

7

Constraint with Restraint

Nathan Salmon

Professor Schiffer has presented an alleged refutation of my version of Millianism, the doctrine (often alternatively called ‘the theory of direct reference’) that the semantic content of a name is simply the designatum.¹ Although Schiffer and I have many times disagreed, I applaud his deep and abiding commitment to argument as a primary philosophical tool. Regretting any communication failure that has occurred, I endeavor here to make clearer my earlier reply in ‘Illogical Belief.’² I shall be skeletal, however; the interested reader is encouraged to turn to ‘Illogical Belief’ for detail and elaboration.

I have argued in numerous venues that to bear a propositional attitude *de re* is to bear that attitude toward the corresponding singular proposition, no more and no less. If this is right, then according to Millianism every instance of the following modal schema is true:

S: Necessarily, α Vs that ϕ_β iff α Vs of β (*de re*) that ϕ_{it} ,

where α is any singular term of English, V is any of a wide range of transitive English verbs of propositional attitude (including ‘believe,’ ‘disbelieve,’ ‘doubt,’ etc.), β is any proper name or other Millian term of English, ϕ_{it} is any English ‘open sentence’ in which the pronoun ‘it’—alternatively ‘he,’ ‘him,’ ‘she,’ or ‘her’—occurs as a free variable, and ϕ_β is the same as ϕ_{it} except for having occurrences of β wherever ϕ_{it} has free occurrences of the relevant pronoun.³

Schiffer uses the epithet ‘Frege’s constraint’ for a principle that entails the following:

FC: Necessarily, if x rationally believes y to be F while also disbelieving (or while also merely withholding believing) y to be F , for some property or singularly propositional-functional concept F , then in so doing x takes y in differing ways, by means of particular *guises* or “modes of presentation,” m and m' where $m \neq m'$; furthermore, in so doing, x does not construe m and m' as guises of, or ways of taking, a single thing.

I have spent much of the past quarter century arguing for *FC* (or for a duly qualified version). The primary rationale for *FC* is that if x rationally believes y to be F while also disbelieving z to be F , then in so doing, x takes y and z to be distinct (one of them being F , the other not). Insofar as x is rational, he/she will thereby take y and z

differently. This will be so even if, in fact, $y=z$. In this case, x will take y , i.e. z , in different ways. Similarly, if x rationally believes y to be F while also suspending judgment whether z is F , then ordinarily, in so doing x will take y and z differently.

Schiffer derives from these principles the conclusion that my version of Millianism is inconsistent with the possibility of a certain empirically possible state of affairs, (a). This state of affairs may be characterized as follows: Jane rationally believes, even while she is fully aware that ‘George Eliot’ and ‘Mary Ann Evans’ co-designate, both that Ralph believes that George Eliot was a man and that Ralph does not believe that Mary Ann Evans was a man. For according to Millianism, in situation (a), Jane rationally believes both the singular proposition about George Eliot, that Ralph believes she was a man, and its denial. Putting ‘Jane’ for α in $S(S)$, ‘George Eliot’ for β , ‘believe’ for V , and ‘Ralph believes *she* was a man’ for ϕ_{it} , and performing a bit of logic, one obtains the result that in (a) Eliot is believed by Jane to be such that Ralph believes she was a man. Now putting for β instead ‘Mary Ann Evans’ and for ϕ_{it} ‘Ralph does *not* believe *she* was a man,’ and drawing analogous logical inferences, one obtains as an additional result that in (a) Eliot is also rationally believed by Jane *not* to be such that Ralph believes she was a man. Thus, in (a) Jane believes Eliot to be F while also believing Eliot not to be F , for a particular property or singulary-functional concept F . Reasoning from (FC), it follows that in (a) Jane, insofar as she is rational, must take Eliot in differing ways, by means of a pair of guises that Jane does not thereby take to be of a single individual. But Jane does not do this in (a).

