On Semantic Content, Belief-Content and Belief Ascription

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"Clark Kent: *sets glasses on kitchen table*
Lois Lane: Where did our table go?"[1]

1 Introduction

For anyone familiar with Fregean and Millian Theories of proper names, it is no surprise that they have problems accounting for the intuitive truth-value of sentences with proper names in the subject position in certain contexts. Modal Arguments offered by Kripke and Kaplan (among others) suggest that Fregean theories fail in *modal* contexts. Frege's Puzzle and related puzzles about beliefs and other cognitive attitudes (like, desire, supposition, etc.) suggest that Millian theories fail in *cognitive* contexts.

There have been several attempts to solve these problems on both Fregean and Millian sides. In the first part of this paper, I argue that they are fundamentally misguided, and that, if we take our intuitions seriously, the tension generated

[1]Source: Twitter.

by them suggest that both Fregean (at least certain versions of it) and Millian Theories are correct, as long as we set their scope to cognitive content (i.e., content of cognitive attitudes, like belief, desire, etc.) and semantic content, respectively. If I am right, and Millian Theories are correct about the semantic content of proper names, Frege's Puzzle reappear. So, in the second part of this paper, I sketch a proposal about the truth-value of belief (and other cognitive attitudes) ascriptions that respects our intuitions about semantic and cognitive contents, and explain how it solves Frege's and other related puzzles.

2 The Tension

The tension between intuitions about the truth-value of sentences, on the one hand, and Millian and Fregean theories, on the other hand, is unsurprising for those familiar with the debate. Millian theories, according to which the semantic content of a proper name is only its referent, seem to capture well our intuitions about the truth-value of simple sentences like (1) 'Eric Blair was born in Motihari' or (2) 'Superman flies'.[2] Intuitively, whether (1) is true or false depends only on whether Eric has the property of being born in Motihari – as in $\ulcorner \Phi\alpha \urcorner$[3] is true iff the object represented by the name substituted for $\ulcorner \alpha \urcorner$ is in the extension of the property represented by the predicate substituted for $\ulcorner \Phi \urcorner$ –, which is how it goes according to Millianism.

Millian Theories also explain well our intuitions about the modal profile of simple sentences. To give an example, in the *actual* world, Eric Blair was born in

[2]For the purposes of this paper I am supposing Superman exists, and ignoring issues pertinent to empty names.

[3]Corner quotes ('$\ulcorner$' and '$\urcorner$') enclose variables that range over predicates (upper case Greek letters), names (lower case Greek letters), and sentences (italicized lower case letters).

Motihari, is an English novelist, essayist, journalist, the author of *1984*, *Animal Farm*, etc. But things might have gone differently, and he could have been born in the nearby city of Chakia, mastered the arts of plumbing and never been interested in writing books. We can further suppose that in this world, call it 'w_1', Marjorie Blair, Eric's sister, accomplished all the things that make Eric famous in the actual world in addition to being born in Motihari. With respect to w_1, (1) is intuitively false, after all it says that Eric Blair was born in Motihari but in w_1 he was born in Chakia. And this is precisely the truth-value (1) gets according to Millian Theories, because the truth-value of (1) depends only on Eric Blair himself and the property of being born in Motihari.

When it comes to account for the intuitive truth-value of sentences that ascribe belief (or other cognitive attitude) to agents ('belief sentences', for short), also known as 'Frege's Puzzle', Millian theories seem to fall apart. For example, we can suppose without apparent contradiction that (3) 'Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari' is true but that (4) 'Lois believes that George Orwell was born in Motihari' is false, even though Eric Blair is George Orwell. However, if Millianism is correct, and given that 'Eric Blair' and 'George Orwell' refer to the same person, then (3) and (4) express the same content, in which case they necessarily have the same truth-value, that is, (3) is true iff (4) is true, contrary to our initial intuitions.[4]

Fregean theories[5], according to which the semantic content of a proper name

[4]Some replies to this problem will be considered at the beginning of section 3.

