

A Pragmatic Defense of Millianism

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ABSTRACT: A new kind of defense of the Millian theory of names is given, which explains intuitive counter-examples as depending on pragmatic effects of the relevant sentences, by direct application of Grice's and Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory and uncontroversial assumptions. I begin by arguing that synonyms are always intersubstitutable, despite Mates' considerations, and then apply the method to names. Then, a fairly large sample of cases concerning names are dealt with in related ways. It is argued that the method, as applied to the various cases, satisfies the criterion of success: that for every sentence in context, it is a counter-example to Millianism to the extent that it has pragmatic effects (matching speakers' intuitions).

Among the first things students of the philosophy of language learn is that co-referring names cannot always be substituted *salva veritate*, in particular, not inside the scope of propositional attitude verbs like "believes", "knows", etc. For instance, it seems that one may believe that Hesperus is a star without believing that Phosphorus is, although Hesperus is Phosphorus. Adherents of Millianism, according to which substitutions of co-referring names are admissible in such contexts, take these intuitions to be the result of conflating certain pragmatic effects of the relevant sentences with their semantic content.

Although Millianism stands or falls with the pragmatic defense, there is at present remarkably little by way of explanation of how the alleged pragmatic effects arise. Here, I

will try to show that the relevant sentences have certain special features in virtue of which what is saliently communicated is not their semantic contents, but pragmatically imparted propositions. Crucially, I will argue that these pragmatic effects can be shown to arise on existing pragmatic theories without any additional controversial assumptions (that may be suspected of only serving the purpose of defending Millianism). In particular, I argue, both Grice's theory and the Relevance Theory of Sperber and Wilson can be taken as they stand to entail the pragmatic effects needed. Further, many intuitions that have bothered theories of names in general, but not Millianism in particular, are also neatly explained on this pragmatic account.

I first present Millianism and the conditions for a successful pragmatic defense. A pragmatic explanation is then given to the apparent failure of substitution of synonyms, which is subsequently transferred to analogous cases with names. Then, a number of other problematic cases are treated on similar lines. I end by comparing the resulting combined theory with other semantic accounts of names.

I

For reasons that will emerge as we proceed, the Millian theory is best formulated with explicit mention of the notion of semantic (as opposed to pragmatic):

- (M) Any instance of the following schema semantically expresses a true proposition: "*a* is such that S(he/she/it) if and only if S(*a*)".¹

An instance of this schema is obtained by uniformly replacing occurrences of "*a*" with occurrences of a single proper name, uniformly replacing occurrences of "S" with a sentence-

context leaving a place for a singular term, and replacing “he/she/it” with “he” “she” or “it” as is appropriate. Thus, one instance is “Superman is such that Lois Lane believes that he can fly iff Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly”. By assuming “ $a=b$ ” and any sentence “ $S(a)$ ”, one can derive “ $S(b)$ ” by applying (M), substituting “ a ” for “ b ” in an extensional context (the left hand side of the schema) and again apply (M).² (M) is thus stronger than some Millian theories, yet has the same spirit. More to the point, the same intuitions seem to tell against it, and it can be pragmatically defended in the same way. (M) has the consequence that sentences differing only in containing distinct, co-referring names express the same proposition. This can be seen simply by making a substitution in the sentence

“Cicero is a Roman” expresses the proposition that Cicero is a Roman

and conclude that “Cicero is a Roman” expresses the proposition that Tully is a Roman. Thus, it expresses the same proposition as “Tully is a Roman”. Since this did not depend on “Cicero” and “Tully”, we can infer the general claim that the referent of a name determines which proposition is expressed by sentences containing it. A further consequence of (M) is that always when a name occurs in the scope of a propositional attitude verb, the sentence ascribes a *de re* attitude. It describes the subject as standing in a relation to the object referred to by the name. Thus, just as “Cicero is a Roman” ascribes a property to Cicero, “Tom believes that Cicero is a Roman” ascribes a (more complex) property to Cicero.

