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ON SEMANTIC CONTENT, BELIEF-CONTENT AND BELIEF ASCRIPTION[1]

SUMMARY: It is no surprise to anyone familiar with Fregean and Millian Theories that they struggle to explain the intuitive truth-value of sentences with proper names in modal and cognitive (such as belief) contexts, respectively. In this paper, I suggest that we can avoid the problems these theories face while at the same time preserving important intuitions by drawing a sharp distinction between semantic content (truth-conditions) and cognitive content (the content of cognitive attitudes), and by fixing the scope of Fregean and Millian theories to cognitive and semantic content, respectively. An immediate worry for this type of hybrid account is to explain the contribution of cognitive contents to the truth-conditions of attitude ascriptions. If they are different contents and the cognitive content is not part of the semantics, how can the truth-value of belief ascriptions be sensitive to cognitive content? If the semantic content follows Millianism, how can belief ascriptions that are otherwise identical but have different co-referring names have different truth-values? To answer these questions, I use Predelli's (2005) semantic framework and argue that the truth-value of belief ascriptions is relativized not only to a world but also to a point of evaluation used to interpret the world. It is the point of evaluation that brings the cognitive content back to semantics and explains away the contradiction.

KEYWORDS: attitude ascriptions, belief attributions, proper names, cognitive significance.

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> Clark Kent: *sets glasses on kitchen table*
> Lois Lane: Where did our table go?

1. The Tension

It is no surprise to anyone familiar with the debate on the meaning of proper names that there is a tension between our linguistic intuitions, on the one hand, and Millian and Fregean theories, on the other. Millian theories (or Millianism) hold that the semantic content of a proper name is only its referent. They explain well our intuitions about the truth-value of simple sentences, such as (1) "Eric Blair was born in Motihari". Whether (1) is true or false seems to depend only on whether Eric Blair has the property of being born in Motihari, which is what they hold. They also explain well our intuitions about the modal profile of those sentences. In accordance with our intuitions, Millianism holds that (1) is false in a world where Eric Blair was not born in Motihari, even if, in that world, there is someone who has accomplished all the things that he is famous for in the actual world and was born in Motihari.

When it comes to account for the intuitive truth-value of beliefs ascription (and other cognitive attitudes), Millian theories seem to fall apart. We cansuppose, without apparent contradiction, that (2) "Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari" is true but that (3) "Lois believes that George Orwell was born in Motihari" is false, even though Eric Blair is George Orwell. However, if Millianism is correct, "Eric Blair" and "George Orwell" have the same semantic content—because they co-refer—which entails that (2) and (3) should have the same semantic content and truth-value, contrary to our intuitions.

Interestingly, the opposite is true of Fregean theories.[2] They hold that the semantic content of a proper name is a mode of presentation or way of thinking of the referent of the name and that co-referring names, like "Eric Blair" and "George Orwell", can have different modes of presentation. This allows them to distinguish the semantic content of (2) and (3) and, consequently, explain our intuitions about their truth-value.

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[2] 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. It should be noted, however, that this will not pose a problem 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 parts of the theory.

The problem for Fregean Theories arises when accounting for the truth-value of simple sentences like (1). According to them, (1) expresses a content like the son of Charles Blair was born in Motihari, which is true if, and only if, the object that satisfies the description the son of Charles Blair also has the property of being born in Motihari. This contradicts our initial intuitions that the truth-value of (1) depends solely on whether Eric Blair has the property of being born in Motihari, because now he also needs to have the property of being the son of Charles Blair.

While one might think that such a departure from our intuitions can be brushed off as a small trade-off required for a simple explanation of belief sentences, when we look at the modal profile of (1)—which gives rise to versions of arguments called "Modal Arguments"—it is evident that it is a bigger problem. Fregean Theories hold that (1) is true if, and only if, whoever is the son of Charles Blair was also born in Motihari. In the actual world, (1) is true—Eric Blair is both the only son of Charles Blair and born in Motihari. But in a world where he is neither of those things and John Blair is, (1) is surprisingly true, since he is both the only son of Charles Blair and born in Motihari.[3]

Millians and Fregeans are very much aware of these and other challenges their theories face. There is a vast literature on the topic and it is impractical to survey all of it. I am generally dissatisfied with the solutions proposed by Millians because they either posit a suspicious three-place relation in terms of which the belief-relation is analyzed (Perry, 1977; 1979), invoke questionable pragmatic principles to explain the intuitive truth-values of belief sentences (see Salmon, 1986 for such a view and Braun, 1998; 2002 for a criticism), or deny the transparency of belief contents (if a person believes that p and is aware of her belief, then she knows what the content of her belief is). The solutions proposed by Fregeans will inevitably add something to the semantic content of a name, and this move just ignores the intuition about the contribution of names to the truth-conditions.

