

First-Person-Based Genericity and Relative Truth

Friederike Moltmann

Institut d'Histoire et de Philosophie des Sciences et Techniques (IHPST), Paris

The generic pronoun *one*, as in (1a), and its empty counterpart, so-called arbitrary PRO, as in (1b), are highly interesting from both a linguistic and a philosophical point of view, though they have received only little attention (by linguists) or no attention at all (by philosophers):

- (1) a. It is nice when *one* is walking in the park.
b. It is nice PRO_{arb} to walk in the park.

(1a) and (1b) display one important use of generic *one*, namely for the expression of *first-person-based genericity* -- a use in fact quite familiar from the philosophical literature on subjectivity, consciousness, and selfknowledge. First-person-based genericity consists in a generalization of a property an agent has attributed to himself to anyone the agent might identify with. Thus, (1a) is most naturally understood as an immediate expression of the speaker's evaluation of his own activity of walking and, simultaneously, as the generalization that it is nice for anyone *x* when *x* is walking in the park.

Generic *one* (and arbitrary PRO) always leads to generic sentences, by introducing a variable to be bound by a sentential generic operator. However, in addition generic *one* has a *first-person-oriented* meaning, which is responsible for why *one* can be used essentially only in sentences whose generalization is either *based on* a self-attribution of a property, as in (1a, b) or *is meant to lead to* a self-attribution of a property, namely for the purpose of practical reasoning, as in (2) (which likely is to prevent the addressee from walking in the park):

- (2) One should not walk in the park.

Generic *one* is excluded in other contexts, such as (3):

- (3) * One is a human being.

The first part of the talk consists in giving a general semantic analysis of generic *one* (and arbitrary PRO); the second part in showing the importance of first-person-based genericity, for the recent philosophical discussion of *relative truth* by philosophers such as McFarlane, Koelbel, Richard, and others. First person-based genericity, I will argue, underlies to a great extent the various cases that have been argued require a notion of *relative truth*. In fact, generic *one*-sentences themselves display the intuitions indicating 'relative truth' such as faultless disagreement and the possibility of retraction. I will argue that the notion of first-person-based genericity allows for a better account of those intuitions than standard accounts of relative truth.

References:

Moltmann, F. (to appear a): 'Generic *One*, Arbitrary PRO, and the First Person'. *Natural Language Semantics*. Available at <http://www-ihpst.univ-paris1.fr/fmoltmann>

----- (to appear b): 'First-Person-Based Genericity and Relative Truth'. Conditionally accepted by *Mind*. Available at: <http://www-ihpst.univ-paris1.fr/fmoltmann>