[5]A word of caution: It is hard to talk about Fregean Theories in general, without making some theoretical choices that will inevitably exclude some of its versions, sometimes even Frege's own theory. For the sake of simplicity, I will consider a simple and, what I take to be somewhat intuitive version of Fregean Theories restricted to simple sentences and belief sentences where there is, at most, one attitude verb, though the issue about multiple iteration of attitude verbs will be briefly discussed at the end. It should be noted, however, that this will not pose a problem

is a mode of presentation or way of thinking of the referent of the name, have a very compelling way of accommodating our intuitions about the truth-value of belief sentences (so much so that, we shall see, most common to Frege's Puzzle on behalf of Millianism appeal to a variation of modes of presentation). For instance, according to it, the semantic content of 'Eric Blair' can be a descriptive content like *the famous high school teacher from Hayes, West London* ('*the famous high school teacher*', for short). In addition, according to this view, co-referential names, like 'Eric Blair' and 'George Orwell', may have different modes of presentation associated with them. So, the semantic content of 'George Orwell' can be a descriptive content like *the famous writer who lived in Oxfordshire*. Because of the difference in the semantic content of the names, (3) and (4) express different contents: (3) expresses (roughly) that Lois believes that whoever is the famous high school teacher was also born in Motihari; and (4) expresses (roughly) that Lois believes that whoever is the famous writer who lived in Oxfordshire was also born in Motihari. And there is no contradiction with (4) being true and (3) false because (3) and (4) have different truth-conditions: (4) is true iff Lois believes that *the famous high school teacher was also born in Motihari*; and (3) is true iff Lois believes that *the famous writer who lived in Oxfordshire was also born in Motihari*

One of the consequences of Fregean Theories is that the truth-value of sentences with proper names depends not only on the object referred to by the name having the property represented by the predicate (as with Millianism) but also on the object satisfying the relevant mode of presentation. According to Fregean Theories, (1) is true iff the object that satisfy the description *the famous high school teacher*

for me because my considerations about the inadequacy of Fregean Theories are general, against its spirit, so to speak, and not about any specific way of cashing out any of the parts of the theory.

also has the property of being born in Motihari. And while this might be a good thing when we consider belief sentences, it is contrary to our initials intuitions that the truth-value of (1) depends solely on whether Eric Blair has the property of being born in Motihari.

Such an inconsistency is often brushed off as a small trade off required to have a nice Fregean explanation of belief sentences, but I think that things are not so simple. A more fundamental problem with this feature of Fregean Theories is revealed when we compare the modal profile of sentences according to them with their intuitive modal profile, an objection known as 'Modal Argument'. According to Fregean Theories, (1) is true iff whoever is the famous high school teacher was also born in Motihari. In the actual world, (1) is true because the famous high school teacher was also born in Motihari, namely, Eric Blair. But in w_1 (1) is surprisingly also true because there too the famous high school teacher was also born in Motihari, namely, Marjorie Blair, contrary to our intuitions that (1) is about Eric Blair and true iff he was born in Motihari. This is *not* a small problem, given that, we can recreate similar inconsistencies with virtually *any* sentence of the form $\ulcorner\Phi\alpha\urcorner$.

Philosophers who defend a version of Fregeanism have tend to reply to such a criticism by suggesting ways of calibrating the modal profile of sentences according to the theory with our intuitions. One way of doing this is to force the description to always go back to the *actual* world to "find" the object (if any) that satisfies it. In this way, (1) is true iff whoever is the famous high school teacher in the *actual* world was also born in Motihari in w_1. (1) is false in w_1 according to this modified version of Fregean Theory because the *actual* famous high school teacher, namely, Eric Blair, was not born in Motihari in w_1.

Despite the ingenuity behind this line of reply, I think it is an incorrect approach. It supposes that there is nothing wrong with the way Fregean theories cash out the truth-value of (1) with respect to the actual world, and that only modal contexts need to be explained. But the failure in modal contexts together with the inconsistency with our intuitions about what is relevant for the truth-value of (1) suggest that getting the wrong truth-value in modal contexts is simply a consequence of the theory getting the wrong truth-conditions in the first place.

At this point, the tension generated by our intuitions is apparent. On the one hand, there is good evidence to believe that Millian Theories are correct about the truth-conditions of simple sentences. On the other hand, Fregean Theories are correct about the truth-conditions of belief sentences. The question now is: can we reconcile our intuitions? If so, how?

