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# Ullin Place's Cartesian Remnants: Identity Theory and the Lack of Animal Minds.

Luke MALIK

This paper aims to show that Ullin Place's classical version of identity theory (CIT) remains Cartesian to the extent that it denies animal mentality, and to this extent CIT is an unsound and inadequate theory of mind.

Let us define some terms:

(Adequacy) An adequate theory of mind should be able to account for all minded entities.

(Inadequacy) An inadequate theory of mind cannot account for all minded entities.

(Soundness) A theory of mind is sound if it does not end up denying mind to minded entities or attributing mind to non-minded entities.

(Unsoundness) A theory of mind is unsound if it does end up denying mind to minded entities or attributing mind to non-minded entities.

To analyze CIT as to its soundness and adequacy is complicated by

the fact that CIT is a so-called “two factor” theory insofar as it provides two explanations, one for each of two aspects of the mind, mental states (related to the propositional attitudes) and mental process (related to consciousness).

I will now make an assumption grounded upon a conviction:

(A) Animals have minds, both intentionality and consciousness.

Given this assumption, it will be my intention to show that CIT is unsound and inadequate. To the extent CIT is a two-factor theory of mind, I will aim to show that CIT is unsound in one factor, and inadequate in the other.

My writing proceeds in two sections:

First, I argue that CIT rules out an explanation of animal intentionality because of Place’s understanding of mental states and, since this is a consequence of Place’s theory, his theory is unsound.

Second, I argue that CIT cannot explain animal consciousness because of Place’s explanation of how compositional statements of identity are formed and, since this structurally rules out the possibility of explaining animal minds, Place’s theory is inadequate.

Section One: CIT and Animal Attitudes

In his 1956 paper, Place bifurcates the mind.<sup>1)</sup> Mental concepts are broken up into two classes. We have concepts which relate to propositional attitudes, on the one hand, and a so-called residue of concepts, centring around consciousness, on the other.

Take the first of these classes, those concepts deal with propositional attitudes, which include, for example, “knowing”, “believing”, “desiring”, “hoping”. These can be explained behaviouristically, according to Place, by reference to behaviours or dispositions. This, he claims, falls within the remit of modern physicalism, because behaviour and dispositions can be given in physical terms alone. Thus the associated mental types can be given physical descriptions.

The exact explanation of propositional attitudes leads Place to the conclusion that animals do not have them. An example is given in his paper “Token- Versus Type-Identity Theories”. I will reconstruct the arguments from that paper because they lead him to the conclusion that animals do not enjoy intentionality: the propositional attitudes, he concludes, “though extended to cover the behavioral dispositions of animals, [have] literal application only to those of linguistically competent humans”<sup>2)</sup>.

Place takes the following route: A propositional attitude is a dispositional mental state. The dispositional mental state is characterized by means of a declarative sentence in *oratio obliqua*. This establishes propositional

attitudes are “not a vocabulary but a grammatical construction”.<sup>3)</sup> And the grammatical nature of propositional attitudes rules out animal intentionality since animals are not competent with language.

This is how Place begins his argument:

“A propositional attitude, properly so-called, is a dispositional mental state whose potential manifestations are characterized by means of an embedded declarative sentence in oratio obliqua or indirect reported speech in the position of the direct grammatical object of a mental/psychological verb. In formal notation a propositional attitude is a dispositional state characterized by means of a sentence of the form X Y’s that p, where X is a person, Y is a psychological verb and p is a declarative sentence in oratio obliqua.”<sup>4)</sup>

But what exactly is oratio obliqua. Oratio obliqua is contrasted with oratio recta. The contrast is between reports of indirect speech and statements of direct speech

Here are some examples,

(1) Mary said she still loved John

is an example of a declarative statement in oratio obliqua. What Mary said is being indirectly reported.

Now consider:

(2) Mary said, "I love John"

This is an example of *oratio recta*. What Mary said is being directly stated.

Let's see how this leads Place to deny animal intentionality.

First, the grammar of propositional attitudes is very much like the grammar of verbs indicating saying, such as in (1).

For example, consider:

(3) Mary still loves John

where we might react to this by saying that:

(3.1) John didn't know that Mary still loved him.

If we take the verb "know" as an archetype of propositional attitude verbs, then their grammar can be seen to be similar to the grammar of "say". For consider:

(3.2) I still love Mary

and

(3.3) John said that he still loved Mary.

(3.1) and (3.3) are similar in grammar: For example, pronouns are introduced or change and tenses go back one place.

