

# Objections to the two-dimensionalism of *The Conscious Mind*

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The two-dimensionalist system of *The Conscious Mind* is comprised of the following three main theses:

- [T1] A sentence is a priori iff it has a necessary primary intension.
- [T2] A sentence is (metaphysically) necessary iff it has a necessary secondary intension.
- [T3] Truth conditions for primary intensions can be defined in terms of Kaplan’s characters. A sentence’s primary intension is true at a world  $w$  iff relative to  $w$  as context, the sentence delivers a secondary intension which is true at  $w$ .

In a series of later articles, Chalmers has revised his interpretation of 2-D semantics, and especially [T3]. (He would now reject the above even as an interpretation of what he had in mind in *TCM*.) However, seeing some problems with the above will give us an idea of what problems later developments of two-dimensionalism will have to solve.

## 1 Problems with the rigidification of names

Consider

[1] Hesperus is Phosphorus.

This is a paradigm example of the necessary a posteriori (according at least to two-dimensionalists), and so it ought to turn out to have a contingent primary intension and a necessary secondary intension. It follows that at least one term in the sentence must contain an indexical element (otherwise primary and secondary intensions would converge at every world, and one would be necessary iff the other is).

Since [1] contains only names and ‘is’, names must contain an indexical element. Given Kripke’s modal arguments, they must also be rigid designators.

We’ve already seen with ‘water’ how Chalmers aims to handle expressions of this kind. Names, like natural kind terms, will be equivalent to rigidified descriptions. As discussed last time, we can rigidify descriptions in two ways: with the ‘dthat’ operator or with the actuality operator. Both options pose problems for the two-dimensionalist.

### 1.1 Names as ‘actually’-rigidified descriptions

The main problem with rigidification using the actuality operator is that it runs counter to the apparent platitude that it is possible for someone to have beliefs about actually existing individuals without having any beliefs about the actual world (Soames (2002, 2005)). Consider, for example, the name ‘Aristotle’, and suppose that it is to be equivalent to some rigidified description ‘the actual author of the  $F$ .’ Let ‘@’ be a name for the actual world. Then take some counterfactual that we are inclined to count as true of the form

[2] If it had been the case that  $p$ , then someone would have believed that Aristotle was  $G$ .

[2] is true iff in the nearest world  $w$  in which  $p$ , someone believes that Aristotle is  $G$ . So, if ‘Aristotle’ is short for ‘the actual  $F$ ’, [2] is true iff [3] is:

[3] In  $w$ , someone believes that the actual  $F$  is  $G$ .

But what this says is that the relevant possible believer in  $w$  has beliefs about the actual world, i.e.

[4] In  $w$ , someone believes that the  $F$  in @ is  $G$ .

where we are presuming that @  $\neq w$ . But this seems wrong; it is not true that in every possible world in which someone has a belief about Aristotle, that they all have a belief about @.

You might object that the theory would fare better if we let ‘actual’ name not the world of the context — our world, since we are the ones talking — but the world of the circumstance — in this case,  $w$ . (If we understand ‘actual’ on par with ‘I’ and ‘here’, that is of course not how the word usually works, but that needn’t worry us here.) But to make this move

is to forget the motivation for adding ‘actually’ to the description in the first case. The point was to turn the description into a rigid designator, in order to answer the modal argument. But if we let ‘actual’ designate the world of the circumstance, then ‘the actual  $F$ ’ will be a rigid designator iff ‘the  $F$ ’ is.

If it works at all, this argument also counts against non-two-dimensionalist uses of the ‘actuality’ operator, such as the analysis of names in terms of individual essences constructed from world-indexed properties in Plantinga (1978).

### 1.2 Names as ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions

In *TCM*, Chalmers uses ‘dthat’ rather than ‘actual’ in his examples of rigidified descriptions. Recall that the difference between the two was that the former, unlike the latter, turns the description into a Millian term of direct reference for the thing denoted by the description. In effect, then it erases the descriptive content of the description — the only thing that distinguishes ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions from names as understood by Millians is that the former have variable characters (i.e., their primary and secondary intensions diverge). For this reason, believing that dthat[the  $F$ ] is  $G$  does not, unlike believing that the actual  $F$  is  $G$ , involve believing something about the actual world. This is, for the above reasons, to the good.

But there are at least two worries about this use of ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions:

1. It appears to lead to the problems with apparent substitution failures faced by Millians and which two-dimensionalists are anxious to avoid. If names are equivalent to ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions, any coreferential names will have the same content/secondary intension. This seems to imply that the following are equivalent:

Hammurabi believes that Hesperus is Hesperus.

Hammurabi believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus.

2. Another worry developed in Soames (2005) (308-310) is that this analysis of names will lead to a radical and implausible expansion of the class of contingent a priori propositions. Let’s suppose that the following are the primary intensions of ‘Kaplan’ and ‘Kripke’:

Kaplan = dthat[the author of *Demonstratives*]

Kripke = dthat[the author of *Naming and Necessity*]

Now consider the sentence

[5] Kaplan is not Kripke.

