

ATTITUDE PROBLEMS

An Essay on Linguistic Intensionality

GRAEME FORBES

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Preface

This preface contains two confessions. First, I confess to a disreputable desire that, because it is so-called, *Attitude Problems* should be purchased in bulk, sight unseen, by large corporations seeking to improve the attitudes of their most difficult employees. Universities and other organizations that have a tenure system might also be tempted by the title. Such potential misunderstanding does not keep me awake at night, for like many of my colleagues,¹ I have pursued the semantics of natural language in order to become rich and famous (perhaps I am less fussy than others about the means).

And so I let the cat out of the bag: *Attitude Problems* is yet another essay on the logico-semantic problems to which attitude ascriptions and their near-neighbours give rise. More exactly, it is about *objec-tual* attitude ascriptions, ascriptions of attitudes towards objects that we make with psychological intensional transitive verbs such as ‘want’, ‘seek’ and ‘fear’.² I also discuss other intensional transitive verbs, such as transaction verbs and depiction verbs, which behave in similar ways.

Those familiar with the literature on intensional verbs would expect the topic of substitution failure to loom large in this book. It does not. Instead, I have focused on another peculiarity of many

¹ See, for instance, (Chierchia and McConnell-Ginet 2000:xi, xv).

² Throughout, I use single quotes to mention expressions of natural language, except expressions which contain an apostrophe, for which I use double quotes. Double quotes are also used as scare quotes. Expressions of formal languages double as names of themselves.

intensional transitives, that with almost any kind of complement, they give rise to an ambiguity that has been called ‘specific/unspecific’, ‘particular/no particular’, and ‘relational/notional’. In Quine’s famous illustration (1956:185), if we paraphrase ‘I want a sloop’ as ‘there exists a sloop such that I want it’, this gives the wrong idea if all I really want is ‘mere relief from slooplessness’. The ‘mere relief’ reading is the notional or unspecific one, and the details of how it gets expressed are by no means evident.

One thing is clear, that in advance of a theory of substitution-resistance and a theory of the relational/notional distinction, there is no reason to be confident that the same mechanism underlies the two phenomena. It is not even the same verbs that give rise to them. Which brings me to my second confession, that in the mid-nineties I nevertheless published an article on substitution-resistance in a prominent journal, in which I suggested that my account of it automatically explained the relational/notional ambiguity as well. Naturally, I blame the editors and referees for letting this pass.

In more recent years, I have published papers on the topic, some of the content of which I have incorporated into this essay in what I think is improved form. I thank the editors and publishers of *The Philosophical Review*, *The Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *Linguistics and Philosophy*, and *Facta Philosophica*, for their permission to use the original material. All those papers contained extensive thanks to various colleagues, which I repeat here without spelling out the lengthy list of names, though Jennifer Saul deserves another mention for her response at the Aristotelian Society meeting in Glasgow, Scotland (where I was either local-boy-makes-good or prophet-without-honour, I am still unsure which).

There are others to whom I am grateful for assistance directly related to writing *Attitude Problems*: Johan van Benthem, Bob Carpenter, David Dowty, Geoffrey Pullum, François Recanati, Tom Sattig, Roger Schwarzschild, Mandy Simons, Jason Stanley, Zoltan Szabó, Achille Varzi, and especially Richmond Thomason and Ede Zimmerman. Obviously, I need to hear from more people in the middle of the alphabet, unless the Press’s anonymous readers, from whom I received very helpful comments, were such.

Discussions with Kit Fine, Christopher Peacocke, and Mark Richard were as invaluable to me again as they have been throughout my

career. Kathrin Koslicki and Teresa Robertson read drafts of chapters and suggested a number of improvements. I am also grateful to audiences at the Society for Exact Philosophy, especially Diana Raffman; at the first Bellingham Summer Philosophy Conference, especially Ted Sider; at Logica 2003, especially Philip Kremer; at the University of Notre Dame's Ernan McMullin Perspective Series in Philosophy meeting on the work of Terence Parsons, especially Peter van Inwagen, Barbara Partee, and, of course, Terence Parsons, to whom I have accumulated a large debt in drinks promised but not yet bought; and at a workshop at the Institut d'Histoire et de Philosophie des Sciences et des Techniques, especially Friederike Moltmann, Thomas Hofweber, Ede Zimmerman, and my commentator, Isidora Stojanovic.

The last stages of preparation of the proofs of *Attitude Problems* were carried out in less than ideal circumstances, for I was completing the project while I was a Hurricane Katrina evacuee.³ I thank the University of Alabama in Huntsville for extending facilities to me that proved very useful, and Andrew Cling for arranging it.

Finally, I thank the National Endowment of the Humanities for the Summer Grant that facilitated the writing and revising of later chapters. To be sure, any views, findings, conclusions, or recommendations expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect those of the NEH.

But I'm not done yet. Though what follows may be out of date by the time it reaches its audience, I would like to end by saying something about the impact of Hurricane Katrina on Tulane University, where I have taught for twenty-three of the last twenty-four years, and the city of New Orleans, where I have lived for the same period.

I am confident that Tulane's current leaders have formulated a sound plan to bring the university back. But their task has been made very much harder by the fact that Tulane has no financial cushion that would allow it room for manoeuvre in weathering this crisis. Significant responsibility for this rests with successive Boards

³ For those interested in such matters, proofs were prepared in Adobe *FrameMaker* running on Macintosh computers. The text font is Robert Slimbach's *Kepler*, the display font for formulae is *AG Rounded*, both from Adobe, and the logic symbols are from *Lucida NewMath* by Y&Y.

of Administrators and the four decades of deficit spending on ball games that they have insisted on to gratify their obsession with remaining in Division 1A of the American intercollegiate athletics system. The total cost in subsidies and lost opportunities relating to these deficits, for the period 1964 to 1995, was calculated by a Tulane economist as reaching nine figures,⁴ an amount of money that would be, to put it mildly, rather welcome right now.

But Tulane does not exist in a vacuum, and whether or not it can function again depends on its environment as well as its finances: New Orleans also needs to be functioning. Bringing New Orleans back will require political will, and a certain competence, at city, state, and federal levels. So far, there have been few hopeful signs in these areas. On the other hand, there is a small army of ordinary people working hard at rebuilding. They range from emergency-services personnel from around the country who volunteered and drove hundreds of miles to the city in their official vehicles to help restore order,⁵ to the clean-up crews who have the arduous, unpleasant, and monumental task of disposing of all the trash and rubble, to the tradesmen who will do most of the reconstruction work on the ground. Some members of this army might be rather nonplussed to be presented with copies of *Attitude Problems*, but the author nevertheless records his admiration for all of their efforts.

New Orleans
May 2006

⁴ See (Tanner 1995). His final estimate of the cost for this period was \$115 million, assuming a 12% return on money that might have been invested instead of being used to cover athletics deficits (12% was the average return on US stocks in the period 1945–94). [Tanner's budget number for 1992–3 is inaccurate, but the effect of this on his overall calculation is negligible. In 1994, the value of Tulane's endowment was \$280 million.]

⁵ In a report about a visit to New Orleans not long after the hurricane, Michael Lewis writes: 'I walked down St. Charles Avenue and watched the most eclectic convoy of official vehicles ever assembled. It included...the New York City Police Department, the Alameda County Fire Department, the Aspen Fire Department, the S.P.C.A. from somewhere in Kentucky, emergency-rescue trucks from Illinois and Arizona, the Austin Fire Department, the U.S. Coast Guard, the Consulate of Iceland, and several pickup trucks marked, mysteriously, FPS: Federal Protection Services' (*The New York Times Magazine*, 9th October 2005, p. 51).

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