

Disquotation and Substitutivity

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Millianism is reasonable: it is reasonable to think that all there is to the semantic value of a proper name is its referent. But Millianism appears to be undermined by the falsehood of Substitutivity, the principle that interchanging coreferential proper names in an intentional context cannot change the truth value of the resulting belief report. Mary might be perfectly rational in assenting to “Twain was a great writer” as well as “Clemens was not a great writer”. Her confusion does not seem to preclude her from assenting to those sentences in a normal, understanding manner. That is, Assent-for-Mary is true: Mary can knowingly assent to “Twain was a great writer” and “Clemens was not a great writer”. By Disquotation—the rough principle that if in ordinary circumstances one assents to “*P*”, then one believes that *P*—Mary believes that Twain was a great writer and she believes that it’s not the case that Clemens was a great writer. If Substitutivity were true, then since “Mary believes that Twain was a great writer” is true, “Mary believes that Clemens was a great writer” would have to be true too. But then Mary would amount to a refutation of the plausible principle Consistency that, roughly put, no rational adult can have occurrently held and reflectively considered and compared contradictory beliefs. Since Disquotation, Assent-for-Mary, and Consistency are true, Substitutivity has to go.

With regard to this historically and justifiably persuasive line of reasoning, Kripke’s (1979) arguments using his belief puzzle about Peter and Paderewski can be best construed as having three primary conclusions:

- (1) The conjunction of Assent-for-Mary, Disquotation, and Consistency is false (since they lead to a contradiction in the Paderewski story).¹

¹I will assume the reader’s familiarity with the Paderewski story, given in Kripke 1979, pp. 130–1. Assent-for-Mary is a claim about Mary, not the protagonist Peter from Kripke’s Paderewski story. What Kripke’s puzzle purports to show *first* is the falsity of the conjunction of Disquotation, Consistency, and an analogous claim about Peter—Assent-for-Peter: Peter can knowingly assent to “Paderewski has (no) musical talent”. (We always assume the rationality of both Mary and Peter.) The undefended premise that allows the inference from Peter’s case to Mary’s is that Peter can make the knowing assents just in case Mary can (i.e., Assent-for-Mary is true just in case Assent-for-Peter is true). When I write that the conjunction of Disquotation, Consistency, and Assent-for-Mary “leads to a contradiction in the Paderewski case” I am relying on that undefended premise, which will be briefly examined below. I am indebted to Tom Stoneham for discussions that helped me recognize the important role of premises about assent in Kripke’s and Frege’s puzzles.

- (2) If that conjunction is false, then the traditional anti-Millian argument summarized above cannot be tinkered with to become compelling and retain its anti-Substitutivity (and anti-Millian) conclusion.
- (3) If that conjunction is false, then since it is so intuitive, we have a deep philosophical puzzle about belief.

Joseph Moore 1999 agrees with (1) (p. 336) but rejects (2) (pp. 339, 358–61). His rejection of (2), the most important part of his article, is based on his belief that even though plausible interpretations of Disquotation are false—so (1) is true—there is a way to alter the traditional anti-Millian argument so that it remains compelling without using Disquotation. I will raise some concerns about both his claims.

Moore uses his ingenious Monica story (pp. 343–6) to attempt to refute the disquotational principle (D) that Kripke examined.

- (D) If a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely [and knowingly] assents to “*P*”, then she believes that *P* (where “*P*” is to be replaced by an English sentence lacking indexicals, pronominals, ambiguities, and other devices that ruin the intuitive sense of the principle). (p. 336)

Monica’s linguistic community is not aware of the coreferentiality of “Jekyll” and “Hyde”. Most use “Jekyll” in such a way that they would assent to “Jekyll is a mild-mannered doctor”; and they use “Hyde” in such a way that they would assent to “Hyde is a big, hairy, dangerous man who tramples children”. Monica does the reverse: she uses “Hyde” in such a way that she would assent to “Hyde is a mild-mannered doctor”; and she uses “Jekyll” in such a way that she would assent to “Jekyll is a big, hairy, dangerous man who tramples children”. (This is akin to someone using “Superman” when seeing Kent dressed as a reporter and using “Kent” when seeing Kent dressed in the Superman costume.) When Monica sincerely assents to “Hyde is in London” she seems to mean what we and virtually everyone in her community means by “Jekyll is in London”; so she believes that *Jekyll is in London*. When she assents to “Jekyll is not in London” she seems to express her belief that *Hyde is not in London*. So it seems that when a normal speaker in her community utters

- (i) Monica believes that Jekyll is in London and she believes that Hyde is not in London,

she speaks the truth. None of this is contrary to Millianism, but now consider the following ascription.

- (ii) Monica believes that Hyde is in London.

The Millian says (ii) is true even though her assents to “Jekyll is not in London” express her belief that Hyde is not in London. So the Millian attributes contradictory beliefs to Monica. Moore has powerful intuitions

on his side when he says that (ii) is false. If Moore were right, then even though Monica sincerely and knowingly assents to “Hyde is in London”, she would fail to believe that Hyde is in London; so (D) would be false (assuming Monica can knowingly assent to “Hyde is in London”).

