

A Puzzle About Belief
PY4617 – The Philosophy of Saul Kripke – Week Three

Background:

- Millianism (aka 'direct reference'): The sole semantic contribution of a name is its referent.
 - 'London', e.g., simply picks out London, and in using that name to refer to London, one doesn't semantically express any property of London.
 - On this view, a name is quite unlike a description – 'the capital of England' picks out London and does so because 'capital of England' semantically expresses a property that London uniquely satisfies.
 - The view entails (SUB): Names are substitutable *salva veritate*, even inside attitude reports.
 - So since 'Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly' is true, 'Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly' is also true!
 - Typically, Millians say that the reason such sentences sound bad is that they *pragmatically* convey something false about Lois' beliefs. (See Soames, Salmon.) Another way of thinking of this: Names make contributions to communication that go beyond their semantics.
- Fregeanism: Names (along with all other expressions) have not only a referent, but a *sense*, which is a mode of presentation or way of thinking of the referent. Both referent and sense are semantic features of names, not merely pragmatically attached features.
 - Senses of names are often thought of as descriptive. E.g., the sense of 'London' might be expressed by 'the capital of England'.
 - Crucially, according to the Fregean, inside attitude reports names' referents change. A name refers to what's usually its sense! So even if $a=b$, in 'S believes that a is F' and 'S believes that b is F', 'a' and 'b' refer to different things and are not substitutable *salva veritate*. So SUB doesn't follow from the Fregean view.
- In Naming and Necessity, Kripke argued that names are not semantically equivalent to, and do not normally have their reference fixed by, descriptions. So he rejects (at least) any version of Fregeanism on which senses are descriptive.
- But Kripke doesn't endorse Millianism either – one could believe that Hesperus is visible without believing that Phosphorus is visible, e.g. Thus the “quandary” at the beginning of Section II of “A Puzzle about Belief”.

Setup for the puzzle:

(D): If a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'p', then he believes that p.

(SD): A normal English speaker who is not reticent will be disposed to sincere reflective assent to 'p' iff he believes that p.

- These are *disquotational schemata*. They're schematic in that we use them to endorse every instance of replacing 'p' with an English sentence.
- While (D) and (SD) only work for English (replacing 'p' with a French sentence results in a weird mixture of languages), analogous principles may be formulated for other languages. E.g. (apologies for any possible mangling of French and Spanish):

- Si un locuteur Français normal, après avoir réfléchi, sanctionne sincèrement à 'p', alors il croit que p.
- Si un hablante Inglés normal, pensándolo bien, sinceramente asiente a 'p', entonces cree que p.
- 'Sincerely' is meant to rule out speakers who are lying or coerced, etc., and 'on reflection' is meant to rule out speakers who assent without thinking about the question properly.
- What is it for S to assent to 'p'? Assume that it's sufficient for S to utter 'p' or expressly agree when someone else utters 'p'.
- A *normal* English speaker is linguistically competent, “uses all words [including names] in the sentence in a standard way, combines them according to the appropriate syntax, etc.”

(T): If a sentence of one language expresses a truth in that language, then any translation of it into any other language also expresses a truth (in that other language).

- Before seeing the puzzle, do any of these principles look questionable to you? Does any one of them seem more vulnerable than others?

The puzzle:

1. Pierre, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'Londres est jolie'.
 2. Pierre croit que Londres est jolie. (By French version of (D).)
 3. 'Pierre believes that London is pretty' is a translation into our language of the French sentence 'Pierre croit que Londres est jolie'.
 4. Pierre believes that London is pretty. (By 2, 3, and (T).)
 5. Pierre, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'London is not pretty'.
 6. Pierre believes that London is not pretty. (By English version of (D).)
 7. Pierre believes that London is pretty and believes that London is not pretty. (By 4 and 6.)
- There are a limited number of possible responses to argument 1-7.
 - a) Reject (D).
 - b) Reject (3).
 - c) Reject (T).
 - d) Accept 7, and endorse the argument.
- 1'. Pierre, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'Londres est jolie'.
 - 2'. Pierre croit que Londres est jolie. (By French version of (D).)
 - 3'. 'Pierre believes that London is pretty' is a translation into our language of the French sentence 'Pierre croit que Londres est jolie'.
 - 4'. Pierre believes that London is pretty. (By 2', 3', and (T).)
 - 5'. Pierre, who is not reticent, is not disposed to sincere reflective assent to 'London is pretty'.
 - 6'. Pierre does not believe that London is pretty. (By English version of (SD).)
 - 7'. Pierre does and does not believe that London is pretty. (By 4' and 6'.)
- There are similarly a limited number of possible responses to argument 1'-7'.
 - a') Reject (D).
 - b') Reject (3').
 - c') Reject (T).
 - d') Reject (SD).