The pragmatic defense of Millianism³ takes as its central claim that when two sentences are deemed by Millianism to be semantically equivalent, although they seem clearly to say different things, this is because the propositions saliently expressed by utterances thereof may not be the same. It is a widely documented fact that there are contexts in which what is saliently expressed by an utterance is distinct from what the sentence semantically

expresses. There are some common misunderstandings of the Millian's commitments here which should be cleared before we can continue.

First, the alleged pragmatic effects need not be similar to *paradigmatic* examples of pragmatic effects, as when one implies that *x* is an uninteresting philosopher by uttering “*x* is an effective administrator” (cf. Saul (1998: 364)). Second, and relatedly, one need and should not say that the intuitively non-equivalent sentences *literally* say the same, for on many pragmatic theories, sentences may be semantically equivalent but, intuitively, have different literal meanings. This is unproblematic, since “literal” is a non-technical term that need not, in its normal use, be entirely co-extensive with “semantic”, as defined by a linguistic theory. Examples of proposed non-semantic ingredients of meaning that may nevertheless appear literal are conventional and generalized implicatures (Grice (1989: 17)) and standardized implicatures (Bach and Harnish (1979: 224-32)).

Third, that speakers' judgements about the *truth*-values of the relevant sentences contradict the Millian view of their semantic truth-values is not in itself a problem. There is an almost ubiquitous tendency to conflate “truth-value” with *semantic* truth-value, and “truth-conditions” with semantic truth-conditions. But of course, propositions non-semantically expressed have truth-conditions too, and when such a proposition is saliently expressed, speakers' judgements of truth-value relate to them.⁴ Often, “appropriate” is used when speaking of pragmatics. But an utterance is (in)appropriate, on this usage, iff it pragmatically communicates something (un)true, and the latter is less misleading, since the former implies that there is some norm other than truth in play. Further, Spencer (2006: n. 7)) objects that we judge a sentence as true when it semantically expresses something true but *clearly* implicates something false. But this is of course not a problem for the pragmatic defense. On the contrary, the pragmatic defense is in trouble only if it could somehow be argued that truth-judgments always mirror the (believed) truth-values of semantically expressed propositions

also when we tend to mistake the non-semantic content for the semantic. For, since, on the pragmatic defense, we make this mistake concerning names in belief-contexts, it would follow that speakers' intuitions reflect semantic content, contrary to Millianism.

Fourth, if we cannot explain exactly which propositions are pragmatically communicated and which are not, that is as it should be, since, as agreed by virtually everyone in pragmatics, this is always the case with pragmatic effects. However, it will be an advantage of my account that we at least understand the type of propositions that are said to be pragmatically communicated. To wit, they are not propositions about "guises of beliefs", "propositional guises", "modes of presentation" or any other unexplained entity. What they are about, however, linguistic items and sometimes general beliefs, may plausibly replace these notions in accounting for the linguistic data. I am also not committed to the possibility of explaining propositions as complexes of various entities, nor of Salmon's analysis of "believes" as a three-place predicate (1986: 8.3) with a place for terms picking out modes of presentation.

Fifth, an explanation in terms of assumptions that conversational maxims, or the principle of relevance, is respected, and the forming of hypotheses about which interpretation will satisfy this constraint are not to be taken literally, any more than speaker's making use of their semantic or syntactic knowledge is to be thought of a conscious form of reasoning. Admittedly, François Recanati requires that every step of an interpretation be fully conscious (2004). On the other hand, because of this requirement, his programme for pragmatics is no less than a reconceptualization of pragmatics and the denial of a central tenet of the field. It is also doubtful whether Grice's and others' explanation of various pragmatic effects would work if speakers are required to consciously infer the interpretations. In any case, much, if not all, of the explanations can be reformulated so that no reasoning or beliefs are even superficially ascribed up to the interpretation of the utterance itself. One can simply say that

speakers take a proposition to be asserted or implied iff this interpretation satisfies the principle of co-operation (which is a matter of logical consequence, not actual reasoning). Here, a condition is stated, specifying what interpretations speakers are actually disposed to make, not how they do it. As we will see, Sperber and Wilson have an ingenious answer to the latter question.