[5] is intuitively an example of the necessary a posteriori. So far, it does not seem to pose any problem for the two-dimensionalist: given the above primary intensions, [5] will have a contingent primary intension and a necessary secondary intension, which is what we want. But now let’s define a new name, ‘Kap2’, with the following primary intension:

Kaplan2 = dthat[the author of *Demonstratives* who did not write *Naming and Necessity*]

Now consider

[6] Kaplan2 is not Kripke.

Intuitively (insofar as there are intuitions about such things) this also seems to be necessary a posteriori. But the problem is that [6] has a necessary primary intension: given the primary intensions of ‘Kaplan2’ and ‘Kripke’, it is true in every context.

A further problem is that [6] and [5] have the same secondary intension. So it might seem that the two can be substitutable *salve veritate* in any sentence. But that leads to the result that the following must have the same truth-value, which is a problem for the two-dimensionalist:

It is knowable a priori that Kaplan2 is not Kripke.

It is knowable a priori that Kaplan is not Kripke.

Both of these arguments rest at least partly on the assumption that terms with the same secondary intension are substitutable in propositional attitude ascriptions. This is a principle which, in developing non-2D semantic theories, we found very plausible. But here it is important to remember that the two-dimensionalist thinks of primary intension as the aspect of meaning most closely linked to the mental lives of subjects — so at this point we should not assume a principle of free substitution of expressions with the same secondary intension in the complements of attitude ascriptions. But this leads us to the question of how the two-dimensionalist should understand propositional attitude ascriptions if, as the above arguments indicate, she must understand them in some way that blocks substitution of terms with the same secondary intensions.

## 2 Problems finding descriptions to rigidify

Kripke gave three arguments against descriptivism: the modal, epistemic, and semantic arguments. If two-dimensionalism is to succeed as a way of reviving aspects of descriptivism, it will have to find a way around all three. Rigidifying names only addresses the modal argument. So, what has to be done is, for each name ‘*n*’ to be analyzed as a rigidified description, find some description ‘the *F*’ such that:

- ‘If the *F* exists, then *n* is the *F*’ is knowable a priori.
- ‘the *F*’ is uniquely satisfied by the referent of ‘*n*.’

This is not trivial. One possibility is to appeal to meta-linguistic descriptions, like ‘the referent of my friend’s use of ‘*n*’’. But there are three problems here:

1. In many cases, like ‘the referent of ‘*n*’ as used by the person from whom I acquired the name’ it is possible to find counterexamples to the suggested analysis.
2. In other cases, as in ‘the referent of my use of ‘*n*’ or ‘the referent of ‘*n*’ in my language’ the analysis can’t determine reference because of circularity.
3. The view is intrinsically implausible. We do not typically use names to talk partly about language.

Further, even if we do find a non-circular description of this sort, it is not obvious that claims like

If the referent of ‘*n*’ as used by the person from whom I acquired the name exists, then *n* is the referent of ‘*n*’ as used by the person from whom I acquired the name.

are a priori.

### 3 The semantics of attitude ascriptions

A central part of the argument of Soames (2005) is that the two-dimensionalist cannot give an adequate account of the semantics of propositional attitude ascriptions.

#### *3.1 Attitude ascriptions report relations to primary intensions*

The main theses of two-dimensionalism lead via some natural assumptions to the thesis that propositional attitude ascriptions report relations to the primary intensions of the complement sentences of the ascription. Consider the following argument:

1.  $\ulcorner S \urcorner$  is knowable a priori iff  $\ulcorner S \urcorner$  has a necessary primary intension.
  2.  $\ulcorner S \urcorner$  is knowable a priori iff  $\ulcorner$ It is knowable a priori that  $S \urcorner$  is true.
  3.  $\ulcorner$ It is knowable a priori that  $S \urcorner$  is true iff  $\ulcorner S \urcorner$  has a necessary primary intension. (1,2)
  4. ‘It is knowable a priori that’ is an operator on primary intensions; if  $\ulcorner S \urcorner$  and  $\ulcorner S^* \urcorner$  have the same primary intension, then  $\ulcorner$ It is knowable a priori that  $S \urcorner$  is true iff  $\ulcorner$ It is knowable a priori that  $S^* \urcorner$  is true. (3)
  5. ‘It is knowable a priori that’ and attitude ascription operators like  $\ulcorner A$  knows that  $\urcorner$  and  $\ulcorner A$  believes that  $\urcorner$  operate on the same thing.
- 
- C. if  $\ulcorner S \urcorner$  and  $\ulcorner S^* \urcorner$  have the same primary intension, then  $\ulcorner A$  *v*’s that  $S \urcorner$  is true iff  $\ulcorner A$  *v*’s that  $S^* \urcorner$  is true. (4,5)

The problem is that the conclusion of the argument — that propositional attitude ascriptions report relations to primary intensions — is clearly false. So the worry is that

this argument is a reductio of premise (1), which is what Chalmers (2006) calls the ‘core thesis’ of two-dimensionalism.