This suggests to Place that reports of meanings, and not reports of what is actually said, is what actually matters. And that suggests one and the same proposition may be expressed in many and various ways in the contexts created by propositional attitude verbs. And, thus, oratio recta is not the correct way to characterize the contexts created by propositional attitudes, for that would defeat the variability and multiplicity of the ways of expressing the proposition in question.

For example, consider a direct statement of (3) i.e. in oratio recta:

(3.4) I said: “Mary still loves John”

In (3.4) the exact words are picked out, which isn’t the case with (3.3).

So the grammar of propositional attitude verbs leads to the conclusion that the contexts that are created by propositional attitude verbs are contexts in which declarative sentences are in oratio obliqua and meanings or propositions, not the actual words, are what is made room for.

Places continues his argument saying that if we take the expressions in a context created by a propositional attitude as, in some sense, directly referring to objects and actions, the actual words in question can be seen as within quotes. The propositional attitude, thus, operates as a quotation device in this sense. The reason he thinks this is so is because contexts *oratio obliqua* are opaque. If we take the expressions in such contexts as quoted names and definite descriptions, then there is no problem in explaining why the contexts are opaque, for quotation marks create opaque contexts. (As we see when we try to substitute an alternative name or description to the one quoted.) In this sense, the propositional attitude verb seems to act as a syntactical device in much the same way as quotation marks do, creating severe opacity.

Thus we might conclude propositional attitude verbs have specific grammatical functions. They create contexts which place declarative sentences in *oratio obliqua* and so report meanings or propositions and we might think of them as functioning as quotation devices. They do not name or describe anything.

Consider, then:

(4) Mary believes that John is incapable of love

This statement does not refer to a belief state as such located in the brain: the brain state or wiring corresponding to the believing-that-



John-is-incapable-of-love. Rather, the propositional attitude verb is just a grammatical device that characterizes a particular disposition to utter a specific sentence by Mary and act accordingly.

The important point for our purposes is to note that creatures that are not competent with language cannot produce declarative sentences. So, literally speaking, the contexts in question cannot be filled and there are no dispositions (disposition to say such and such) to report. Thus creatures that are not linguistically competent do not have the dispositions in question. But the propositional attitudes just are the dispositions (to say something and act accordingly) in question. Thus creatures that are not linguistically competent do not have the propositional attitudes.

To summarize: The propositional attitudes are mental dispositional states. A mental dispositional state is a disposition to say something and act accordingly. Thus the mental dispositional states in question are characterized by language. The language involves a propositional attitude verb and a declarative sentence. The propositional attitude verb has a grammatical function. The grammatical function creates an opaque context in which a meaning or quote is conveyed. A declarative sentence is placed within the context to fill this requirement. And a disposition to say something and act accordingly is, thereby, characterized. Linguistically incompetent creatures cannot produce declarative sentences. Thus linguistically incompetent creatures do not have the dispositions in question. But this is to say linguistically incompetent

creatures do not have propositional attitudes because the propositional attitudes, as stated, just ARE the dispositions in question.

Since animals are linguistically incompetent, then, we can take them as lacking propositional attitudes, mental dispositions to say such and such, because they lack the ability to produce declarative sentences, that is, to say something.

As Place puts it:

“What [the analysis] shows is that [the] “vocabulary of propositional attitudes” is not a vocabulary, but a grammatical construction. It is the use of *oratio obliqua* or indirect reported speech to characterize the orientation of a disposition to talk in a particular way and act accordingly, a construction which, though extended to cover the behavioral dispositions of animals, has literal application only to those of linguistically competent humans.”<sup>5)</sup>

Place's understanding of propositional attitudes (and intentionality) rules out the possibility that animals have propositional attitudes and this can be seen as a consequence of his theory of propositional attitudes: intentionality is characterized linguistically, but animals are not linguistically competent, therefore animals do not enjoy intentionality.

But we have assumed:

(A) Animals have both intentionality and consciousness.

And given our characterization of unsoundness:

(Unsoundness) A theory of mind is unsound if it does end up denying mind to minded entities or attributing mind to non-minded entities,

we conclude that:

(C1) CIT is an unsound theory of mind, at least, in one of it's factors, that which treats of intentionality.

## Section Two: CIT and Animal Consciousness

CIT also rules out an explanation of animal consciousness. In this case because it is not possible for CIT to construct identity statements that would identify experiences, sensations, and the like with neural processes in the neural structures of animals.