Sixth, nearly everyone in the debate say that Millianism is counter-intuitive, and, of course, many reject it on this basis. I agree that counter-intuitive theories should simply be rejected, but it is confused to call Millianism counter-intuitive. If one says, e.g., “Necessarily, if you believe that Hesperus is hot, then you believe that Phosphorus is hot”, then you have of course said something quite counter-intuitive – indeed, something false. That is precisely the point of the pragmatic defense. This is why (M) is formulated with explicit mention of semantics. Thereby, nothing counter-intuitive (or intuitive) has been said, since speakers (including philosophers) have no intuitions about such technical matters. This is also why the Millian should not say that they “literally” mean the same, for this is again counter-intuitive given how this word ordinarily is used. Millianism is one way of explaining the linguistic data, i.e., the intuitions, and to say that it is counter-intuitive is to overlook what Millians say, and results in prejudging the question whether it, together with, e.g., a pragmatic explanation, can account for the data.

II

The present variant of the pragmatic defense does not generalize so that for any conversational context, an utterance with a name comes with pragmatically imparted propositions. Rather, it will be seen that the sentences that seem to provide counter-examples to Millianism have special features in virtue of which the pragmatic effects arise. It will also

emerge that for the cases which do not seem to yield counter-examples, the pragmatic effects cannot be inferred by the model, contrary to most other accounts. Further, we will see that the determination of the pragmatically imparted propositions goes by way of taking speakers to act in accordance with pragmatic principles as they have been formulated by theorists not concerned with names.

We will first focus on sentence-pairs where two synonyms occur within the scope of a propositional attitude verb, and then apply the same reasoning to sentences with co-referring names. We will see that these are special in that no particular feature of a context of utterance needs to be assumed in order for the desired pragmatic effects to be entailed. I follow Salmon (1989) in taking what is pragmatically communicated here to be about linguistic expressions, but avoid the notion of guise of belief in favour of unproblematic general beliefs of the attributee. Propositions thus non-semantically expressed, I will argue, are precisely the ones non-Millians mistake for the semantic contents of the sentences. They make this mistake because they, as every other normal speaker, are constructed so as to unconsciously interpret utterances in accordance with pragmatic principles in a very natural and direct way. The mistake is even more understandable in that the interpretation of the problematic kind of sentence yields, as the proposition intended to be communicated, the same proposition quite regardless of what the context of utterance is like.

Benson Mates (1952: 215) has argued against Rudolf Carnap (1947) that synonymous expressions cannot be mutually substitutable since the substitution within the context of a propositional attitude verb seems not to preserve truth.⁵ For instance, it may be argued, one can believe that foot-doctors are foot-doctors without believing that foot-doctors are chiropodists. Success in showing such intuitions to be pragmatically explained should not be underestimated. For if Mates is right, we either have to deny a plausible principle of compositionality (cf. Pelletier (1994)), or take intuitively synonymous words not to be

synonymous after all. But in simple, extensional occurrences, “foot-doctor” and “chiropracist” just seem to mean the same. One can try to have it both ways by taking, “believes” and other troubling expressions to operate on the expressions following it. But this usually gives the wrong results in other cases, e.g., where the attributee is known not to speak English (or any language at all). Further amendments of course *ipso facto* make the accounts increasingly implausible.

I will now explain how the pragmatic effects arise, first on the refined Relevance Theory of Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson (RT), and then on Grice’s original, somewhat sketchier theory. In rough terms, (RT) says that nearly all communication⁶ tends to conform to the Principle of Relevance, according to which speakers are to convey optimally relevant information. A piece of information is defined as relevant in a context to the extent that it has contextual effects and to the extent that these effects take little effort to process (1986:125). Contextual effects are simply changes of belief, so the greater the effects, the more new information is gained, or old is rejected (regardless of the truth of the beliefs). A piece of information which is trivial or absurd has minimal contextual effects, since the trivial is always already known and the absurd is in too stark contradiction to stored information to change it (1986: 109, 120).