In the remainder of this paper, I will develop an account of the truth-conditions of sentences with proper names in a way that the truth-value of simple sentences does not depend on the mode of presentation of the referent of the name, but that of belief sentences does. Such a project has a lot of moving parts, and it would impractical to discuss all of them in details. So I will begin by making two assumptions: first, given our intuitions about the truth-conditions of simple sentences, I will take that Millianism is right about the semantic content of proper names. From here on, when I talk about the semantic content of proper names, I mean only their referent.

Second, I have and will continue to implicitly endorse some version or other of *Standard Compositionality*, according to which the semantic content of a complex expression is a function of the semantic content of its basic expressions. This means that Millians accounts of the truth-value of belief sentences that replace

Standard Compositionality for some other principle will not be considered here[6].

Keeping these two points fixed, the question raised before reduces to this: how can (3) and (4) have the same semantic content but differ in truth-value? To address this question, it will be illuminating to investigate *why* the truth-value of belief sentences are sensitive to modes of presentation. And for this, we need to talk about beliefs themselves, specifically about their content.

3 A Puzzle About Belief-Content

Let me change the example for a more familiar one. Given what we know about Lois Lane, it seems correct to say that she believes that Superman walks and that Clark Kent walks, and that they are *different* beliefs. But what are the content of her beliefs?

The Disquotation Principle below (henceforth, 'Disquotation') is often invoked to answer this question:

> **Disquotation Principle**
> If an agent A sincerely, reflectively, and competently accepts a sentence $\ulcorner s \urcorner$, then A believes s (the semantic content expressed by $\ulcorner s \urcorner$).

According to Disquotation, and assuming that Lois would sincerely, reflectively, and competently accept (5) 'Superman walks' and (6) 'Clark Kent walks', the content of her beliefs are the semantic content of (5) and (6), respectively.

Disquotation visibly raises a problem for Millian Theories. Together, they entail that belief-content of (5) and (6) is the same, namely, a belief composed

[6]See Putnam [1954] for an earlier development of this line of response, and Fine [2008] for a recent revival.

of Superman himself and the property of waking (assuming properties are the semantic content of predicates[7]). Therefore, the beliefs that Superman walks and that Clark Kent walks are the same, contrary to our initial intuitions.

Advocates for Millianism have addressed this problem in a varieties of ways. Some have rejected our intuitions that Lois's beliefs are indeed different (most notoriously Salmon [1986]), others explored a difference between belief and belief-content, where the former is (somehow) constituted by a perspective ('guise' in Salmon's terminology; 'sense' [1977] or 'belief state' [1979] in Perry's terminology) and a belief-content – in this way, Lois's beliefs have the same belief-content but different perspectives. I am not sympathetic to those lines of reply because they entail that belief-contents are not transparent, that is, one could know that she believes that s without knowing what the content of her belief is. According to Salmon and Perry, this is precisely Lois's situation: she knows she believes that Superman walks and that Clark Kent walks, but she does not know that they have the same content. This means that Lois is ignorant about the content of at least one of her beliefs. But I do not think Salmon and Perry have offered good arguments for this latter claim. For this reason, I want to propose a different way of avoiding the undesired conclusion that Lois's belief that Superman walks and that Clark Kent walks are the same, whereby I reject Disquotation.

Disquotation is often taken to be supported by a intuitive argument that goes roughly like this: we utter sentences to express our beliefs, and, as competent speakers, we are pretty good (though not infallible) at picking out the right sentence to express our beliefs, at least in normal circumstances. So, if a speaker

[7]This is a controversial assumption, but since the topic of this paper is the semantic and cognitive content of proper names and not predicates, I will leave the discussion about the semantic content of predicates aside.

picks out a sentence 's' to express a belief of hers, it is reasonable to infer that the belief-content of her belief is the belief-content expressed by (her utterance of) 's'. Conversely, a competent speaker who takes her time to understand an utterance of a sentence and accepts it indicates that (in normal circumstances) she believes the belief-content it expresses. So, one concern with my proposal is that in rejecting Disquotation, I might be also rejecting a very compelling explanation of how speakers pick out sentences to express their beliefs. And while this does not undermine it, it makes it less attractive.