First, we need to understand how Place thinks the kind of identity statement, identity statements like “consciousness is a process in the brain”, actually go about getting constructed. To do this Place uses an established analogue of that last statement. “Lightning is the motion of electric charges” is the one Place chooses. This he says is an identity statement of a compositional kind. Such identity statements differ from statements of a descriptive kind. Another example of the former might

be “water is H<sub>2</sub>O”, an example of the latter “bachelors are unmarried men”.

The descriptive set of statements are true by definition. Statements of this sort involve a relation between the grammatical subject and the grammatical predicate such that if the former is applicable, the latter is applicable.

The compositional set of statements are not true by definition, but true by observation. The relation between the grammatical subject and the predicate is not such that if the former is applicable, the latter is applicable, at least, in the first instance.

The statement that “consciousness is a brain process” falls into the second class of sentences just like the statement “lightning is a motion of electrical charges.”

So how do we form statements of compositional identity? Place explains how it is that we can identify consciousness with brain processes like this: First, it is not mere correlation that allows the identity to be posited. He notes that many correlations do not determine an identity. His example is the movement of the tides and the stages of the moon. In this case, and similar, he argues, what is determined is a causal relation. The reason why we see it fit to posit an identity relation between lightning and motion of electric charges is that we treat the separate observations of each event as the observations of one event because it is “one of those

cases where the technical scientific observations set in the context of the appropriate body of scientific theory provides an immediate explanation of the observations made by the man in the street”.<sup>6)</sup> In essence, the identification is a theoretical identification based on the relevant science, and the identity in question explains a direct or immediate causal connection between the motion of electric charges and the reports (or observations) of lightning.

Contrasting the case with the case of the moon stages and high tides, a motion of electric charges gives rise to the visual stimulation that leads one to report (or observe) the presence of lightning, but the stages of the moon do not give rise to a direct or immediate explanation of reports (or observations) of high tides. As Place says, “there is no such direct causal connection between the stages of the moon and the observations made by the man who measures the height of the tide”.<sup>7)</sup> Concluding, “The causal connection is between the moon and the tides, not between the moon and the measurement of the tides”.<sup>8)</sup>

Let me try to make this a bit clearer. There are three occurrence in the kind of relationship Place is talking about that lets us identify two of those occurrences. There is A, B, & reports of B. If A leads directly and immediately to reports of B such that A is theoretically the direct and immediate cause of reports of B, then the identification of B with A is justified. So in the case of lightning, we have three events: the motion of electric charges, lightning, and reports of lightning. The motion of electric charges is an immediate and direct cause of the report of lightning, set

within the context of a body of theory, such that when the one occurs it is seen as the direct and immediate cause of the other. On this basis one is justified in identifying lightning with the motion of electric charges. Likewise, let's suppose there is a relation between the following three kinds of occurrences: brain processes, consciousness and reports of consciousness. Brain processes are an immediate and direct cause of the reports of consciousness, set within the context of a body of theory, such that when the one occurs it is seen as the direct and immediate cause of the other. On this basis one is justified in identifying brain processes with consciousness (or one will be when the theory is worked out). In contrast, the case is different with the following set of three occurrences: stages of the moon, movements of the tides, reports of high and low tides. The stages of the moon are not a direct and immediate cause of the reports of high and low tides. This is why stages of the moon and the movements of the tides cannot be identified.

The statement that "consciousness is a process in the brain" can be taken to be an instance of the kind of statement that "lightning is the movement of electric charge" is, constructed in the sense just shown. Thus it is, or will be, a theoretically justified identity statement of a compositional, non-descriptive, kind.

But, now, if one constructs an identity between A and B on the basis that whenever an instance of A occurs there is a report of B, then because there is never a report of B from a non-linguistically competent animal, there is no chance of an identity being established. We can't

replace reports of B with behaviours associated with B because Place eschews the possibility of identifying consciousness with behaviours. He argues behaviour cannot explain mental aspects related to consciousness, and for that very reason develops an identity based account of the mental processes in question. Thus, it seems, animal conscious cannot be explained by CIT.

As Place writes in 1956:

“[T]here would seem to be an intractable residue of concepts clustering around the notions of consciousness, experience, sensation, and mental imagery, where some sort of inner process story is unavoidable. It is possible, of course, that a satisfactory behaviouristic account of this conceptual residuum will ultimately be found...I shall assume this cannot be done and that statements about pains and twinges, about how things look, sound, and feel, about things dreamed of or pictured in the mind’s eye, are statements referring to events and processes which are in some sense private or internal to the individual of whom they are predicated.”<sup>9)</sup>

It seems that since the events and processes “are in some sense private and internal” behaviour cannot provide a satisfactory account of their presence or absence. But, now, it is difficult to see what else would suffice, other than reports or behaviour, to signal the presence of pain in an animal.