A stimulus takes effort to process to the extent that already stored information must be accessed in order to interpret the information. Stored information that is already accessed in a context takes less effort to access (1986: 127). The relevance of a stimulus, such as an uttered sentence-token, is derivatively defined as co-varying with the relevance of the information it makes manifest (1986: 152f.). A stimulus makes a piece of information manifest iff the production thereof results in conveying the information. An obvious consequence of this is that when a sentence is uttered, which has an irrelevant semantic content p , but where a relevant assumption q follows from p together with mutually shared assumptions, then the

hypothesis that q is intended to be communicated is confirmed. If also q is the only relevant assumption that follows from p and the mutually shared information, then, indeed, q has been communicated (1986: 194).

This last kind of identification of what is communicated is of course often used by Grice. In general, the principle of relevance is an attempt to generalize Grice's maxims, to cover cases they fail to cover, and avoid some of his exaggerations (1986: 161ff.). To convince the reader that they succeed in this to a great extent, I can only recommend the book. One attractive feature of (RT) which is relevant for what was said about the cognitive processing of pragmatic effects, however, is its ability to explain how it is that we can "get the message" in such a quick, unconscious and effortless way, despite the apparent complexity of the mechanisms involved. It may seem as if interpretation must involve the comparison of infinitely many hypotheses about what is meant, and picking out that which makes the stimulus most relevant. But then, all cases of interpretation would cost the same amount of effort, an absurdly large one (1986: 166). But, as is made clear by examples, since relevance co-varies with effort of accessing, the *first* hypothesis accessed which is consistent with the principle of relevance will, by definition, be the most relevant (1986: 166ff.).

Let us now see how (RT) can help defend the view that synonyms are universally intersubstitutable. We may take as our first target for pragmatic treatment the sentence

(B) x believes that foot-doctors are foot-doctors but x does not believe that foot-doctors are chiropractors

If synonyms are substitutable, then (B) semantically expresses a contradiction. Since contradictions lack contextual effects, this interpretation of (B) will automatically be avoided. (Objection: speakers take (B) to be true, not false (cf. Schiffer (1987: 468)). Reply: the claim

that is relevant for the interpretation is that (B) is *semantically* false, but speakers have no conscious idea of what this is. They do consciously take (B) to be true, of course, but this means taking what is saliently expressed to be true (what else?), and this is precisely what we are about to explain.) The second step determines more positively what kind of proposition, should be taken as the one meant. Intuitively, (B) “says” that *x* does not know that “foot-doctor” and “chiropracist” mean the same, or some such. Consider now the following story:

Foot-doctors tend, as many other specialists, to exaggerate the importance of their field and they do so at the expense of patients, which are now beginning to treat chiropracists with increasing suspicion.

There is intuitively something slightly inappropriate about introducing “chiropracist” in the final clause of this sentence instead of sticking to “foot-doctor”. Though we know that they are synonyms, the switch is a little irritating, and one might think, half-consciously, “Why ‘chiropracist?’”. Note that substituting “chiropracists” for “foot-doctors”, we get a wholly appropriate phrase. Since that phrase is semantically equivalent, there must be something pragmatically wrong with the above phrasing. Indeed, on (RT), the switch lowers relevance by requiring additional effort. Clearly, a new lexeme must be accessed, which would not be required if “foot-doctor” was used twice. Recall that the semantic content of (B) is absurd, so that some other interpretation is required. If there is a feature of an utterance which lowers relevance, then the interpretation will tend to satisfy the assumption that this feature has a communicative point. Thus, the correct interpretation of (B) must take into account the occurrence of two distinct, synonymous expressions. One can also see that the pragmatic effect is created by the switch to “chiropracist” by considering the sentence got by substituting

in (B) the word “chiroprapist” for “foot-doctor”. Here, we get a clear contradiction with no pragmatic effects.