The *reductio* derivation is in fact fallacious. Specifically, a fallacy is committed when Schiffer erroneously “restates” the relevant half of the first premise as the thesis that every instance of the following alternative schema is true (putting ‘believe’ for V):

S' : Necessarily, if α believes that ϕ_β , then β is believed by α to be (something/someone) such that ϕ_{it} ,

where α , β , ϕ_β , and ϕ_{it} are all exactly as before.⁴ Contradiction is indeed derivable from (S') taken together with Millianism, FC, and the empirical possibility of (a), exactly in the manner that Schiffer sets out. This is because the relevant instance of (S') is inconsistent with the facts. The derivation might even be taken as demonstrating this—at least by the Millian’s lights. Importantly, Millianism is in no way committed to (S'), not even a Millianism like my own, which is committed to (S). I am committed to the existence of counter-instances of (S').

The distinction between the *de re* constructions $\lceil \alpha$ believes of β that $\phi_{it} \rceil$ and $\lceil \beta$ is believed by α to be something such that $\phi_{it} \rceil$ may seem excessively subtle and delicate, but in the present instance it is crucial. The latter is the passive-voice transformation of a relational predication:

α **Believes_r** (β , to be something such that ϕ_{it}),

where ‘**Believes_r**’ is a triadic predicate for a ternary relation between a believer x , an object y (the *res*), and importantly, a property or singulary-functional concept F that x attributes to y . Schema (S') is thus indeed a logical consequence of (S) in a special case: if the open sentence ϕ_{it} has monadic-predicational form, $\lceil It \Pi \rceil$, where Π is a monadic predicate in which the pronoun ‘it’ does not occur free and whose single argument place is filled by the pronoun ‘it’ (or ‘he’ or ‘she’). In this case, Π is a term

for a particular property or singular-functional concept F . If someone x believes the singular proposition expressed by $\lceil It \Pi \rceil$ under the assignment of a particular value y to the variable/pronoun 'it,' then the proposition believed—that y is F —has the simple structure, $\langle y, F \rangle$, so that y is indeed believed by x to be F .⁵

Not all *de re* beliefs about y involve the attribution of a property to y . Many singular propositions involving y have a structure considerably more complex than $\langle y, F \rangle$. There are some propositions, expressed by complex sentences ϕ_β , such that someone might rationally believe the proposition without inferring, indeed even while doubting, the consequence expressed by $\lceil \beta \text{ is something such that } \phi_{it} \rceil$.⁶ Some of these propositions are witness to the fact that (S') is no logical consequence of (S) .

To take an example due to David Kaplan, if Quine's Ralph believes that *this man* [pointing at a fuzzy picture of Ortcutt, his face covered by a large brown hat] is taller than Ortcutt, then Ralph believes the singular proposition about Ortcutt, that he (Ortcutt) is taller than he (Ortcutt) is. According to (S) , Ralph thus believes that Ortcutt is taller than Ortcutt. But Ralph does not thereby believe Ortcutt to be someone taller than himself. That is, Ortcutt is not believed by Ralph to be something z such that z is taller than z . The proposition Ralph believes has the binary-relational form: $\langle \text{Ortcutt, Ortcutt, taller-than} \rangle$ —or perhaps, the special monadic-predicational form: $\langle \text{Ortcutt, } \langle \text{taller-than, Ortcutt} \rangle \rangle$. It most definitely does not have the alternate monadic-predicational form: $\langle \text{Ortcutt, being taller than oneself} \rangle$. Putting 'Ralph' for α , 'Ortcutt' for β , 'believe' for V , and 'He is taller than he is' for ϕ_{it} , the resulting instance of (S) is true while the resulting instance of (S') is false.⁷

Schiffer's central example exploits another such sentence ϕ_β , specifically 'Ralph does not believe that Mary Ann Evans was a man.' This expresses a singular proposition about George Eliot, that Ralph does not believe that she was a man, represented by the ordered pair $\langle \langle \text{Ralph, believing, } \langle \text{Eliot, having been a man} \rangle \rangle, \text{ being false} \rangle$. Jane rationally believes this proposition, while also believing precisely what it denies, as expressed by 'Ralph believes that George Eliot was a man' and represented by $\langle \text{Ralph, believing, } \langle \text{Eliot, having been a man} \rangle \rangle$. But Jane does not thereby both believe and disbelieve the singular proposition about Eliot, that she is believed by Ralph to have been a man, as represented by $\langle \text{Eliot, being believed by Ralph to have been a man} \rangle$.

The following dialogue illustrates Jane's pertinent beliefs:

SOCRATES: "Does Ralph believe that Mary Ann Evans was a man?"

JANE: "No, he doesn't."