Compare Monica’s situation with Trevor’s, a normal speaker in Monica’s community. He is like virtually everyone besides Monica in using “Jekyll” in such a way that he would assent to “Jekyll is a mild-mannered doctor”; and he uses “Hyde” in such a way that he would assent to “Hyde is a big, hairy, dangerous man who tramples children”. Trevor assents to “Jekyll is in London and Hyde is not in London”. So it seems that when a normal person in his community utters

(i*) Trevor believes that Jekyll is in London and he believes that Hyde is not in London,

she speaks the truth. As before, none of this is contrary to Millianism, but now consider the following ascription.

(ii*) Trevor believes that Hyde is in London.

It is well-known that the Millian says (ii*) is true and that the anti-Millians have powerful intuitions on their side when they say that it’s false. Trevor’s situation is just a familiar Frege case. It is widely recognized that critics of Millianism can no longer rest content with pointing out the counterintuitive nature of the Millian’s position on (ii*) since Millians have offered not implausible explanations of these allegedly mistaken intuitions (in terms of false implications about guises, to be discussed below). Instead, the anti-Millian has to challenge the Millian’s *account* of why (ii*) seems false but isn’t.

Now suppose that the Millian’s explanation of the counterintuitiveness of (ii*) can be applied just as plausibly to Moore’s (ii). It seems to follow that it would be unacceptable to attack the Millian’s take on (ii) merely by pointing out how counterintuitive it is. And if it were unpersuasive to attack the Millian’s view of (ii) on those grounds, then it seems that Moore will have failed to raise any new issue with the Monica story since he appears to rest his argument against (D) on the undefended premise that (ii) is counterintuitive.

Can the Millian attempt to explain away the intuition that (ii) is false in the same manner she uses to attempt to explain away the intuition that (ii*) is false?

Let us say that Trevor, like virtually everyone else, associates guise *H* with “Hyde” and guise *J* with “Jekyll”. Monica does the reverse: she associates guise *H* with “Jekyll” and guise *J* with “Hyde”. Of course there are all sorts of problems with guises, but that is another topic, and one that troubles most Millian and non-Millian theories alike. The Millian says (*my* Millian says) that the true claim (ii*) “Trevor believes that Hyde is in

London” seems false because it carries the false implication that Trevor grasps the thought that Hyde is in London via the guise he associates with “Hyde is in London”, viz. *H*. The implication is false because he grasps that thought via *J*, not *H*. This is how one can start to give a Millian account of the classic Frege case. But this kind of explanation might work for claim (ii) just as well as it works for (ii*). The Millian can say that the true claim (ii) “Monica believes that Hyde is in London” seems false because it carries the false implication that Monica grasps the thought that Hyde is in London via the guise she associates with “Hyde is in London”, viz. *J*. The implication is false because she grasps that thought via *H*, not *J*.

One can, and should, quarrel with these bold claims about false implications (e.g., Saul 1998). But this is old news. As far as I have determined the Monica story presents nothing but anti-Millian intuitions that are already being addressed in the literature. So resting an argument against (D) on these intuitions is question-begging. Thus, I fail to see how Moore has adequately defended his first point, that (D) is false.

Moore’s most important claim is that contrary to Kripke’s (2) we can tinker with the traditional anti-Millian argument so that it is successful in refuting Substitutivity but does not rest on some false principle such as (D). Moore appeals to a Lois Lane example (p. 359). Lois’s purely non-linguistic behaviour in the presence of Kent dressed in the Superman costume makes it plain that we should accept the truth of “Lois believes that Superman can fly”. She never assents to that sentence, but that hardly matters. Her non-linguistic behaviour in the presence of Kent dressed as a reporter makes it plain that “Lois believes that Kent cannot fly” is true as well. (D) isn’t required to back up either belief report.

Moore thinks that Joseph Owens (1995) and I (1998) have argued that (D) is required by the traditional argument (p. 359, fn. 42), but we neither argued for nor hold that position. The traditional argument appealed to (knowing) assent, and that is why Owens and I (and Kripke I assume) did too. Although we used (D), the traditional argument can get by with, for instance, a *dispositional* (D), something like the following:

- (DD) If a normal English speaker, on reflection, *is disposed to sincerely and knowingly assent to “P”*, then she believes that *P* (where “*P*” is to be replaced by an English sentence lacking indexicals, pronominals, ambiguities, and other devices that ruin the intuitive sense of the principle).²

² (DD) does not entail (D), so an argument against (D) does not automatically work against (DD). Both Kripke (1979, p. 113) and Owens (1995, p. 253) consider a dispositional form of disquotation. In addition, in the third paragraph of his article Kripke remarks that alternative forms of disquotation can do the job of (D).