Since “foot-doctor” and “chiroprapist” are synonyms, one cannot explain how the correct interpretation is to be made by reference to the *meaning* of the relevance-lowering feature (the occurrence of “chiroprapist”). Therefore, it seems the only feature of it must be its very identity, that is, its orthographic form. The interpretation must further exploit this feature in a way that stays as close as possible to the semantic meaning of (B). This because of the requirement that the interpretation be as effortless as possible. A plausible candidate is to take the utterance to mean, e.g.,

that *x* believes that foot-doctors are called “foot-doctors” but *x* does not believe that foot-doctors are called “chiroprapists”.⁷

This simply seems like a proposition that satisfies the constraints the principle of relevance dictates in this case: (a) avoid the semantic interpretation, (b) exploit the use of synonyms, and (c) do this with as little effort as possible, by staying as close as possible to the semantic interpretation as possible. Here, the expression “are *Fs*” is, as it were, substituted for “are called ‘*Fs*’”. Though these express quite different properties, they are linguistically similar, and this might in itself result in making the interpretation require less processing effort. There are of course other, similar beliefs about the expressions that could work as well. But as noted above, it is often indeterminate exactly which propositions have and have not been communicated, so we should not say more than required, which is that in uttering (B), a speaker would communicate propositions which approximate the one above.

On Grice’s theory, the implicature first depends on the fact that the semantic content of (B) is a contradiction, and so blatantly violates a maxim under the category of *Quality* –

“Try to make your contribution one that is true”. Next, Grice has a maxim whose motivation seems to fit the present case fairly well. It is the maxim under the category of *Quantity*, and reads, “Do not make your contribution more informative than is required”, which Grice thinks is operative because “such overinformativeness may be confusing in that it is liable to raise side issues; and there may also be an indirect effect, in that the hearers may be misled as a result of thinking that there is some particular *point* in the provision of the excess of information” (1989: 46, original emphasis). Of course, in the story about foot-doctors, there seemed precisely not to be any point in using a new word. It is not happily called “overinformativeness”, however. Under the category of *Manner*, there are the maxims “Avoid obscurity of expression” and “Avoid ambiguity”. The inappropriateness of the little story could intuitively be taken to violate both of these in that one in the final clause creates the impression that one is talking about a different class of people than in the first. All in all, though there is no maxim which perfectly covers our case, Grice’s comments taken together do seem to be of such a spirit that he would agree that the use of synonyms is somewhat inappropriate. Note especially how important it is for Grice not only what the content of the utterance is, but its purely orthographic features, the number of words, etc. The little story does not contain unnecessarily many word-tokens of course, but it does contain too many word-types. If no maxim perfectly covers (B), that is a problem for his set of maxims, for we have already seen considering the little story above that unwarranted use of synonyms is pragmatically inappropriate. Perhaps Grice was too specific. When describing very briefly Grice’s accomplishment in a different context, Soames gives the following, allegedly all-encompassing principle: “*Don’t choose a more complicated way of saying something without reason when a simpler way is available*” (2003: 133). That seems to cover our cases well.

A crucial final step is to note that in reaching the pragmatic interpretation, no specific contextual features were considered. This means that no matter what the context is like, an

utterance of the sentence will always result in communicating the metalinguistic proposition.⁸ Because of this context-independence, it is natural to take what is pragmatically imparted by (B) to be its semantic content, since what a sentence semantically says is normally what speakers *invariably* intend to communicate by uttering it. Since speakers rather blindly follow pragmatic principles of interpretation, and since objectors to substituting synonyms are ordinary speakers, it should not seem unreasonable to think that they make this mistake. They are not confused about what the sentence “says”, of course, but simply fail to make a certain technical distinction between ways of “saying”. Nor is it wrong to say that what (B) “means” is true. We often take a sentence to “mean” something which it very clearly expresses only non-literally. For instance, if asked what “I live, and yet I do not” means, we might well say that it means that the speaker is biologically alive, but has no lust for life, or some such thing.