None of these considerations are knock-down objections. They are a motivation to examine the debate from a different perspective. Instead of seeing Fregean and Millian theories as competing theories, I want to explore a hybrid view that brings them together in harmony, which is a natural perspective given that Millian and Fregean theories seem to explain well different sets of non-overlapping intuitions. The resulting theory would have to draw a sharp distinction between the semantic and cognitive content of a name. The semantic content is the meaning of a name and gives its contribution to the truth-conditions of a sentence. This content is as Millianism holds: the referent of the name (if there is any). The cognitive content is the content towards which a person bears

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[3] In fact, can recreate generate such counterexamples with virtually any sentence of the form $\ulcorner \Phi \alpha \urcorner$, such that "$\Phi$" ranges over predicates and "α" over names. Notable exceptions are naturally expressions which are associated with rigid descriptions, like "two" and the even prime number greater than 1. Though, if I am right about the underlying problem that the Modal Argument reveals—namely that (1) is intuitively about Eric Blair and not about whoever is the son of Charles Blair—even these cases are contrary to our intuitions.

a cognitive attitude, a mode of presentation. In alignment with Fregean theories, we can understand modes of presentation as some sort of description, a cluster of descriptions, or a set of information (such as a mental file; Recanati, 2012).

In this new unified theory, the name "Eric Blair" means Eric Blair himself, and (1) is true iff Eric Blair is born in Motihari, and its cognitive content is the son of Charles Blair. However, sameness of semantic content does not entail sameness of cognitive content. Thus, even though "George Orwell" has the same semantic content as "Eric Blair", its cognitive content can be different, such as the author of 1984. This explains why (2) can be true and (3) false: because Lois bears an attitude towards the son of Charles Blair was born in Motihari but not towards the author of 1984 was born in Motihari. A view roughly along these lines has been developed by Recanati (2012).

Ideally, such a unified theory should work. But, unfortunately, the real world is far from ideal and two immediate and closely related problems arise. Since the semantic content is in accordance with Millianism, (2) and (3) have the same semantic content. But (a) how can they have the same semantic content and different truth-values? Furthermore, if the truth-conditions of (2) do not include the cognitive content of "Eric Blair", (b) how is the truth-value of (2) sensitive to a content which is not part of its truth-conditions?

Anyone who wants to defend such a hybrid view needs to address these questions even before offering a theory of what modes of presentations are. This is what I will do in this paper. I will use the semantic framework developed by Predelli (2005) to address these two problems.

Predelli is primarily concerned with explaining how different utterances of the same sentence can express the same semantic content but have different truth-values depending on the context in which they are uttered. While the case at hand is slightly different, because we are considering utterances of different sentences, namely, (2) and (3), the core of the problem is the same: how can sentences with the same semantic content have different truth-values? Predelli has also used his framework to answer (a). But there are many differences between the resulting theories given that Predelli subscribes to Millianism for both semantic and cognitive content while I do not.[4]

As for the structure of the paper, I begin by explaining Predelli's view in Section 2. In Sections 3 and 4, I expand it to the problem at hand. Then, in Section 5, I use this framework to explain other puzzles about belief. Lastly, in Section 6, I consider some objections.

2. Green Leaves and Hexagonal Countries

Consider a world w^* where all leaves have been painted green (the case is discussed in Predelli, 2005; 2009). Suppose that you are talking to your friend Marie, who is taking a photography course. Her assignment for the week is to

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[4] See Section 4 for an explanation of the differences.

take pictures of green objects. She is wondering what to photograph, and you utter (4) "The leaves are green". Intuitively, (4) is true. Now, suppose your other friend, Bill, is taking a biology course and has to get samples of some green plants. If you utter (4), it is now false. It seems that we have a contradiction: different utterances of (4) in w^* have different truth-values. How do we explain this? Is (4) true or false in w^*?

A potential explanation is to accept the intuitive truth-value of the utterances at face value and assume that the predicate "to be green" changed its meaning from one context to another. This would explain away the contradiction because different utterances of (4) express different semantic contents. However, this solution is less than ideal. It treats "to be green" as a context sensitive expression—an expression whose semantic content may vary according to the context—which does not seem to be the case.

Another way to analyze the case is to hold that our intuitions about the truth-value of (4) are mistaken: both utterances must have the same truth value, and we are incorrect in judging the truth-value of (4) when talking with either Bill or Marie. This solution is also less than ideal because if Marie submits pictures of the painted leaves, she will be fulfilling the assignment, indicating that the leaves must be green. However, if Bill submits pictures of the same painted leaves, he will clearly not fulfill the assignment, suggesting that the leaves must not be green—if they were, why would not he be meeting the requirements?

Predelli offers a different and very interesting explanation of the intuitive difference in the truth-value of two utterances of (4). He takes our intuitions at face-value and argues that the utterances express the same semantic content but are evaluated against different circumstances of evaluation. Since both utterances are evaluated against the same world, he adds a new element to the circumstances of evaluation to distinguish them, what he calls a point of evaluation.