I do not think this concern is well-founded. The relation between Disquotation and the argument is not as strong as it is supposed. *By itself*, the argument does not support Disquotation, because it is neutral about what belief-content is expressed by 's'; it does not say that it is (or that it is not) the semantic content of 's'. It simply says that we pick out 's' to express a belief b because 's' expresses b. It is a theoretical choice to identify belief-content with the semantic content expressed by 's'. If this is right, we can analyze Disquotation into the following theses:

> **Minimal Disquotation**
>
> If an agent A sincerely, reflectively, and competently accepts a sentence $\ulcorner s \urcorner$, then A believes *a belief-content expressed by* $\ulcorner \mathrm{s} \urcorner$.

> **Identity Thesis**
>
> The belief-content expressed by a sentence $\ulcorner s \urcorner$ is the semantic content of $\ulcorner s \urcorner$.

such that Minimal Disquotation is directly supported by the argument offered before, and Identity Thesis establishes a connection between belief-content and

semantic content expressed by a sentence. If this is right, we can reject Disquotation without giving up the intuitive reasoning behind it by rejecting only the Identity Thesis. Some reasons philosophers have given in support of the Identity Thesis will be addressed at the end. For now, I will offer *prima facie* plausibility to this idea by pointing out that many philosophers have ditched closely-related versions of the Identity Thesis in discussions about linguistic communication. They have argued that (utterances of) sentences can express (assert)[8] not only a semantic content but also other content(s), often called an 'assertoric content', that, in some cases, is the relevant communicated content, or the content that speaker wanted to get in the hearer's mind, so to speak. According to them, sometimes a competent speaker A utters a sentence 's' with the intention of communicating, and, therefore, expressing a content s' that is *not* the semantic content expressed[9]. If they are right, (at least sometimes) the belief-content we want to communicate by choosing and uttering 's' is *not* its semantic content. So, there is a case to be made against the Identity Thesis.

Without the Identity Thesis, the content of Lois's belief that Superman walks and that Clark Kent walks does not have to be the semantic content of (5) and (6), respectively. And with this framework, Millians have room to offer an account to distinguish them. Since the fregean insight that we think of objects in certain ways

[8]The difference between 'express' and 'assert' is usually a terminological one, where the former is reserved to talk about a relation about (an utterance of) a sentence and its semantic content, and the latter about a relation about (an utterance of) a sentence and (some) non-semantic contents. Nothing I say hangs onto this distinction, so I will mostly use 'express' to avoid introducing unnecessary terminology.

[9]Dummett [1981, 1991], (some interpretations of) Evans [1979, 1982], Lewis [1980], and Stanley [2002] argue that utterances of sentences that express *different* semantic contents can, in some contexts, to express (assert) the *same* assertoric content. Cappelen and Lepore [2005] and Soames [2009, Ch.10] argue that there's a plurality of contents that (an utterance of) a sentence may assert, and Soames even argues that sometimes an utterance of a sentence does not express (in the relevant sense) its semantic content.

and that we can think of the same object in different ways without knowing they are the same object is very intuitive and appealing, I propose that the contribution of a proper name to a belief-content (its *cognitive content*) expressed by a sentence (of which it is a component) be a mode of presentation of its referent. In this way, (5) 'Superman walks' and (6) 'Clark Kent walks' express the same semantic content but may express different cognitive contents. When they are uttered to express Lois's belief they indeed express different belief-contents because, given all we know about Lois's mental life, it is fair to suppose that she has different ways of thinking of Superman associated with 'Superman' and 'Clark Kent', say *the guy who wears red underwear over blue pants* and *the goofy guy who wears squared glasses*, respectively.

There are several important questions about modes of presentations that I will not have the space to address here: which kinds of contents modes of presentation are? How to names get associated with a mode of presentation? Does the mode of presentation of a name varies from speaker to speaker? Among many other questions. In the remainder of this paper, I will focus on explaining how this general framework can help to answer the main question of this paper: how can (3) and (4) have the same semantic content but differ in truth-value?

4 Back to Belief ascriptions

It is now clear why the truth-value of belief sentences are sensitive to modes of presentation: it is because modes of presentation are the content of beliefs. So whatever story we tell about the difference in the truth-value of (3) and (4) has to incorporate the fact that Lois believes and does not believe different belief-contents

(of course, in virtue of the fact that 'Eric Blair' and 'George Orwell' have different cognitive contents). Here is my story.

