December 2021

Miara S Beko

Consider the self-evident sentence:

Everyone thinks that racists are bad.

Now, consider the following sentence:

Some people do not think that racists are bad.\*

This sentence\*, of course, is false. The sentence is composed of a subject (some people), and a predicate (do not think that racists are bad). Then one of the following must be true: the subject is not accurately described by the phrase “some people”, or the predicate is not accurately described by the phrase “think that racists are bad”. Insofar as we make sense of sentence\*, we can do so only by admitting that the subjects at hand are not “some people”, or that they are not described by the predicate “think that racists are bad”. That is, it is possible that the subjects are not “some people”: they are not people.

It is also possible that they do not “think that racists are bad”. It is possible that they “think”. Insofar as they do so, their thinking is not accurately described by the phrase “that racists are bad”. The “that” in the previous phrase refers to the subjects’ thinking. It is possible that such a reference is not possible at all. It is also possible that such a reference is possible, but it cannot be cashed out in the content of the phrase, “racists are bad.” That is, the subjects at hand may think, and they may even “think that x”: but the content of “x” is not “racists are bad”. That is, it is possible the subjects think, and it is even possible that what they are thinking of can be referenced, and even have content. But there is no reason to believe that the content is equivalent or, indeed, anywhere near the content of the phrase, “racists are bad”. There is absolutely no reason to believe so. Any hint of reason as such, is an echo and bias from the first, self-evident sentence.

In conjunction, the following possibility arises. Sentence\* describes some subjects according to a predicate. The subjects are not people. They think that x. x’s content is orthogonal to the content of the phrase, “racists are bad.” Then the sentence, “Some people do not think that racists are bad”, has sense, insofar as (1) it refers to subjects that are not people, and (2) describes them according to a predicate, but with an arbitrarily maximally incorrect content referenced by the predicate.[[1]](#footnote-1) It is plausible that the mistakes (1) and (2) are related. When we say, “people think that x”, “x” is described by language that people use. But when we speak of subjects that are not people, and say that such subjects think that x, x is not accurately described by language that people use. For example, consider the sentence, “My dog does not think that racists are bad.” Is it true that my dog does not think that racists are bad? It is possible my dog thinks. Perhaps it thinks that the snow is beautiful. But what sense is there in the sentence at hand? Is my dog’s thought (or lack of thought, since we are describing what it does not think) described by the predicate, “racists are bad”? No. Then, the far more correct sentence, as a rectification of sentence\*, is:

Some subjects that are not people think that x.

Where x has no linguistic content, and “some subjects that are not people” describes a collection of subjects that are each not one, that is, a collection of subjects whose intersection with the collection described by “everyone” is empty. One consequence of the fact that the sentence “everyone thinks that racists are bad” is *self-evident*: to think that racists are bad is a condition of possibility of thinking. How can we, then, make sense of sentences such as (1) “racists are good”, (2) “racists are not bad”, or more difficultly, (3) “racists are not” (where we take “are” as an existential predicate)? The response to (1) and (2) are obvious: they are not thoughts at all, but mechanical combinations of words. Subjects who utter them, and believe there is sense in them, are not thinking, and they are not using language that people use. Whatever they utter, which has the semblance of human language, is not human language, and they are not people. In such cases, it is advisable to listen to their heartbeat instead of their semblance at syllables, which may speak something closer to human language.

(3) can be rejoindered that the bad is that which does not exist. But that is beyond the scope of this note.

1. It is arbitrary, because it is an echo from an orthogonal, self-evident sentence. It is maximally incorrect, because it is from a self-evident sentence. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)