A point of evaluation is a perspective we take to interpret the world (what Predelli calls "wordly conditions"). According to Predelli, w^*, by itself, does not determine whether the leaves are green or not, or, more generally, whether an object is in the extension of a predicate. We need to interpret the world to determine whether the leaves are green. And this interpretation depends on a point of view, or a perspective. From the point of view that what is important is that objects look green, the leaves are green in w^*. But from the point of view that what is important is that leaves are green due to the presence of chlorophyll, the leaves are not green in w^*. What I am calling "point of view" is a point of evaluation. The result of interpreting a world from a point of evaluation, that is, deciding whether an object is in the extension of a predicate, is called a "state of affairs". Ultimately, utterances of sentences are evaluated against an interpretation of a world from a point of evaluation.

With this, Predelli can explain the intuitive truth-value of different utterances of (4). When talking with Marie, the purpose is to assess the color of objects in $w^{\wedge}*$ from the perspective of their appearances, because the conversation is about finding objects for her photography assignment. For such a purpose, appearing

green (point of evaluation m) in w^* count as being green. This means that the leaves are green from this point of evaluation, and (4) is true with respect to w^* and m. On the other hand, in the conversation with Bill, appearances are not enough for leaves in w^* to count as green. For his assignment, Bill needs objects that appear green because of chlorophyll (point of evaluation b). From this point of evaluation, the leaves are not green, which means that (4) is false with respect w^* and b.

The initial contradiction between the two utterances of (4) goes away because each utterance is evaluated against different parameters: in the conversation with Marie, (4) is true with respect to world w^* and point of evaluation m; in the conversation with Bill, it is false with respect to the same world w^* but point of evaluation b.

The underlying claim in Predelli's framework is that we do not evaluate sentences against some given organization of objects in the world (worldly condition). Rather, we interpret (or cut) the world from a point of evaluation and then evaluate sentences against the resulting interpretation (state of affairs). Which point of evaluation should be used to interpret the world and evaluate an utterance will depend on certain elements of the context of the utterance. In the case of green leaves, it depends on the purpose of the assignment. But in other conversations, it will be something else.

Predelli is not the only nor the first philosopher to suggest that the truthvalue of sentences depends on some point of evaluation. Austin (1962, p. 142) makes a similar point, though he does not develop it in as much detail as Predelli. He says that (5) "France is hexagonal" is true when uttered in a conversation with a general, but false in a conversation with a geographer. Furthermore, the difference in the truth-value is due to a change in the purpose of the conversation. Predelli's semantic framework explains this case very nicely. World $w_@$ is interpreted from two different points of evaluations. In the conversation with the general, we interpret $w_@$ from a point of evaluation g in which countries with a general shape when looked at on a map counts as hexagonal. So, (5) is true in with respect to $w_@$ and g. But in the conversation with the geographer, we interpret world from a point of evaluation o in which we look at the shape of a country more closely, and its general shape is not enough for it to count as hexagonal. So, (5) is false with respect to $w_@$ and o.

Of course it can be debated whether Predelli's proposal is the best solution to the green leaves problem. But it shows how utterances of a sentence with the same semantic content can have different truth-values in the same world without contradiction. If this framework can be successfully extended to belief sentences, which I will try to do in the next sections, it can open up a path for a different and interesting way of solving puzzles about beliefs. We will be able to explain how (2) and (3) have different truth-values even though they express the same semantic content in a way that preserves the intuitions presented in Section 1. To do that, I first need to talk about the metaphysics of belief content to get clear on what a worlds and points of evaluation are in the case of beliefs.

3. Metaphysics of Belief Content

In Section 1, I said that the content of beliefs (cognitive contents) can be a description, set of descriptions, mental files, and so on. For the sake of simplicity, I will take them to be a description of an object. But, as it will become clear, my account of the truth-conditions of belief ascriptions is compatible with different ways of cashing out modes of presentation.

Consider a classical so-called "Frege's Puzzle" case. Suppose that Eric Blair and Lois are very close childhood friends both from Motihari. Lois has read some books by Eric Blair under his pen name "George Orwell" and has even seen some pictures of him on book covers. However, she does not recognize the man in the pictures as her friend from Motihari whose father was Charles Blair. She thinks that the person called "George Orwell" was born somewhere in England. Here, Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari when thinking of him as *the son of Charles Blair* but not when thinking of him as *the author of 1984*. This together with the assumption that the cognitive contents are descriptions (modes of presentation) entails that Lois has a belief attitude towards the belief content *the son of Charles Blair was born in Motihari* but not towards *the author of 1984 was born in Motihari*.

The figure below represents Lois's mental life. «SON, BORN IN MOTIHA-RI»[5] stands for the cognitive content *the son of Charles Blair was born in Motihari*, and «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI», for *the author of 1984 was born in Motihari*. Cognitive contents inside Lois's belief box[6] are contents she believes. Contents outside her belief box are the ones she does not believe.