- The puzzle is that none of the responses look acceptable (especially for 1-7).
 - We can't accept the conclusion, Kripke thinks, since Pierre is rational. We shouldn't take him to believe something and its negation.
 - There seems to be *some* sense in which Pierre's beliefs are inconsistent – they can't both be true. But there's also a sense in which his overall picture of the world is coherent.
 - We can't reject (T). The whole point of translation is to preserve meaning, and if two sentences mean the same thing, then they're true under the same circumstances.
 - We can't reject (3) without implausibly ruling that no sentence containing a name has a translation in any other language. Furthermore, a similar paradox arises without (3)/(T).
 - Peter believes that there are two prominent people named 'Paderewski', one a politician and the other a pianist. Does or doesn't he believe that Paderewski has musical talent?
 - We could try to reject (D), but the principle does seem self-evident. Would we merely restrict it? To what cases?
 - Notice that (D) fails when there are context-sensitive expressions in the relevant sentence. E.g.: “If a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'You are lazy', then he believes that you are lazy.” Is context-sensitivity relevant to our puzzle?
 - Mark Richard suggests that a solution might lie in this direction.
 - Suppose we refused to use (D) to infer from Pierre's assent to 'Londres est jolie' that Pierre believes that London is pretty. Then presumably, we'd have to think that Pierre *used to believe* that London is pretty, but changed his mind. But we can stipulate that he's the most stubbornly opinionated person on Earth. When did he change his mind?
 - Alternatively, we might think that Pierre never believed that London was pretty. But why not? What he believes now depends on what happens later in his life?
 - Suppose on the other hand that we refused to use (D) to infer from Pierre's assent to 'London is not pretty' that Pierre believes that London is not pretty. Why wasn't he able to acquire this belief? We'd count anyone else in a similar state of mind as believing that London is not pretty.

Lessons of the puzzle:

- Kripke: It would be a mistake to criticize Millianism as follows:
 - “Millianism implies SUB, and SUB is wrong. Suppose we have 'S believes that Tully isn't famous' and 'S believes that Cicero is famous'. Then SUB lets us derive 'S believes that Tully is famous,” so we incorrectly attribute contradictory beliefs to a normal person.
 - The criticism is a mistake because that sort of result is obtainable without SUB! Using just (D) and (T) we end up incorrectly attributing contradictory beliefs to normal people.
 - Reply: Wait, if Millianism implies SUB and SUB results in paradox, then Millianism is wrong. Why does it matter if some other principles *also* result in the same paradox?
 - Rejoinder: They aren't just *other* principles – SUB just amounts to a homophonic application of (T). Since (T) seems obviously true independent of Millianism, there's no reason to blame the paradox on (SUB) and therefore on Millianism.
- Relatedly, particular substitutions of co-referring names can be argued to be valid by appeal to (T). We just need another language with just one name where our language has two. Suppose Alice believes that K2 is deadly and Alice believes that Mount Godwin-Austen is not deadly. By (T), we get in Chinese: Rènwéi Chogir àilì sī shì bùshì zhìming de. By (T) again: Alice believes that K2 is not deadly. Puzzle!

- Kripke doesn't conclude that Millianism is true. But he does conclude that problems about substitution don't *favour* Fregeanism over Millianism.
- Note: It is absolutely crucial to Kripke's conclusion that Fregeanism doesn't provide a plausible way to deny or restrict (D) or (T). If it did, then Kripke's path to the paradox would be blocked while the path through SUB would still be clear, troubling Millians.

Some questions to think about as you read (and if you'd like, to blog about):

- Is Kripke right that Fregean senses are of no help in resolving the puzzles about Pierre and Peter? For some discussion, see this week's extra readings, plus Taschek, W. "[Would a Fregean Be Puzzled By Pierre?](#)", and Sosa, D. "[The Import of the Puzzle about Belief](#)".
- A Fregean might try to block Kripke's puzzle by pointing out that Pierre has two different ways of thinking about London. Similarly with Peter. What is Kripke's response to this? How effective is his response?
- Kripke says that problems about substitution don't favour Fregeanism over Millianism. But is that because both views are equally refuted? Or is neither refuted?
- Are we all translating each other homophonically all the time? Why does Kripke appeal to the notion of homophonic translation? Does he succeed in using it to make the points he wants to make?
- Kripke calls his puzzle a puzzle about *belief*. Is it really a puzzle about belief, or just about belief *ascriptions*? Kripke admits that there is a totally consistent way of describing Pierre's beliefs. (It just doesn't answer the question about whether or not Pierre believes that London is pretty.) Does this show that the puzzle is just about how belief ascriptions work?
- The puzzle of belief strains our practices of belief attribution, perhaps to the breaking point, Kripke says. What does this mean? What consequences would it have?
- Do you think we can accept 7? If so, how do you respond to Kripke's complaint that Pierre might be an expert logician who should be able to detect whether one belief was really the negation of the other?