In Moore's story Lois satisfies the antecedent of (DD) with respect to "Superman can fly" and "Kent cannot fly". This assumes the truth of Assent-for-Lois, a premise analogous to Assent-for-Mary: Lois can assent to "Superman can fly" and "Kent cannot fly" in a knowing manner. Although she may never assent to those sentences, she has the ability to and is disposed to "nod" to them in some manner. So (DD) and Assent-for-Lois can be used to argue for the truth of

- (iii) Lois believes that Superman can fly and she believes that Kent cannot fly.

Clearly we need *something* like (DD) (and Assent-for-Lois) to derive the truth of (iii) (and without the truth of that sentence the anti-Millian argument cannot get started). Moore can try to appeal to something like Consistency to conclude that the sentence

- (iv) Lois believes that Kent can fly

is false. Therefore, Lois's dispositions, (DD), Consistency, and Assent-for-Lois entail that Substitutivity is false. However, Kripke's puzzle shows that either (DD), Consistency, or Assent (for Lois or Peter or Mary) is false. Here's why. Just like Lois, Peter need never assent to "Paderewski has musical talent" or "Paderewski does not have musical talent". Kripke's argument need not use (D); it can use principles like (DD). Peter's non-linguistic behaviour at a Paderewski concert can justify our belief in the truth of "Peter believes that Paderewski has musical talent"; and his non-linguistic behaviour at a political rally can equally justify our belief in the truth of "Peter believes that Paderewski does not have musical talent". So (DD), Assent-for-Peter, and Peter's dispositions entail that Peter believes that *P* and that not-*P* contrary to Consistency. So either (DD), Assent-for-Peter, or Consistency is false. And Assent-for-Peter and Assent-for-Lois stand or fall together.

I fail to see how a disquotation-like principle could apply to Lois and "Superman can fly" and "Kent cannot fly" while failing to apply to Peter and "Paderewski has musical talent" and "Paderewski does not have musical talent". Any principles—like (DD) and Assent-for-*X*—that bring us from Lois's non-linguistic behaviour to "Lois believes that Superman can fly" and "Lois believes that Kent cannot fly" seem equally to bring us from Peter's non-linguistic behaviour to "Peter believes that Paderewski has musical talent" and "Peter believes that Paderewski does not have musical talent". If we forgo (DD) and try to appeal in its place to some at least superficially non-linguistic principle (as Moore's Lois example tends to suggest), then by fiddling with Peter's situation the supposition of the new principle will be true of Peter if it is true of Lois. An analogous point seems to hold for Consistency: a plausible Consistency-like principle will apply to Lois only if it applies to Peter as well.

This suggests that Moore is not going to be able to modify the traditional anti-Millian argument so that it refutes Substitutivity without using principles that a Kripke puzzle case can use to generate a contradiction. The burden of proof is on Moore: he has to show us (a) the non-question-begging principles and other premises that (b) lead to a denial of Substitutivity but (c) do not, via a suitable Kripke puzzle situation, lead to a contradiction.³

Discussions with Tom Stoneham have made me realize that there may be a way to satisfy (a)–(c) by arguing that while Assent-for-Peter is false, Assent-for-Lois is true. The reason, crudely put, is the following. Lois’s confusion does not rob her of the ability to assent to “Superman” and “Kent” sentences in a knowing manner. So Assent-for-Lois is true and can be used in an anti-Substitutivity argument. Even so, Assent-for-Peter is false because his confusion makes him disposed to utter, in all sincerity and under as much reflection as you please, both “Paderewski has musical talent” and “Paderewski does not have musical talent”. This shows, one may think, that he really does not know how to use “Paderewski” in a knowing manner—roughly put, a manner demonstrating an ability to use “Paderewski” for Paderewski in a sufficiently wide and typical range of circumstances. It is a minimal condition for being able to assent to “Paderewski” sentences knowingly that one not utter in all sincerity (and upon reflection, etc.) both “Paderewski has musical talent” and “Paderewski does not have musical talent” (or a similar pair of sentences). But Peter does utter those sentences; so his assents aren’t knowing; so Assent-for-Peter is false. On the other hand, Lois is not in this situation; so her assents are successful; so Assent-for-Lois is true.

This suggests that the role of assent (or non-linguistic behaviour that does the work of assent) needs to be carefully addressed in evaluating Kripke’s and Frege’s puzzles. However, I fail to see any good reason to think that Lois’s position vis-à-vis “Superman” and “Kent” is better than, more competent than, Peter’s vis-à-vis “Paderewski”. The two assent premises stand or fall together.^{4,5}

³ If we forgo linguistic principles like Assent-for-*X* and focus on non-linguistic behaviour, as Moore suggests, then our problem remains that Peter’s and Lois’s situations seem on a par with regard to our evidence for the relevant belief ascriptions. Even if Peter and Lois are dogs, with no natural language dispositions, their situations still seem to be on a par.

⁴ Even if this proposal is correct, it does not seem to help Moore’s argument against Substitutivity, for he wants to appeal to non-linguistic behaviour in his argument (so assent has no role).

⁵ Thanks to Joseph Moore for helpful, encouraging, and engaging correspondence.

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