Figure 1

Lois's Belief Box

«SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI»   «AUTHOR, BORN IN MOTIHARI»

Figure 1 represents how the world is according to the hybrid view under consideration. Call it world *w*. Now, we can raise the question: is (2) true or false? Does Lois believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari? In other words, is Lois in the extension of the predicate "to believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari"?[7]

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[5] "«BORN IN MOTIHARI»" stands for the cognitive content of the predicate "to be born in Motihari", whatever it is. In this paper, I will not discuss issues pertaining to predicates, though what I say about names should apply to them and other linguistic expressions.

[6] The concept of belief box is usually used in the analysis of belief according to the language of thought hypothesis, in which a belief is a physical representation of a content in the brain. Here, I am using "belief box" as a metaphor merely as a pedagogical aid.

[7] For the sake of making the comparison between the case of green leaves and Lois' case, I will treat "to believe that *p*" in ⌜*s* believes that *p*⌝ as a unary predicate like "to be

Using Predelli's framework, it depends on how we interpret *w*, just like in the case of green leaves.

Given certain reasonable assumptions about Lois's cognitive life, it is plausible to suppose that she associates the mode of presentation «SON» with the name "Eric Blair", by which I mean that, when she hears the name "Eric Blair", the cognitive content «SON» comes to her mind (in Recanati's terms, the mental file named "Eric Blair" is activated), and she will think of Eric Blair as *the son of Charles Blair*. As a result, «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» is the mode of presentation she associates with (1). Thus, if we look at Figure 1 and interpret it from the point of evaluation of *the mode of presentation of "Eric Blair" for Lois* (point of evaluation *e'*), she believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari, that is, she is in the extension of the predicate "to believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari". From perspective *e'*, to have «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in one's belief box counts as believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari (similarly to how from point of evaluation *m* appearances are enough for leaves to be green in *w**).

But Lois does not believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari from all points of evaluation. Assuming, as we have, that Lois does not know that "Eric Blair" and "George Orwell" co-refer, we can suppose that she associates the mode of presentation «AUTHOR» with the name "George Orwell" and «AUTHOR, BORN IN MOTIHARI» with (6) "George Orwell was born in Motihari". If now we interpret *w* from the point of evaluation of *the mode of presentation of "George Orwell"* (point of evaluation *e''*), the result is that she does not believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari, that is, she is not in the extension of "to believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari" (similar to how in *b* leaves appearing green does not count as being green). From this perspective *e''*, having «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» inside Lois's belief box does not count as believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari.

The contrast between points of evaluation *e'* and *e''* is similar to the contrast between *m* and *b*: they lay out different criteria for an object (leaves and Lois) to be in the extension of a predicate ("to be green" and "to believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari") given how the world is.

In the next section, I will use this account of the metaphysics of belief together with Predelli's semantic framework to address the questions raised in Section 1: (a) how can (2) and (3) have the same semantic content but different truthvalues? and (b) how is the truth-value of (2) sensitive to a content which is not part of its truth-conditions?

4. Belief Ascriptions

Consider an utterance of the sentence (2) "Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari". According to the semantic account I endorse, it is true iff Lois

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green". But my analysis would also applies if we treat "to believe" as two place relational predicate between *p* and *that p*, as it is commonly done.

believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari, that is to say, iff Lois is in the extension of "to believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari". Does Figure 1 make (2) true or false? In other words, does Lois believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari in w? Just like with (4) "The leaves are green", it depends not only on how w is but also on the point of evaluation considered.

As I explained in the last section, from point of evaluation e' (the mode of presentation Lois associates with "Eric Blair"), Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. Therefore, when (2) is evaluated with respect to w and e', it is true. On the other hand, from point of evaluation e'', Lois does not believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. From e'', Lois having «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in her belief box is not enough to count as believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. Thus, (2) is false with respect to w and e''. This might sound strange at first, but I will explain how this reflects an intuition we have shortly.

Similarly for (3) "Lois believes that George Orwell was born in Motihari". It is true iff Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari, just like (2) because "Eric Blair" and "George Orwell" have the same semantic content. Interpreting w from e', she does. So (3) is true in w and e'. Interpreting w from e'', she does not. So, (3) is false in w and e''.

Since (2) (and [3]) can have different truth-values depending on which point of evaluation it is evaluated against, in order to determine whether a *specific* utterance of (2) is true in the context it was uttered, we need to know which point of evaluation is the appropriated one for that context. As Predelli explains, elements of the context determine the point of evaluation. In the case of green leaves, the *purpose of the assignment* determined the point of evaluation. In your conversation with Marie, the purpose was to talk about objects which are green for her photography assignment.

