

How Do Indexical Beliefs Motivate Group Action?

Juliana Faccio Lima

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Perry [1979] has famously argued that we need indexical beliefs to explain and rationalize intentional actions of individuals. I climb up a tree upon seeing a bear running towards me because I believe that "I am about to be attacked by a bear". The beliefs that "The inattentive hiker is about to be attacked by a bear" or "John is about to be attacked by a bear" are about me. But, if I don't believe that "I am the inattentive hiker" or "I am John", indexical beliefs, I won't be motivated to act in a way to save myself.

Interestingly, we can generate similar cases with groups and conclude that a group indexical belief, a *we*-belief, is necessary to explain a group's behavior. Suppose I am hiking with a group called the 'Bear Food hiking team'. Upon seeing a bear coming towards us, we all climb up the nearest tree together. We are motivated to behave this way because we believe that "we are about to be attacked by a bear". The beliefs that "The inattentive hiking group is about to be attacked by a bear" or "Bear Food Hiking Team is about to be attacked by a bear" are also about us. However, unless we believe that "we are the inattentive hiking group" or that "we are Bear Food Hiking Team", we won't be motivated to act in a way to save ourselves.

A popular account of indexical beliefs, 'Self-Locating View', holds that indexical beliefs play such a fundamental role in explaining and rationalizing action because they reveal an object's location relative to the person who holds the belief. Thus, what is special about my belief that "I am about to be attacked by a bear" is that it locates me, the believer, in relation to the object of the belief. In other words, it is a belief that carries information about where, when, or who the object of the belief is in my immediate environment.

Given the similarities of the individual and group cases, it's reasonable to expect and *prima facie* desirable to have one account of indexical beliefs that explains why they are necessary to motivate individual and group actions.

In this paper, I will argue that the Self-Locating View can't accommodate group indexical beliefs for basically two reasons. First, in some cases, for me to have a *we*-belief, I do not need to know *where* the group the belief is about is in my immediate environment, as the Self-Locating View requires. For instance, if I'm leading the hike with the Bear Food team and I'm in front of the group, then I'm not seeing every member. As a result, I won't know where they all are in relation to me, but I can still have a *we*-belief. Second, I do not need to know *which group* the belief is about to have a *we*-belief – this is the equivalent of knowing *who* the belief is about in the individual case. Take the last case and further suppose that I don't know who some of the members of the Bear Food Hiking team are. This means that I do not know which group it is, in what I will argue is the relevant sense, but I can still have the *we*-belief.

The problems for the Self-Locating View become more interesting when we move to *demonstrative beliefs*, another type of indexical belief. Suppose I see that Nora is about to be shot and push her to the floor to save her. For reasons explained before, the motivating belief has to be indexical, in this case, a belief like "she is about to be shot". According to the Self-Locating View, this belief is indexical because it reveals Nora's location in relation to the person who holds the belief.

Now suppose that Andrew, a security guard, sees that Nora is about to be shot through security

cameras. He also sees that Jasmin, his co-worker, is near Nora but can't see her. He calls Jasmin and gives her precise directions to find Nora, which she successfully does. Together, Andrew and Jasmin saved Nora. The motivation was that they (as a group) believed that "she_[Nora] is about to be shot". However, to be motivated to save Nora, Andrew didn't need to know where Nora was in relation to him or to both of them; just in relation to Jasmin. But Andrew's knowledge of where Nora is relative to Jasmin is not self-locating.

I will present an alternative approach to indexical beliefs where these are practical ways of thinking of objects. In my proposed view, indexical beliefs require a *know how* to interact with the object, instead of a knowledge of where, who, or when the object of the belief is in relation to the believer. This way of understanding indexical beliefs can uniformly explain both individual and group actions. In the *we*-belief case, I do not need to know where the group is relative to me, but just how to act as a group to perform a group action. In Andrew and Jasmin's case, Andrew needs to know how to get the group to get to Nora, which he does by guiding Jasmin to Nora. So, Perry is right that there's a special kind of belief to motivate actions. But, if I'm right, group action and indexical beliefs suggest that he is wrong about what an indexical belief is.

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