In a situation where we are discussing possible objections to Millian Theories and consider (7) 'Lois believes Superman flies' and (8) 'Lois believes Clark Kent flies', we are interested in the mode of presentation of (2) 'Superman flies' and (9) 'Clark Kent flies' for Lois, respectively. In other words, in this context we evaluate (7) and (8) with respect to a mode of presentation of (2) and (9) for Lois, respectively. So, my proposal is to incorporate our interest in this context by relativizing the truth-value of belief sentences to a new parameter, which I call 'evaluative perspective'. An evaluative perspective packs up contextual information, in accordance to our *evaluative* interest, that points to a mode of presentation (cognitive content) against which the semantic content expressed should be evaluated.

According to my proposal, in the context described before, (7) and (8) are evaluated with respect to different evaluative perspectives. (7) is evaluated with respect to "the mode of presentation of (2) for Lois", an evaluative perspective e', and (8) is evaluated with respect to "the mode of presentation of (9) for Lois", an evaluative perspective e''. In this analysis, (7) is true in e' iff the mode of presentation of determined by e' is in Lois's belief box, so to speak[10]. Since the mode of presentation determined by e' is *the guy who wears red underwear over blue pants flies* and it is fair to assume that this mode of presentation is in Lois's belief box, (7) is true in e'. Similarly for (8): it is true in e'' iff the mode of presentation of determined by e'' is in Lois's belief box. Since the mode of presentation determined

[10]The expression 'belief box' is usually used in the analysis of belief according to the *language of thought hypothesis*, according to which a belief is a physical representation of a content in the brain. However, here I am not using this expression with this meaning, and I do not mean to say that cognitive contents are tokens in the language of thought. The metaphor of a belief box is merely a pedagogical aid.

by e'' is *the goofy guy who wears squared glasses flies* and it is fair to assume that this mode of presentation is not in Lois's belief box, (7) is false in e''. In general, $\ulcorner A$ believes that $s\urcorner$ is true with respect to an evaluative perspective e iff the mode of presentation determined by e is in A's belief box.

An interesting consequence of my view is that (7) is also false with respect to e', and (8) is true with respect to e''. This might seem odd but I believe it is an advantage because I believe that there are contexts in which (8) is intuitively true, as in the following situation. Suppose we are counting how many people are believed by Lois as someone who flies. We start considering Jonathan Kent (Superman's father). Given what we know about Lois, we conclude that she does not believe that he flies. We then consider Lex Luthor, and also conclude that she does not believe he flies. Then we consider Clark Kent. In this case, it seems to me plausible to say that Lois believes that Clark Kent flies[11], in which case, (8) is true. Now, we do not have to suppose that Lois changed her mind and began to believe that *the goofy guy who wears squared glasses flies* to explain why (8) is true in this context. A better explanation is that, in this case, the *evaluative interest* in (8) changed and, consequently, the evaluative perspective. Here, we seem to be interested in *any* way Lois thinks of the referent of 'Clark Kent', or in any mode of presentation of Superman for Lois, and not only in the way associated with 'Clark Kent'. So, instead of evaluating (8) with respect to e'', in this context, we evaluate it with respect to an evaluative perspective e''' that considers all modes of presentation Lois has to think of Superman. So, (8) is true with respect to e''' iff there is a mode of presentation of Superman to the effect that he flies in Lois's belief box. Since, by assumption, she believes that *the guy who wears red*

[11]If it does not seem plausible to the reader, suppose it is just for the sake of the argument

underwear over blue pants flies, (8) is true with respect to e'''.

We are now ready to answer the question raised at the end of section 2: how is it possible for (7) and (8)[12] have the same semantic content but differ in truth-value? It is possible as long as they are evaluated with respect to different evaluative perspectives that determine different belief-contents. Contexts where this question is typically raised are contexts where we are considering objections to Millianism. In these contexts, e' and e'' are the relevant evaluative perspectives, respectively, and they determine different belief-contents, only one of which is in Lois's belief box.

The general idea that the truth-value of belief sentences might be relativized to some contextual element was already suggested by Wallace and Mason's criticism of Burge's famous argument for social externalism based on the "arthritis" example. Among other things, they argue that Burge's argument depends on there being a simple yes/no answer to the question 'Does an agent A believes that s?', which is rarely, if ever, the case.