Adopting this idea to the case at hand, in contexts in which we are using Lois's mental life to raise objections against Millianism, the purpose is to highlight the fact that Lois has different ways of thinking about Eric Blair: one that she associates with the name "Eric Blair" and another with "George Orwell". We invoke these different perspectives by using different names, as in (2) and (3). In this way, (2) is to be evaluated with respect to the mode of presentation Lois associates with "Eric Blair", and (3) with respect to the mode of presentation she associates with "George Orwell". Here, the name in the sentences determines the correct point of evaluation. Thus, an utterance of (2) in such a context is true iff Lois has the property of believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari in w by means of the mode of presentation she associates with "Eric Blair", that is, from point of evaluation e'. With respect to this point of evaluation (e') and world w represented by Figure 1, Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. Likewise, an utterance of (3) in the same context is true iff Lois has the property of believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari in w, by means of the mode of presentation she associates with "George Orwell", that is, from point of evaluation e''. This is because different names are used to highlight different mode of

presentation Lois has of Eric Blair. From this point of evaluation, she does not believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari in *w*.

In both cases, cues from the context suggest what the relevant point of evaluation is. In the case of green leaves, we do not need to assume that at any point of the conversation Marie or anyone said that she needs to photograph objects that look green. Anyone with some basic knowledge will assume or infer from knowing what the assignment is that you are talking about leaves that look green. In the same way, in the Lois's case, we do not need to assume that anyone has explicitly said that Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari *by means of the mode of presentation she associates with the name "Eric Blair"*. Anyone who knows the background story (even the most hardcore Millians) will understand that she associates different modes of presentation with the names "Eric Blair" and "George Orwell", and that using one particular name suggests that it is a specific mode of presentation that we are talking about.

A consequence of putting together the proposed hybrid view and Predelli's framework is that (2) "Lois believes that *Eric Blair* was born in Motihari" and (3) "Lois believes that *George Orwell* was born in Motihari" have the same truth-conditions. They are true (false) with respect to the circumstances of evaluation, that is, with respect to the same world and point of evaluation. This means that (3) is also true with respect to *e'*, and (2) is false with respect to *e''*. This is a desirable consequence because in the hybrid view the semantic content determines the truth-conditions and, since this is given by Millianism, it should entail that (2) and (3) have the same truth-conditions. It might sound counterintuitive at first because it is not obvious whether there are contexts in which we should evaluate (3) taking it to consideration the mode of presentation Lois associates with "Eric Blair", and not with "George Orwell". However, a closer look reveals that there are such contexts. For instance, suppose we are making a list and counting how many people Lois believes were born in Motihari and how many she does not. Suppose further that we know that Eric Blair is George Orwell. We begin by considering whether she believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. We conclude that she does. Then we wonder whether she believes that George Orwell was born in Motihari, which is to wonder whether (3) is true. We cannot say that she does not, or else we will count the same person twice, one in each side of list. So, we conclude that she does because she has «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in her belief box. This is a context in which (3) is evaluated against a circumstance of evaluation which takes as the point of evaluation any mode of presentation of Eric Blair for Lois (*p'''*). So, (3) is true in this context because «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» is in Lois' belief box.

One might be tempted to immediately point out that my proposal entails a contradiction. We now have different utterances of (3) with the same semantic content but different truth-values when evaluated with respect to the same world, which usually entails a contradiction.

But this objection can be quickly dismissed once we notice that it is just like the case of green leaves. And the answer here is the same: there is no contradic-

tion because different utterances of (3) are evaluated with respect to different circumstances of evaluation. Whereas an utterance of (3) in a discussion about Millianism is evaluated against a world *w* and point of evaluation *e''* (the mode of presentation Lois associates with "George Orwell"), an utterance of (3) in the counting case is evaluated against world *w* but a different point of evaluation *e'''* (any mode of presentation Lois has about Eric Blair).

In Section 2, I explained that the general idea of relativizing the truth-value of sentences to more than just a world and time is not new. However, there I talked about only simple sentences that do not ascribe beliefs or any other cognitive attitudes. But philosophers have suggested the same for belief ascriptions too. Wallace and Mason, in their criticism of Burge's famous argument for social externalism based on the "arthritis" example, argue that Burge's argument depends on there being a simple yes/no answer to the question "Does an agent *A* believes that *p*?", 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, 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, Mason, pp. 182, my emphasis)

I take it that to reject the question "Does an agent *A* believes that *p* or not?" entails, among other things, that belief sentences are not true or false without considering them in a context—"the narrative surrounding belief sentences".[8] One way of cashing out this idea is that we cannot just take the semantic content of a belief ascription and compare it with the world to check whether the ascription is true or false.[9] We need to know what the ascription is uttered for, the purpose or the intention behind it, so then we interpret the world from that perspective and are in a position to tell whether the ascription is true or false. Just like the world

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[8] I do not mean to suggest that my semantic apparatus correctly captures Wallace and Mason's idea. My point is just to show that there is an intuitive pull to the idea that ⌜*A* believes that *p*⌝ is true or false not only with respect to a world and time, but also to some other element.