Therefore, animal consciousness is left unaccounted for by Place's compositional account of identity. And even if animals have pains, itches and the like, this theory will be in no position, as it stands, to explain them.

It is not the characterization of consciousness that rules out the possibility that animals have consciousness. For consciousness is just characterized as internal and private, and from this it does not follow that animals do not have consciousness. CIT, thus, does not elaborate the tools by which, if animals are conscious, we might provide identity statements of, for example, animal pain and animal brain processes because linguistic requirements are built into the process of identification.

Given, then, that we have assumed:

(A) Animals have both intentionality and consciousness,

and given our characterization of inadequacy:

(Inadequacy) An inadequate theory of mind cannot account for all minded entities,

we conclude that:

(C2) CIT is an inadequate theory of mind, at least, in one of its factors, that which treats of consciousness.



## Conclusion

We have shown that CIT is Cartesian in the sense it rejects the possibility that animals are minded. It rejects animal intentionality as a consequence of Place's take on propositional attitudes, and is structurally incapable of explaining animal consciousness, it just doesn't provide any way of connecting a sensation like pain, for example, in a dog to a brain process in that dog. Therefore, given our assumption about animal mindedness and our definitions covering soundness and adequacy, we find that CIT is both an unsound theory of mind and an inadequate theory of mind. It is unsound in its treatment of intentionality and inadequate in its treatment of consciousness.

## Postscript

There are two things to note:

First, my claim that CIT is inadequate insofar as it comes to animals minds is different from Putnam's well known complaint against CIT. My claim is that CIT is structurally deficient because it provides no means of verifying that, for example, octopus pain is identical to the octopus's brain or neural process. Putnam's claim is that CIT must be able to provide an identity statement of the type pain is identical to such and such a brain process and that that statement be applicable to actual non-human beings that feel pain and possible beings, which is, according to

Putnam, highly unlikely.<sup>10)</sup> Apart from the modal aspect of Putnam's argument, the difference can be made out like this, if Putnam is wrong so that in actuality one identity statement fits all, such that pain is identical to such and such is true for all that experience pain, CIT would not allow us to verify the truth of the statement in question in respect of animals that do not report their pain, because it provides us no tools and no way to do this.

The second thing to note is that my conclusions rely on the assumption that animals enjoy both intentionality and consciousness. If this assumption is denied, CIT may well be considered both sound and adequate. I don't mean to defend this assumption. It is just my intuition. Since there is no knockdown argument that I am aware of to suggest the opposite of my intuition is true, and a lot to suggest its truth, I feel no pressure to give it up.

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### Notes

- 1) Place, U. T., Ullin Place, “Is Consciousness a Brain Process”, in Chalmers, D. J., Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002
- 2) Place, U. T., Token- Versus Type-Identity Theories, <http://www.swif.uniba.it/lei/mind/texts/t0000002.htm>, extracted April 10th, 2010
- 3) Ibid.
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- 5) Ibid.
- 6) Op Cit. Place, U. T., Ullin Place, “Is Consciousness a Brain Process”, in Chalmers, D. J., Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, p.58
- 7) Ibid. p. 58
- 8) Ibid. p. 58
- 9) Ibid. p. 58
- 10) See Putnam, H. W., “The Nature of Mental States”, in Chalmers, D. J., Philosophy of Mind: Classical and Contemporary Readings, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002

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## SUMMARY

Ullin Place's Cartesian Remnants:  
Identity Theory and the Lack of Animal Minds.

Luke MALIK

This paper aims to show that Ullin Place's classical version of identity theory (CIT) remains Cartesian to the extent that it denies animal mentality. CIT is a so called "two-factor" theory of the mind, which explains intentionality and consciousness in two different ways. Intentionality is explained by behaviouristic means, consciousness is explained in a physicalist manner. It is argued that, on the one hand, as a consequence of the explanation of intentionality, animals do not have intentionality. On the other hand, the physicalist explanation of consciousness allows no room for an explanation of animal minds, even if there are animal minds. This paper, therefore, comes to the conclusion that if one assumes that animals are minded, CIT is an unsound and inadequate theory of mind. It is unsound insofar as it deals with intentionality, and inadequate insofar as it deals with consciousness. This critique of Place's theory is also argued to be distinct from Putnam's critique of the same theory.

**Keywords :** Physicalism, Mind, Animal, Intentionality, Consciousness