> It is worth reminding ourselves that frequently, when we report someone's beliefs, we do so in response to a question of the form, "Does the person believe that p, or not?" That is, frequently, the question to which we are responding is focused on the person's stance toward a topic and not toward a specific sentence. When this is so, our response frequently takes the form of a narrative in which belief sentences – in the philosopher's sense, sentences of the form 'x believes that p' – are embedded with other sentences, some of which may not even be explicitly psychological in character, but which set a scene, describe a context, or provide relevant background. Judging from the surface of our practice, *the narrative surrounding belief sentences frequently is not mere embellishment but is integral to conveying what we wish to convey about the person's outlook*. For if someone were to press us,

[12]The original question was how (3) and (4) could differ in truth-value, but since I changed the example, I also changed the question.

> saying, "That long story is all very well, but what I want to know is: does x believe that p or not: yes or no,", we often would reject the question. (Wallace and Mason, pp. 182, my emphasis)

To reject the question 'Does an agent A believes that s?' entails, among other things, that belief sentences are not true or false without relativizing it to an evaluative perspective, or 'the narrative surrounding belief sentences' (though we can define a notion of true (false) *simpliciter* as true in the evaluative perspective of the context in the world of the context).

5 Other Puzzles

Before I consider objections, I want to go over how my proposal explains Kripke's famous puzzles about belief and belief-ascription.

Kripke [1979] introduced two similar cases, London/Londres and Paderewski cases. The first goes roughly like this: Suppose that Pierre, who only speaks French, learned the name 'Londres' by seeing a picture of a nice neighborhood in London, and formed the belief that London is pretty. He later moves to an ugly neighborhood in London, without speaking English, and learns that the name of the city he lives in is 'London'. When considering the belief that London is pretty, he concludes that he does not believe it. Two of the many puzzling questions about this case are: after he learns the name 'London', does Pierre believe that London is pretty? And, is (10) 'Pierre believes that is pretty' true?

Paderewski case goes roughly like this. Suppose Marie first met Paderewski in a music hall after attending one of his concerts and formed the belief that Paderewski is a great musician. After some time, at a political rally, Marie was introduced

to Paderewski again. She did not recognize Paderewski as someone she had met before, and when considering the belief that Paderewski is a great musician, she concludes, perhaps unwarrantedly, that she does not believe it. Similar puzzling questions arise in this case: after the second encounter, does Marie believe that Paderewski is a great musician? And, is (11) 'Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician' true?

Beginning with the second question, Paderewski case is puzzling because, on the one hand, considering (11) *after* the second encounter but keeping in mind the first encounter, (11) seems true. On the other hand, if we focus on the second encounter, we want to say that (11) is false. And so it seems that our intuitions support the claim that (11) is both true and false, which is a contradiction. Similar remarks apply to London/Londres case.

In my proposal we can explain our seemingly contradictory intuitions. It is indisputable that Marie has two modes of presentation of Paderewski, just like Lois has two modes of presentation of Superman. Let us say they are *the guy at the music hall* and *the guy at the political rally*. The relevant belief-contents here are *the guy at the music hall is a great musician* and *the guy at the political rally is a great musician*. Given how the case s described, only the former is in Marie's belief box. When we consider (11) keeping in mind the first encounter, our evaluative interest is in "the mode of presentation of (12) 'Paderewski is a great musician' for Lois in the first encounter", an evaluative perspective p'. (11) is true at p' because it points to *the guy at the music hall is a great musician*, which is in Marie's belief box. One the other hand, when we consider (11) keeping in mind the second encounter, our evaluative interest is in "the mode of presentation of (12) for Lois in the second encounter", an evaluative perspective p''. (11) is false at p''

because it points to *the guy at the political rally is a great musician*, which is not in Marie's belief box. A similar explanation is available for London/Londres case. My account, then, dissolves the puzzle in that it explains that (11) can be true and false as long as they get the truth-value with respect to different evaluative perspectives.

As for the first question, about whether Pierre believes that London is pretty and Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician, it is ill-formed in my view. As Wallace and Mason pointed, it is the kind of question ordinary people reject unless it is supplemented by an evaluative perspective ("a narrative surrounding belief sentences").