[9] Though we can define a notion of true (false) simpliciter as true in the point of evaluation of the context in the world of the context, as Predelli (2005, p. 22) does.

by itself cannot determine whether the leaves are green, it also cannot determine whether Lois has the property of believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari.

Predelli himself has used his semantic framework to solve the apparent contradiction between the truth-value of (2) and (3) in Millian theories (Predelli, 2005, Chapter 5), and it is worth pausing here to understand the differences between our views. His example supposes that Tom does not know that the names "Bush" and "Dubya" refer to the same person, the former president of the United States. Tom is disposed to sincerely assent to "Bush is the president" but not to "Dubya is the president". Predelli, then, considers two scenarios:

> [O]n some occasions, Tom's ignorance of these names' co-referentiality seems to matter when reporting on his beliefs. For instance, I may explain Tom's indifference to your exclamation of "There goes Dubya" by commenting: "He does not know that Dubya is the President" [*scenario A*]. […] in other settings, Tom's attitudes towards Bush's appellations seem irrelevant. So, if you and I are accustomed to referring to Bush as "Dubya", I may well comment on Tom's view of the President as a conservative by telling you "Tom thinks that all Presidents are conservative, and he knows that Dubya is one of them" [*scenario B*]. (Predelli, 2005, pp. 168–169)

In scenario A, Predelli says, an utterance of (7) "Tom believes that Bush is the president" seems true, but an utterance of (8) "Tom believes that Dubya is the president" seems false. On the other hand, in scenario B, an utterance of (8) seems true. The contradiction appears both in scenario A between (7) and (8) and between the different utterances of (8) in each scenario.

According to him, the difference in the truth-value of sentences that have the same semantic content and truth-conditions is due to the fact that each scenario has different thresholds to ascribe Tom the belief <BUSH, PRESIDENCY>, such that it stands for the *semantic* content of "Bush is the president" according to Millianism. In the first scenario, what is relevant "[…] is whether Tom is positively inclined towards the claim that Bush is the President when that claim is presented to him by means of appropriate linguistic devices". On the other hand, in the second scenario, "[…] what matters is roughly whether Tom is among those who assent to "Bush is the President", or who sincerely utter "He is the President" when pointing at the man in the Oval Office". This explanation is incompatible with my metaphysics of belief because, in my view, we do not find the semantic content of "Bush is the president" in a person's belief box.

While I do not have a knock-down objection against Predelli's view, my reason to reject it is that it does not preserve the intuitions, which, as stated at the beginning of the paper, was one of my aims. It is true that Predelli's view can accommodate the difference in the intuitive truth-value of (2) and (3). But it does not accommodate the intuition that it is due to the different modes of presentation she has to think about Eric Blair. My view preserves this intuition by accepting that these are the contents in belief boxes and adjusting Predelli's semantic framework as I have done. We do have to stop thinking of Fregean theories as

semantic theories and, instead, think of them as theories about belief contents or things we find in a person's belief box, as Recanati (2012) has proposed. In a way, we can understand my view as a new way of thinking about the truth-conditions of belief ascriptions for theories like Recanati's. In fact, my proposal should work even with theories in which what I am calling cognitive content is taken to be something syntactic, such as Fodor's (2008) and Sainsbury and Tye's (2012).

Before moving on to other puzzles to see how powerful my proposal is, I want to explicitly answer the questions in Section 1. The first is: (a) how can (2) and (3) have the same semantic content but different truth-values? The answer is that they have different truth-values when uttered in contexts in which they are evaluated against the same world but different points of evaluation. The answer to the second—(b) how is the truth-value of (2) sensitive to a content which is not part of the truth-conditions?—is that points of evaluation point to the relevant cognitive content and make the connection between cognitive and semantic content. At some points of evaluation, to have the property of believing that Eric Blair is born in Motihari is to have a specific cognitive content in one's belief box. At others, it is to have some other cognitive content.

5. Other Puzzles

Kripke (2011) has introduced two cases to the discussion about belief contents: London/Londres and Paderewski. 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 puzzling questions can be raised: after Pierre learns the name "London", does he believe that London is pretty? And, is (9) "Pierre believes that London is pretty" true?

The 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, Marie was introduced to Paderewski again at a political rally. She did not recognize Paderewski as the man she had met in the music hall. When considering the belief that Paderewski is a great musician, she concludes, perhaps unwarrantedly, that she does not believe it. Similar puzzling questions can be raised: after the second encounter, does Marie believe that Paderewski is a great musician? And, is (10) "Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician" true?

Focusing on the Paderewski case, and beginning with the second question, the case is puzzling because, on the one hand, evaluating (10) *after* the second encounter but keeping in mind the first encounter, (10) seems true. On the other hand, if we focus on the second encounter, we want to say that (10) is false. The puzzle is that our intuitions support the contradictory conclusion that (10) is both

true and false. Similarly, to London/Londres case. We seem to have reasons to say "yes" and "no" to both questions.