(C) can be shown to be false by considering examples of attitude ascriptions in which context-sensitive expressions figure in the complement. Consider first ordinary indexicals, like ‘I.’ Suppose that you say, ‘I am hungry.’ If ascriptions did report relations to primary intensions, then I could report what you said correctly with the ascription, ‘He said that I am hungry.’ This is clearly wrong.

Similar examples can be developed using names, since the two-dimensionalist system under consideration counts them as having variable character as well. See the discussion of strong two-dimensionalism in Soames (2007).

The moral is that the two-dimensionalist must reject a premise of the above argument other than (1). The most plausible candidate seems to be (2); but this runs contra to what two-dimensionalists tend to say about the a priori in their writings.

### 3.2 *Attitude ascriptions report relations to secondary intensions*

One natural retreat for the two-dimensionalist is to say that attitude ascriptions report relations to secondary, rather than primary, intensions. But this is not a stable stopping point, for the reasons discussed above in connection with ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions. The view that attitude ascriptions report relations to secondary intensions + the view that names are ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions entails, via the argument above, that all true non-identities (as well as all true identities) are knowable a priori.

(Why should the two-dimensionalist be bothered? Because of the modal argument, she must find some interpretation of names on which they are rigid designators. Because names are a source of the necessary a posteriori, she must find some interpretation of them on which they have variable characters. (Remember, we are assuming the close link between primary intensions and Kaplanian characters endorsed in *The Conscious Mind*.) There seem no other options than ‘dthat’- or ‘actually’-rigidified descriptions, and the latter don’t work.)

### 3.3 *Hybrid views*

The only other option is to give truth conditions for attitude ascriptions in terms of some combination of primary and secondary intensions, as suggested in §7 of Chalmers (2002). The suggested truth conditions are along the following lines:

- [T4]  $\ulcorner A$  believes that  $S \urcorner$  is true iff
- (i)  $A$  has a belief with the secondary intension which  $S$  has in the context of the ascription, and
  - (ii)  $A$ ’s belief has a primary intension which is appropriately related to the primary intension of  $S$ .

The key detail which needs filling in is clearly the nature of the appropriateness relation. Chalmers says that it is likely context-sensitive, and difficult to spell out.

His view seems to be that this is a plausible approach to belief ascriptions but that, in any case, two-dimensionalism is not as such committed to any particular semantics of belief ascriptions. If the truth is that the Russellian semantics of Soames or Salmon is correct, for example, the two-dimensionalist can just model that by letting beliefs be relations to secondary intensions. But this seems to me to be a mistake. As we have seen above, the view that propositional attitude ascriptions are relations to secondary intensions threatens the view that names and natural kind terms can be treated as ‘dthat’-rigidified descriptions, which seems the most plausible version of the kind of two-dimensionalism that we are discussing. So two-dimensionalism really is committed to giving a semantics for attitude ascriptions, and the problems we’ve discussed with Fregean attempts to do so do not inspire confidence that there’s a good way of spelling out the appropriateness relation above.

#### 4 Problems with the existence of bearers of content

A further problem with the present version of two-dimensionalism is discussed in Chalmers (2006), §2.4. This is that many sentences have the property of being true when uttered, and so have necessary primary intensions, but are clearly not a priori. Examples:

Language exists.  
I exist.  
I am uttering now.

The moral, Chalmers says plausibly, is that ‘apriority and being true whenever uttered are fundamentally different properties.’ But if that is right, then the present version of two-dimensionalism is a nonstarter.

#### 5 Which worlds are allowed?

When we construct a two-dimensional array of worlds as contexts and contents, it is natural to wonder what worlds we are permitted to use as possible contexts. Block and Stalnaker (1999) argue that this leads to a problem for this kind of two-dimensionalist. Consider the sentences

Water is H<sub>2</sub>O.  
Water is the watery stuff.

The two-dimensionalist wants the primary intension of the first to be contingent, and the primary intension of the second, to be necessary. Let’s consider two possible ways of thinking about the contexts which can go into the 2D array:

- Any context at all, even one in which ‘water’ has a completely different meaning, can be considered as a context.

- Only contexts in which ‘water’ is used as it actually is, to denote H<sub>2</sub>O, can be considered as a context.

If we take the first option, then ‘Water is the watery stuff’ will have a contingent primary intension. If we take the second, then ‘Water is H<sub>2</sub>O’ will have a necessary primary intension. So neither of these options will work.

This is best thought of not as a knock-down objection to two-dimensionalism, but as a way of pressing the point that the two-dimensionalist has to specify the aspect of meaning (i.e., character) that is held constant between possible contexts.

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