In addition to offering intuitive solutions to puzzles about belief, part of the attraction of my proposal is that it keeps the belief relation a two-place relation between a subject and a content, it does not posit suspicious three-place relation in terms of which the belief-relation is analyzed, and it does not invoke questionable pragmatic principles to explain the intuitive truth-values of belief sentences.[13]

6 Possible Concerns

Concern 1: In my view, that-clauses in belief sentences do not refer to a belief-content. So, how can I explain the validity of arguments such as: (P1) Pierre believes that Superman flies; (P2) Lois believes that Superman flies; therefore, (C) there is something that Pierre and Lois believe? In particular, how do we make sense of the conclusion? It is easy to understand how the conclusion can be true, and how it follows from the premises, if, when (P1) and (P2) are true,

[13]See Braun's [1998; 2002] criticism of Salmon's.

Pierre and Lois have beliefs with the *same* content and that content is the semantic content of 'that Superman flies'. But if that is not the content of their belief, as I have argued, how can they be said to believe the same thing?

Reply 1: To understand how (C) can be true, we just need to understand how (13) 'Pierre and Lois believe that Superman flies' can be true. Suppose that Lois has in her belief box the belief-content *the guy who wears red underwear over blue pants flies*, and that Pierre has in his belief box the belief-content *the son of Jonathan Kent flies*; and, for the sake of simplicity, suppose that they do not have other beliefs.

As with any belief sentence, (13) gets a truth-value relative to an evaluative perspective e. (13) is not true with respect to e' – the mode of presentation of 'Superman' for Lois – because e' points to *the guy who wears red underwear over blue pants flies*, which is in Lois's belief box but, by assumption, not in Pierre's belief box. (13) is also not true with respect to an evaluative perspective e^* that points to *the son of Jonathan Kent flies* because Lois does not have it in her belief box. An evaluative perspective in which (13) is true has to be less specific. One example is an evaluative perspective e^{**} where we are interested in any mode of presentation associated with 'Superman'. In this case, it will point to both *the guy who wears red underwear over blue pants flies* for Lois and *the son of Jonathan Kent flies* for Pierre. And (13) is true with respect to e^{**} because Lois and Pierre have the respective belief-content in their belief boxes. Loosely speaking, in e^{**}, Pierre and Lois believe the same thing, i.e., that Superman flies because their way of thinking of Superman associated with (2) 'Superman flies' is in their respective belief boxes.

As for the validity of the argument, in my view, validity is relativized to an

evaluative perspective, just like the truth-value of sentences: an argument is valid with respect to e (a world w, and, perhaps, a time t) iff it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false with respect to e (w, and t). The argument given before turns out valid because at least one of the premises will be false with respect to evaluative perspectives where the conclusion is false. For instance, in e', (C) is false, but so is (P2): e' points to the mode of presentation of 'Superman' for Lois which is not in Pierre's belief box. (C) is also false in e^*, but so is (P1): e^* that points to *the son of Jonathan Kent flies* which is not in Lois's belief box. In general, whenever (C) is false, it means that either Pierre or Lois do not have the relevant belief-content in their respective belief boxes. But for this very same reason at least one of the premises will also be false.

Readers not convinced of my explanation are probably those not convinced that there is no simple yes/no answer to the question 'Does A believe that s?'. Once one accepts it and that the truth-value of belief sentences is relative to evaluative perspective, it naturally follows that relations that depend on them will be relative to a perspective as well.

Concern 2: One might argue that my solution to the problem of the truth-value of belief ascriptions is *ad hoc* because for each case/belief sentence, I offer an explanation of its truth-value carefully crafted in a way to avoid problems in that case. Additionally, my proposal singles out belief sentences from other sentences because, according to it, only belief sentences are evaluated with respect to evaluative perspectives.

Reply 2: It is true that the explanation of the truth-value of belief sentences

is particularist in the sense explained. But it hardly means that it is *ad hoc*. Each conversational context is different from another, and if a particular feature of contexts is relevant for the truth-conditions of a sentence, then different utterances of even the same sentence might have different truth-conditions.