According to my proposed view, this is an easy puzzle to solve because it is just like the case of green leaves: two utterances of the same sentence expressing the same semantic content but with different truth-values. First, (10) is true or false with respect to a world w and point of evaluation p. Given the description of the case, this is how w is like. It is indisputable that Marie has two modes of presentation of Paderewski, just like Lois has two modes of presentation of Eric Blair. Let us say they are *the guy at the music hall*, represented by «MUSIC HALL», and *the guy at the political rally*, represented by «POLITICAL RAL-LY». The relevant complete cognitive contents here are «MUSIC HALL, GREAT MUSICIAN» and «POLITICAL RALLY, GREAT MUSICIAN». Based on the description of the case, only the former is inside Marie's belief box—this is the world. Second, when we consider (10) keeping in mind the first encounter, we evaluate from the point of evaluation "the mode of presentation of (11) 'Paderewski is a great musician' for Marie in the first encounter" (d'). Interpreting the world w from d', Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician because Marie has the relevant cognitive content in her belief box, namely, «MUSIC HALL, GREAT MUSICIAN». So, (10) is true in w and d'.

One the other hand, when we consider (10) keeping in mind the second encounter, we evaluate it from the same world but a different point of evaluation, namely, "the mode of presentation of (12) for Marie in the second encounter" (d''). (10) is false in w and d''. The interpretation of w from d'' yields a state of affairs in which Marie does not believe that Paderewski is a great musician because she does not have the relevant cognitive content, «POLITICAL RALLY, GREAT MUSICIAN», in her belief box. A similar explanation is available for London/Londres case.

My proposal, then, dissolves Kripke's puzzle. It explains that (10) can be true and false because they get their truth-value with respect to different points of evaluations.

As for the first question, about whether Pierre believes that London is pretty and Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician full-stop, 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 a point of evaluation ("a narrative surrounding belief sentences").

At this point, it is fair to ask is what went wrong with Kripke's argument based on London/Londres and Paderewski cases. Without going too much into the details of the argument, Kripke concludes that Marie has contradictory beliefs from the fact that she assents to (12) "Paderewski is a great musician" and to (13) "Paderewski is not a great musician" and the *Disquotation Principle*: "If a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'p', then he believes that p" (Kripke, 2011, p. 137). While it is true that Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician and also that Paderewski is not a great musician, in my view it does not follow that she has contradictory beliefs in the sense of having

a content and its negation in her belief box. Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician when the world is interpreted from a point of evaluation where the relevant cognitive content is «MUSICAL HALL, GREAT MUSICIAN». She believes that Paderewski is not a great musician when the world is interpreted from a point of evaluation where the relevant cognitive content is «POLITICAL RALLY, NOT-GREAT MUSICIAN».[10] So the problem is with Disquotation but not because it is false. In my view, Disquotation is true. But it does not give the content of the belief (world) as Kripke and many others have assumed. It gives the state of affairs, the result of interpreting a world from a point of evaluation, that makes the sentence true. But different interpreted worlds (wordly conditions) can result in the same state of affairs. We can see this easily in the case of green leaves. We can get the state of affairs that the leaves are green from w^*, in which the leaves are *painted* green, and point of evaluation m, or from a different world, w^{**}, in which the leaves are green *because of chlorophyll*, and point of evaluation b. Similarly, the state of affairs that Marie believes that Paderewski is a great musician can be obtained with a pair of world and point of evaluation such that in the world the belief content in Marie's belief box is not the semantic content of (12) but rather «MUSICAL HALL, GREAT MUSICIAN».

6. Possible Concerns

Concern 1: In my view, that-clauses in belief sentences do not refer to beliefcontent. So, how can I explain the validity of arguments such as: (P1) Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari; (P2) Marie believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari; therefore, (C) there is something that Lois and Marie 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, because, if (P1) and (P2) are true, Lois and Marie have beliefs with the same content which is the semantic content of "Eric Blair was born in Motihari". But if that is not the case, as in my proposed view, how can they be said to believe the same thing?

Reply 1: To understand how (C) can be true, we need to understand how (14) "Lois and Marie believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari" can be true. Let me suppose the worst-case scenario for me, one that Lois and Marie have completely different cognitive contents in their belief box. Let us say, as we have supposed, that Lois has the cognitive content «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in her belief box, and Marie that has «AUTHOR, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in her belief box—this is the worldly conditions.[11]

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[10] Following Sosa's (1996, p. 380) presentation of the puzzle, the step with a question mark is the problem.

[11] For the sake of simplicity, suppose that they do not have any other beliefs about Eric Blair in their belief boxes.

As with any belief sentence, (14) gets a truth-value relative to a point of evaluation. It is true if, and only if, Lois believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari and Marie believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. (14) is false in *e'*—the mode of presentation Lois associates with (1) "Eric Blair was born in Motihari". The state of affairs *e'* yields is one in which the left conjunct is true but the right is false. As explained, in *e'*, it is only by having «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in one's belief box that one counts as believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. Lois has it in her belief box, but Marie does not. For similar reasons, (14) is also false in a point of evaluation that considers the mode of presentation Marie associated with (1), assuming Marie associates «AUTHOR, BORN IN MOTIHARI» with (1).

