

Special Issue on *The Indexical Point of View*:  
INTRODUCTORY NOTES

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**MATHEUS VALENTE** <sup>1,2</sup>

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6380-2623>

<sup>1</sup>*Universitat de Barcelona (LOGOS)*  
*Department of Philosophy*  
*Barcelona*  
*Spain*

<sup>2</sup>*Universitat de València (VLC Philosophy Lab)*  
*Department of Philosophy*  
*València*  
*Spain*

[matheusvalenteite@gmail.com](mailto:matheusvalenteite@gmail.com)

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**Abstract:** This special issue is dedicated to Vojislav Božičković's *The Indexical Point of View* (Routledge, 2021) and contains five critical notices written by experts from all around the globe accompanied by the author's responses.

## Introductory notes by Matheus Valente<sup>1</sup>

The literature on indexicality in both thought and language is so extensive that readers aiming to delve into this issue for the first time might be unable to avoid a sense of vertigo. It is thus very fortunate that *The Indexical Point of View* (Routledge), the outcome of several decades of first-tier research by Vojislav Božičković (Belgrade University), single-handedly offers us: a comprehensive introduction to the problematics surrounding indexical thought, the main theories that have been proposed to address them, as well as the author's own attempt to remedy his predecessors' limitations by offering his own positive view.

Božičković surveys the views of luminaries such as Frege, Kaplan, Perry, Lewis, Evans and Stalnaker, carefully pinpointing what each of these authors got right and where they went wrong. The cognitive significance of those thoughts we express by means of indexical expressions ('I', 'here', 'now', 'this' etc.) is particularly elusive. It cannot be equated with the linguistic meaning of these expressions since it is possible to express thoughts with the same cognitive significance by means of distinct indexical expressions. This possibility is famously illustrated by Frege in *The Thought* (1956), in a passage that Božičković dubs 'the Retention Claim' (p. 8): "If someone wants to say today what he expressed yesterday using the word 'today', he will replace this word with 'yesterday'." But if the same thought can be re-expressed by 'today' and 'yesterday', expressions with distinct meanings, how can we account for its cognitive significance? More generally, how do we explain the

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dynamics that are necessary in order to retain indexical beliefs across time as well as to share them with each other?

Božičković's own positive view, previously defended in a series of papers published in some of the best philosophy journals, and now reformulated in its clearest and most convincing form, involves the idea that the retention of an indexical belief is based on the internal continuity of a thinkers' beliefs, and her capacity to unreflectively take for granted that an object represented by a series of beliefs is the same. This allows Božičković to overcome a series of problems related to the impossibility of both linguistic meaning and referential content to characterize thought's cognitive significance, to properly account for cases of confused subjects who lose track of their surroundings (such as the notorious story of Rip van Winkle, who sleeps for 20 years thinking only one night has passed) and to explain in which sense thought must be epistemically transparent. Finally, Božičković's overall discussion suggests a way to explain in which sense indexical thought forms a unified class in spite of the apparent differences between self-thoughts, temporal thoughts, spatial thoughts and perceptual/demonstrative thoughts. Indexical thoughts are, Božičković convincingly argues, based on the same underlying cognitive mechanism of representing as the same both diachronically and intersubjectively.

This special issue includes five critical notices of *The Indexical Point of View* followed by Božičković's responses.

Eduarda Calado cross-examines Božičković's view of indexical thought in light of the issue of indirect speech reports, making suggestions about how the author's view could be modified so as to accommodate insights about the theoretical importance of taking into account both the speech reporter and her audience.

Eros Corazza comes in the defense of the venerable tradition of two-factor semantics that originates in Kaplan and Perry. While Corazza is sympathetic to Božičković's criticisms of this tradition, he argues that we can overcome their limitations without completely giving up on their framework – the key to this being a proper employment of the Perrian notion of reflexive content.

María de Ponte's contribution similarly proposes a defense of an older tradition exemplified by the work of John Perry. De Ponte explains why Perry cannot be attributed the view that cognitive significance is reducible to linguistic meaning, and similarly emphasizes the central importance of the notion of reflexive content. Crucial to de Ponte's discussion is the claim that, in order to account for belief retention and change of mind, we need a concept of context that is determined by what the speaker believes but also the objective notion of context as determined by how the world really is.

Peter Ludlow formulates several challenges to Božičković's appeal to thinkers' unreflective assumptions about an object's constancy in thought. For one example, the author's use of this notion to bind together sense contents might find a problem in the undeniable coherence of trains of thought about fictional or other non-existent objects. It also risks approximating Božičković's view a tad too close to direct referential theories and their familiar difficulties. Ludlow closes by suggesting that the notion of unreflective thought itself might be subject to unclarity.

Finally, Ludovic Soutif & Carlos Márquez formulate two objections to the main views in *The Indexical Point of View*. First, drawing inspiration in thought experiments devised by Charles Travis, they mount a criticism of Božičković's solution to the "proliferation of thoughts" problem. Second, they revamp a view usually attributed to Evans according to which the retention of indexical thoughts may require more

than that the relevant thinker remembers having the thoughts they once did, i.e. it might require that they additionally keep track of time, space and of their surroundings. This view stands in sharp contrast to some of the main ideas defended by Božičković, according to which internal continuity and representing as the same should be sufficient to tell a complete story about indexical cognitive dynamics.

### References

FREGE, Gottlob (1956). “The Thought” (Trans. by A.M. and M. Quinton), *Mind* 65, 289–311.