SOCRATES: "Does Ralph believe that George Eliot was a man?"

JANE: "Yes."

SOCRATES: "So George Eliot is someone Ralph believes was a man?"

JANE: "Yes."

SOCRATES: "What about Mary Ann Evans, then? Does Ralph also believe *she* was a man?"

JANE: "Ralph doesn't believe that *Mary Ann Evans* was a man. But you're now asking about Mary Ann Evans herself. Mary Ann Evans and George Eliot are the same person, don't you know? And Ralph does indeed believe she was a man."

SOCRATES: “Very well. Is Mary Ann Evans someone Ralph also *doesn't* believe was a man?”

JANE: “Of course not; that would be logically impossible. I just told you: Mary Ann Evans is someone Ralph *does* believe was a man.”

SOCRATES: “Is George Eliot someone Ralph *doesn't* believe was a man?”

JANE: “You're not listening to me: George Eliot and Mary Ann Evans are the same person. Ralph *does* believe she was a man.”

Jane's position is rational, sophisticated, even subtle. It is perfectly coherent (even if it is inconsistent, at least by Millian lights). It is essentially a part of a neo-Fregean theory of *de re* constructions. Putting ‘Jane’ for α , ‘George Eliot’ for β , ‘believe’ for V , and ‘Ralph believes *she* was a man’ for ϕ_{it} , the resulting instance of (S) is true while the resulting instance of (S') is false. Schiffer's *reductio* derivation fallaciously infers the latter from the former on its way to deriving a contradiction.

Schiffer's objection can make do without fallaciously inferring (S') from (S) if FC can be extended into the following more general principle schema, which might be called ‘Frege's constraint without restraint’:

FC': Necessarily, if α rationally believes of β that ϕ_{it} while also disbelieving (or merely withholding believing) of β that ϕ_{it} , then in so doing α takes β by means of differing guises, m and m' ; furthermore, in so doing, α does not construe m and m' as guises of a single thing,

where α and β are English singular terms and ϕ_{it} is as before. (Schiffer proposes a related generalization.) But as remarked earlier, there are complex singular propositions about y that one can rationally believe without attributing the corresponding property to y . Someone may rationally believe and disbelieve one of these propositions without taking y to be distinct things. Given the existence of such cases, there is no obvious rationale for removing the restraint from Frege's constraint. One who urges such a sweeping extension of FC must bear the burden of providing a rationale that does not involve a fallacious inference from ‘ α believes of β that ϕ_{it} ’ to ‘ α believes β to be something such that ϕ_{it} ’, or its contrapositive. Indeed, the very situation (a) arguably yields a counter-instance. I maintain that in (a), Jane rationally both believes and disbelieves of George Eliot, *de re*, that Ralph believes she was a man—even though in so doing, Jane does not take Eliot to be two separate people. It is unclear how, or even whether, a neo-Fregean can plausibly avoid this conclusion.⁸

There remains a bit of a mystery: How *can* someone rationally both believe and disbelieve a singular proposition about y without thereby taking y to be distinct things? In short, given FC, how can FC' have any counter-instances?

The solution is not far to find. There is a sound substitute for Schiffer's fallacious *reductio*, an alternative derivation that relies on FC and (S) without fatally detouring through dubious generalizations. This time, putting for β the that-clause ‘that George Eliot was a man’ and putting for ϕ_{it} the open sentence ‘*It* is something Ralph believes,’ the relevant half of the resulting instance of (S) states that necessarily, if Jane believes that the proposition that Eliot was a man is something Ralph believes, then Jane believes of the proposition that George Eliot was a man, *de re*, that it is something Ralph believes. In situation (a), so Jane does. Now putting for β instead

the alternative that-clause ‘that Mary Ann Evans was a man’ and for ϕ_{it} ‘It is something Ralph does *not* believe,’ the relevant half of the resulting instance of (S) states that necessarily, if Jane believes that the proposition that Mary Ann Evans was a man is something Ralph does not believe, then Jane believes of the proposition that Mary Ann Evans was a man, *de re*, that it is something Ralph does not believe. In situation (a), so Jane does. According to Millianism, the propositions to which Jane *de re* attributes complementary properties (being believed by Ralph and not) in (a) are one and the same. Reasoning from FC, it follows that Jane, insofar as she is rational in (a), must take this proposition in differing ways—not Eliot herself, but the proposition that she was a man.