A point of evaluation in which (14) is true has to be less specific. An example is *e'''*: a mode of presentation the subject associates with (1). With *e'''* we get a state of affairs in which both Lois and Marie believe that Eric Blair was born in Motihari. In this point of evaluation, Lois having «SON, BORN IN MOTIHARI» in her belief box counts as believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari because that is the cognitive content she associates with (1). Similarly, Marie having «AUTHOR, BORN IN MOTIHARI» counts as believing that Eric Blair was born in Motihari because that is the cognitive content Marie associates with (1). Thus, (C) is true in *e'''*.

As for the validity of the argument, in my view, validity is relativized to points of evaluation, just like the truth-value of sentences: an argument is valid with respect to *e* (a world *w*, and, perhaps, a time *t*) if, and only if, it is impossible for the premises to be true and the conclusion false with respect to *e* (*w*, and *t*). The argument given in the objection turns out to be valid because at least one of the premises will be false with respect to points of evaluations where the conclusion is false: in *e'*, (C) is false, but so is (P2); in *e''* (C) is false, but so is (P1). In general, whenever (C) is false, it means that either Lois or Marie do not have the relevant cognitive contents in their respective belief boxes. But for this reason, at least one of the premises will also be false.

Readers not convinced of my explanation are probably not convinced that there is no simple yes/no answer to the question "Does *A* believe that *p*?". Once one is convinced of it, and that the truth-value of belief sentences is relative to points of evaluation, it naturally follows that relations that depend on them will be relative to points of evaluation as well.

Concern 2: One might argue that my solution to the problem of the truthvalue of belief ascriptions is ad hoc because for each case I offer an explanation of its truth-value carefully crafted in a way to avoid problems in that case.

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. Conversational contexts are different from each other. If a specific 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.

Concern 3: My proposed account of the difference between the truth-value of (2) and (3) 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 (1) "Eric Blair was born in Motihari" modes of presentations are not relevant to determine its truth-value. But they are relevant in belief sentences like (2) "Lois believes Eric Blair was born in Motihari". So, would not my view have the problems similar to the problems Fregean Theories have in virtue of appealing to context shifting?

Reply 3: It is impractical to survey all objections to Fregean accounts regarding context shifting. I will address what I take to be the most pressing objection: the unlearnability of language as raised by Davidson (1991).[12]

Roughly, Davidson argues that it is an important feature of language that, if someone knows the semantic content of (1) "Eric Blair was born in Motihari", she also knows the semantic contribution of "Eric Blair" and "to be born in Motihari" in (2), and (15) "Marie believes that Lois believes that Eric Blair was born in Motihari". However, Davidson's objection goes, this is incompatible with Fregean Theories. According to them, whenever an attitude verb, like "to believe", is introduced in a sentence, it forces a shift in the semantic content of the expressions in the that-clause. Thus, "Eric Blair" and "to be born in Motihari" have different semantic contents in (1), (2) and (15). Consequently, in Fregean Theories, someone could know the semantic content of (1) without knowing the semantic content of "Eric Blair" and "to be born in Motihari" in (2) and (15). Thus, Fregean Theories cannot be correct.

The problem raised by Davidson, however, does not arise in my view. The meaning of "Eric Blair" in (1), (2) and (15) is the same, namely, its referent. The content that may change is the cognitive content one associates with a sentence. But they are 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 that semantic content is cognitive content in the context of explaining linguistic communication.[13] Often times they do not describe a clear relation between se-

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[12] Kripke (2008) has also offered a related argument. He argues that even a Fregean theory that suggests that "Eric Blair" has different meanings in (1) and (2) has problems. Very briefly, according to Kripke, 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.

[13] 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, express (assert) the *same* assertoric content. Cappelen and Lepore (2005) and Soames (2009, Chapter 10) argue that there is a plurality of contents that (an utterance of) a sentence may assert. He even argues that sometimes an utter-

mantic 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 challenges.

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 determines a suitable cognitive content, semantic content plays a fundamental role without being the cognitive content. Thus, giving up the identification of semantic content with cognitive content does not mean that semantic content is irrelevant for communication (Soames, 2009, p. 260).

As for whether accounts that deny the identity of semantic and cognitive content have additional challenges to overcome, it will depend on how particular accounts of the relation between semantic and cognitive content compare to accounts that endorse it. There is not much 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 is false has been raised by philosophers precisely because theories that endorse it cannot explain some common linguistic interactions (see Footnote 13 of the current paper). So it is far from clear that the fact that accounts that deny the identity of semantic and cognitive content have problems means that we should, instead, embrace the claim that semantic and cognitive content are identical contents.

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