As for singling out belief sentences from other sentences, it is not entirely clear that is the case. Other philosophers have proposed the addition of new parameters of evaluation similar to evaluative interests to address different problems with other kinds of sentences. Predelli [2005], for instance, argues that the truth-value of simple sentences should be relativized to worlds and *point of evaluations* (similar to an evaluative perspective), so we can explain conflicting intuitions as the ones in the following case. Consider a world w^* where all leaves have been painted green. Suppose that in w^* you are talking to Mary, a friend of yours who is taking a photography course, and her assignment for the week is to take pictures of green objects. She is wondering what to photograph, and you utter (14) 'The leaves are green'. Intuitively, (14) is true. Now, suppose that in w^* you have another friend, Bill, who is taking a biology course and has to get samples of some green plants. Intuitively, (14) is false. So, is (14) true or false in w^*? Taking our intuitions at face-value, Predelli argues that something changed from your conversation with Mary to your conversation with Bill. But it is not the meaning of the predicate 'to be green' or the world. For Predelli, what changed was what counts as green given the purpose under discussion (evaluative interest, in my view), what he call a 'point of evaluation'. When talking with Mary, objects with a certain appearance count as green, and so the leaves are green, and (14) is true with respect to this point of evaluation g'. On the other hand, when talking with Bill, appearances are not enough for plants to count as green, and so the leaves are not green, and (14)

is false with respect to this point of evaluation g''. There is no contradiction here because different utterances of (14) have different truth-values in different points of evaluation.

Surely it stands to be argued whether Predelli's proposal is the best solution to the problem he wants to address. However, my point here is just to illustrate how evaluative perspectives can be extend to other sentences, and that my proposal does not necessarily single out belief sentences.

Concern 3: My proposed account of the difference of the truth-value of (7) and (8) is very Fregean in spirit. It relies, among other things, on differences in modes of presentation and in some sort of shift of the relevant content in belief contexts – in simple sentences like (2) 'Superman flies' modes of presentations are not relevant, but they are in belief sentences like (7) 'Lois believes Superman flies'. So, wouldn't my view have the similar problems as Fregean Theories regarding context shifting?

Reply 3: It is impractical to survey all objections to Fregean accounts regarding context shifting. So I will address what I take to be the most pressing objection: the unlearnability of language as raised by Davidson [1965][14].

Roughly, Davidson argues that it is an important feature of language that, if someone knows the semantic content of (2) 'Superman flies', she also knows the semanic contribution of 'Superman' and 'to fly' in (7) 'Lois believes that Superman flies', and (15) 'Pierre believes that Lois believes that Superman flies'. However,

[14]Kripke [2008] has also offered a related argument. He argues that even a Fregean theory that suggests that 'Superman' has different meanings in (2) and (7) has problems. According to him, if this was an accurate description of natural language, then someone who is learning a language would first learn the meaning of names (and basic expressions in general) in simple sentences, and then move on to their meaning in belief sentences, which is clearly absurd.

Davidson's objection goes, this is incompatible with Fregean Theories. According to Fregean Theories, whenever an attitude verb, like 'to believe', is introduced, it forces a shift on the semantic content of the expressions in the that-clause. Thus, 'Superman' and 'to fly' have different semantic contents in (2), (7) and (15). Consequently, in Fregean Theories, someone could know the semantic content of (2) without knowing the semantic content of 'Superman' and 'to fly' in (7) and (15). Thus, Fregean Theories cannot be correct.

The problem raised by Davidson, however, does not arise in my view because the meaning of 'Superman' in (2), (7) and (15) is the same, namely, its referent. The content that may change in those sentences is the cognitive content. But the cognitive content is not involved when learning a new language in the way proposed by the objection.

Concern 4: There are notorious problems with theories that, like mine, deny the Identity Thesis in the context of explaining linguistic communication[15]. Often times they do not describe a clear relation between semantic content and cognitive content (assuming cognitive content is what is communicated), which either means that semantic content is irrelevant to account for linguistic communication, or, the very least, raises additional challenge to such accounts.

Reply 4: Semantic content can be relevant for communication even if it is not *the* content communicated. For instance, in an account where semantic content together with other contextual elements determine a suitable cognitive content, semantic content plays a fundamental role without being the cognitive content. Thus, giving up the Identity Thesis does not mean that semantic content is irrel-

[15]For a recent critique of views in fn.9, see Stojnić [2017].

evant for communication.

As for whether accounts that deny the Identity Thesis have additional challenges to overcome, it will depend on how particular accounts of the relation between semantic and cognitive content compare with accounts that endorse the Identity Thesis. There is nothing I can say in a couple of sentences to settle this question, but it is important to keep in mind that the possibility that the Identity Thesis is false has been raised by philosophers precisely because theories that endorse it cannot explain some common linguistic interactions[16]

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[16] See fn.9.

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