In situation (a), so Jane does. In (a), she evidently mistakes this singular proposition for two altogether independent thoughts (or at least is committed to doing so), one that Ralph believes, the other (according to Jane) not. No contradiction is derived and no problem for Millianism generated. On the contrary, our conclusion solves the riddle of how, without mistaking Eliot for two distinct people, Jane can rationally both believe and disbelieve of Eliot, *de re*, that Ralph believes she was a man. Though Jane does not mistake Eliot to be distinct people, she mistakes the singular proposition that Eliot was a man to be distinct thoughts.⁹

In effect, Jane in (a) is a proto-Fregean, or perhaps a closet neo-Fregean. (Are we not all—at least early on?) With this new derivation, she has been outed. With a little further Socratic questioning, she will likely embrace her neo-Fregeanism with pride. (Unless Jane is very young—in which case, just how rational is she?)

Schiffer defends his objection to Millianism asserting, “...the only reasonable construal of *propositional* modes of presentation is that they are structured entities whose basic components are modes of presentation of the basic components of the Russellian propositions of which the propositional modes of presentation are modes of presentation.” Since Jane does not have the requisite differing modes of presentation of Eliot (nor of the property or singularity-functional concept of *having been a man*), she also does not have differing modes of presentation of the (putatively singular) proposition that Eliot was a man, as would be required by FC.

With all due respect, it is unreasonable to suppose that the only proposition guises are such composite constructions as Schiffer envisions. Equally unreasonable is Michael Dummett’s rival thesis that propositions can be conceived of only as the senses of particular sentences.¹⁰ Frege would rightly have insisted that these are but two among infinitely many ways in which propositions (‘thoughts’), like anything else, can be presented or conceived. The singular proposition about George Eliot that she was a man might be taken or conceived as *the semantic content of the English sentence ‘George Eliot was a man,’ as the singular proposition composed of George Eliot and the concept of having been a man, as that of which the proposition that George Eliot was not a man is the denial, as the central propositional example in Stephen Schiffer’s ‘A Problem for a Direct-Reference Theory of Belief Reports,’ as Jane’s favorite proposition, or in any number of alternative ways. Significantly, in particular the proposition might be taken as Ralph’s mistaken opinion about George Eliot’s gender. Jane takes the proposition in question to be both believed by Ralph and not believed by Ralph. Even the restrained constraint FC entails that in so doing Jane takes the proposition in differing ways—assuming she is rational and not a young child.*

Assuming she is sufficiently sophisticated, Jane might take the proposition in question to invoke the concept that Ralph associates with the name ‘George Eliot’ (Ralph’s concept of who George Eliot is), and alternatively, to invoke instead the concept that Ralph associates with ‘Mary Ann Evans.’ These are misconceptions—or so claims the Millian—but an incorrect way of taking something is a way of taking that thing. One great philosophical genius has thus misconceived propositions like the one in question. One hardly needs to be a philosophical genius to commit this exceedingly tempting error. But even if Jane is not sufficiently sophisticated to venture a theory, or a proto-theory, of the nature of what it is that Ralph believes and does not believe, it is enough that Jane believes p to be believed by Ralph while also disbelieving p to be believed by Ralph, for Jane thereby to take p by means of different guises. She need not take p to be a Fregean thought. In Schiffer’s scenario it is enough that Jane does not take p to be a Russellian singular proposition.¹¹

Notes

1. Schiffer presented his alleged problem for Millianism in “The ‘Fido’-Fido Theory of Belief,” in J. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives, 1: Metaphysics* (Atascadero, Ca.: Ridgeview, 1987), pp. 445–80; and again two decades later in “A Problem for a Direct-Reference Theory of Belief Reports,” *Noûs*, 40, 2 (2006), pp. 361–8. Here I follow the more recent presentation.
2. In J. Tomberlin, ed., *Philosophical Perspectives, 3: Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory* (Atascadero, Ca.: Ridgeview, 1989), pp. 243–85, at part VII, pp. 264–73, reprinted in my *Content, Cognition, and Communication: Philosophical Papers II* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 191–221. See also my “The Resilience of Illogical Belief,” reprinted in *Content, Cognition, and Communication*, pp. 222–7. The earliest forum for our debate was a Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in March 1987.
3. The relevant pronoun occurrences are anaphoric, hence bound, within (S) itself. On anaphoric pronouns as bound variables, see my “Pronouns as Variables,” *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 72, 3 (2007), pp. 656–64; preprinted in my *Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Meaning: Philosophical Papers I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 399–406.
4. I have reformulated Schiffer’s “restatement” to conform to the present notation, in a manner that accords with the intent indicated by Schiffer’s applications of the schema. Schiffer commits the fallacy precisely at his step (iii) (*Remnants of Meaning* [Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987], p. 364), when he derives his (c).

