonable to suppose that one's state of mind might have arisen under those ideal conditions" (p. 158). "A fortiori"?? Hardly. The idea, Stampe goes on to say, is that your desire is an indicator of what would be a good thing to bring about. He seems to be assuming that (merely) to host such an indicator is to have a reason for acting, though he also and unwarrantedly speaks of being "in cognitive possession of" the reason. Not terribly convincing. (But I am very sympathetic to his likening of desires to perceptual states, and I want to explore that analogy further. There is more on it in his article, "The Authority of Desire," *Phil.Review* (1987), <http://www.jstor.org/view/00318108/di981328/98p0185u/0>.)

Closure and psychosemantics

On pp. 159-63, Stampe returns to the question(s) of closure, but under what seems to be a psychosemantic heading (he's now trying to give "a correct account of the identity of" desire *contents*). As before, we can't advert to "the" state of affairs that will tend to result from having the desire, because there are many. He now thinks that we can peel off the unwanted causal consequences by building in his goodness condition (p. 161).¹ "It is good that" obviously is not closed under causal consequence. I'd say it's just as obviously not closed under logical consequence; recall my Good Samaritan example. And that's OK with Stampe though he remains officially neutral. As I said, I myself don't see why it "should be controversial," or why anyone would think that either goodness or desire was closed under entailment.

Stampe seeks a parallel explanation of the nonclosure of belief under causal and logical consequence. (Notice that logical nonclosure for *belief* is entirely

¹ Memorable quote: "Resorting to goodness will make many philosophers uneasy." That'd make a nice epitaph for someone.

uncontroversial; no one has ever thought that belief is closed under entailment.) He suggests a variant psychosemantics for belief, according to which a belief's ideal cause is, not the fact corresponding to the content proposition, but that fact's *being "evident."* Being evident is of course not closed under logical consequence, and that would explain why belief itself isn't.

The variant view puts a very strong requirement on beliefs. I (actually) believe that no consistent system of set theory strong enough to contain elementary arithmetic is semantically complete. Does that belief have as its ideal cause, the fact of its being *evident* that no consistent system of set theory strong enough to contain elementary arithmetic is complete? Pretty radical idealizing!

For the record, it's not clear why logical nonclosure, either of belief or of desire, needs explaining in the first place. Note that nonclosure is a *purely logical* fact, just a non-entailment. Non-entailments don't need explanation. The sentence "Pigs are mammals" does not entail "The Parr Center is organizing a farting contest for next Tuesday"; what explains that, hey, hey?

To be fair, non-entailments *can* be explained, when one might reasonably suppose that the relevant entailment holds. ("John got married and Marsha got married" does not entail "John and Marsha got married," on the dominant reading of the latter sentence.) Might one reasonably hold that belief or desire was closed under entailment? Yeeees, if one were in the grip of possible-worlds semantics for attitude content. Suppose that to believe/desire that P is to bear the "b."/"d." relation to the set of P-worlds; P is true in every world compatible with what the subject believes/desires. If P entails Q, then Q is true in every P-world, so Q is also true in every world compatible with what the subject believes/desires; hence, on the possible-worlds analysis, the subject also believes/desires that Q. But so much the worse for that analysis, as even Hintikka granted when he propounded it in *Knowledge and Belief*.

Desires vs. intentions

This (pp. 163-66) is a great topic, to which we'll be devoting more attention. I have no strong objection to Stampe's solution in terms of distinct faculties, because I too believe in those faculties. But isn't there a simpler functionalist solution? To make a trivial but correct point, there is at least one simple functional difference between desires and intentions: Desires cause intentional action only by causing intentions which cause the action; intentions cause intentional action directly, without causing more intentions. Less trivially (and perhaps controversially), intentions normally result from *decisions*, while desires may or may not do so.

Stampe's final analysis

The analysis is officially stated on p. 166. Notice carefully that it *bypasses the mind*; the analysis contains not a single mental term. Thus, it is essentially a Behaviorist rather than a Functionalist analysis; Functionalists explicate a type of mental state in terms of inputs, outputs, and *other mental states*. (Though Stampe will say that the references to ideal causes are Functionalist in spirit). This makes me entirely confident that there will be counterexamples in the tradition of Geach and Chisholm

aforementioned: Whether a desire does make you act in ways that will tend to result in..., whatever other nonmental conditions may be added, depends on what else is going on in your mind. But I viciously leave it to you to devise the counterexamples themselves.

Desires and needs

This (pp. 167-69) is really an appendix. I won't comment on it, for now, but we may return to the relation between desires and needs; Dennett, at least, thinks that the concept of a need plays a big role in the epistemology of desire ascription.

What to take home?

The article, I still maintain, is rich and valuable. But what are its definite lessons? (1) Stalnaker's analysis won't do. (2) I guess there is some adequacy condition about rational behavior. (3) *Maybe* Stampe-satisfaction is important. (4) Maybe psychosemantics shouldn't be attitude-neutral. (5) Desires are in some ways like perceptual states, and this needs exploring. (6) The relation between desires and intentions needs very careful investigation.

Onward!