

Logic for non-persons

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By “non-persons” I intend those agents who are not adult human beings but are alive in some sense. So the term fits young children, animals, and groups like a party or a corporation (but not robots). What these possess are some logical processes that they perform, but these processes are not mediated through language. This is true of course of children and animals who do have some reasons for what they do – and we can often guess what these reasons are. But they do not express themselves in language. With groups, they do use language, but often with intent to deceive and in any case, not consistently. Different members of the same group say different things, and combining these different statements into a group stance may be difficult. The work of List and Pettit and earlier of Arrow, points in this direction.

So can logic exist without language and if so, what is its structure? Can we talk about the logic of a child or an animal even if it cannot talk? Donald Davidson would disagree, certainly with animals, and perhaps also with children. But his argument does not support his strong conclusion.

The issue is different with groups. I can say that my daughter likes pizza but we cannot say that the Democratic party likes pizza. So its actions have to be explained in a more complex way. To be sure the Democratic party does have goals like winning an election, and within limits, even beliefs. But these need to be seen in a nuanced way before we can talk about its logic. A question like “does the Democratic party want to promote socialism?” does not have a straight yes or no answer.

The talk will consist of two parts. In the first part we will talk about animals and children and suggest that there is some logic we can attribute to them as long as we do not demand that this logic be expressed in language, although *our representation of that logic* may be expressed in our language. There will be a little bit of formalism here. The work of Uexküll on *umwelts* will come in for a mention.

With groups, a different question arises, namely the extent to which we can take towards them the *intentional stance* which Dennett talks about. An agent can be assigned the intentional stance if we can relate its behavior to its beliefs and goals without bothering about its internal structure. The intentional stance is unproblematic for animals and children (and has been used for robots) but it needs to be used with caution for groups. We will talk about *the extent* to which a group can also be assigned the intentional stance.