As I argued in “Illogical Belief” pp. (265–7), Millianism is inessential to Schiffer’s alleged problem. With a change of example to one of a sort made famous by Benson Mates, a similar derivation can be constructed without any appeal to Millianism. This consideration by itself bursts Schiffer’s attempt to refute Millianism.

5. I assume here that necessarily, x believes y to be F iff x believes of y , *de re*, that it (he, she) is F . For more on this assumed equivalence, see Kaplan, “Afterthoughts” in J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein, eds., *Themes from Kaplan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 565–614, at 605–6; and my “Relational Belief,” in P. Leonardi and M. Santambrogio, eds., *On Quine: New Essays* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 206–28, at 214–16, 219; reprinted in *Content, Cognition, and Communication*, pp. 247–67.

In contrast to $\lceil \alpha$ believes of β that $\phi_{it} \rceil$, $\lceil \alpha$ Believes_r (β , to be something such that ϕ_{it}) \rceil is what David Kaplan calls a *syntactically de re* construction. Cf. his “Opacity,” in L. E. Hahn

and P. A. Schilpp, eds., *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), pp. 229–88, at 268. The former construction is equivalent to $\lceil (\lambda\gamma)[\alpha \text{ believes } \wedge \phi_\gamma \wedge](\beta) \rceil$; the latter to $\lceil (\lambda\gamma)[\alpha \text{ believes } \wedge (\lambda\zeta)[\phi_\zeta](\gamma) \wedge](\beta) \rceil$, where ‘ \wedge ’ is a content-quotation mark (i.e., an indirect-discourse quotation mark) and ϕ_γ is the same as ϕ_ζ except for having free occurrences of the variable γ wherever ϕ_ζ has free occurrences of the variable ζ . Given Millianism, (S') entails the following:

$$[\alpha \text{ believes } \wedge \phi_\beta \wedge \supset \alpha \text{ believes } \wedge (\lambda\gamma)[\phi_\gamma](\beta) \wedge],$$

where β is any proper name or other Millian term and ϕ_β is the same as ϕ_γ except for having free occurrences of β wherever ϕ_γ has free occurrences of γ .

6. That is, $\lceil \alpha \text{ believes } \wedge \phi_\beta \wedge \rceil$ may be true even while $\lceil \alpha \text{ believes } \wedge (\lambda\gamma)[\phi_\gamma](\beta) \wedge \rceil$ is false. Cf. the previous note.
7. See Kaplan, ‘Opacity,’ at pp. 269–72, and my “Relational Belief,” especially pp. 213–14. I investigated these matters in some detail in “Reflexivity,” *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 27, 3 (July 1986), pp. 401–29, and “Reflections on Reflexivity,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15, 1 (February 1992), pp. 53–63; both reprinted in *Content, Cognition, and Communication*, pp. 30–64.
8. See “Relational Belief,” pp. 217–18.
9. See “Relational Belief,” pp. 218–19.
10. Dummett, *The Interpretation of Frege’s Philosophy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1981), at pp. 90–8. Cf. my “The Very Possibility of Language: A Sermon on the Consequences of Missing Church,” in C. A. Anderson and M. Zeleny, eds., *Logic, Meaning, and Computation: Essays in Memory of Alonzo Church* (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2001), pp. 573–95, especially at 578–82, 592–5; reprinted in *Metaphysics, Mathematics, and Meaning*, pp. 344–64.
11. I thank Gary Ostertag for providing me this opportunity. I thank David Braun for comments on an earlier draft. I am grateful also to Blackwell Publishing for permission to incorporate my article ‘The Resilience of Illogical Belief,’ *Noûs* 40 (2) (June 2006): 369–75.