To summarize, the reasons (B) non-semantically communicates these propositions in such a strong and clear way that they are mistaken for its semantic content, is that:

- (i) it is semantically contradictory (thus blatantly violates pragmatic principles),
- (ii) no other feature than the synonyms themselves can show which interpretation is correct,
- (iii) the synonyms rather clearly shows the way to the correct interpretation,
- (iv) the effect is calculated independently of any context of utterance,
- (v) all speakers follow the pragmatic principles more or less unconsciously.

A further argument for this pragmatic explanation of the apparent truth of (B) can be given by considering “John is not a foot-doctor, he is a chiropodist”. This cannot be semantically true, of course. But it still seems that one can make sense of this sentence pragmatically. It does help to imagine the sentence being uttered so that “chiropodist” is stressed and pronounced as

it would in a snob skit. Then, it is reasonable to take the utterance as intended to communicate that John (being a snob) prefers to be called “chiroprapist” rather than “foot-doctor” (or some such). This goes further to show that if Grice’s maxims did not seem to perfectly yield the desired explanation above, his theory is incomplete. Thus, the needed extension of his maxims would not be *ad hoc*.

III

Much of the above reasoning can be rather directly applied to corresponding sentences with names. Consider

- (1) Cicero and Tully’s father were Romans.

This seems inappropriate in the same way as the story about foot-doctors. For a sentence like

- (2) Tom believes that Cicero is Cicero but not that Cicero is Tully

the rest can be assumed to work, too. However, pragmatic effects relevant to Millianism can arise in other ways than as detailed above. For instance, there are sentences where names stand in extensional contexts, but nevertheless cannot intuitively be substituted for co-referring names. For some contexts and sentences, further, intuition is in line with the Millian semantic account, so here, we had better ensure that *no* pragmatic effects arise. We can now formulate a general criterion of success for the pragmatic defense of Millianism. It should yield evidence for the general claim,

- (C) A sentence in context is an intuitive counter-example to Millianism to the extent it has clear pragmatic effects (matching the intuition).

Since pragmatic effects are more or less strong, I use “to the extent”, rather than “if and only if”. In what follows, I will go through a number of test cases, some made up and some figuring in the debate, which can all be explained so as to satisfy this criterion of success. When necessary, there will be a discussion of exactly what ordinary speakers intuit, and how strongly. I will begin considering the names “Cicero” and “Tully” and then go on with “Superman” and “Clark Kent”, since the latter pair has features that needs special treatment.

We will begin by looking at cases that are similar in various ways to (B). (B) has a clear pragmatic effect because the semantically expressed proposition was a contradiction. It is easy to test whether the semantic content is pragmatically inappropriate on (M), simply by substituting so that the same name occurs everywhere in the sample, and see whether it makes pragmatic sense to utter it. Applying this test to phrases like

- (3) Tom knows that Cicero was great, but does he know that Tully was?
- (4) If Tom believes Cicero was great, then he believes that Tully was,
- (5) Tom believes that Cicero is Tully,

we clearly see that, on the semantic interpretation given by (M), they have low relevance (and flout Grice’s maxims). Now, precisely in these cases, it is intuitive that something about names has been said, and something which can be conversationally appropriate in a context.

(C) therefore requires such pragmatic effects to be derived, and this is of course to be done as above. Let us now look at cases where the semantic content is not pragmatically inadequate in this way, e.g.,

- (6) Tom thinks that Cicero was a great poet, as most critics do. He considered Tully to be greater than most.

By substituting to get the same name in both places, one gets a clearly appropriate phrase, especially so since the second sentence is a conversationally natural continuation of the first. Here, it seems to me, it is not intuitive that something about names has been said. Rather, the name-switch simply causes a (slight) confusion. This is plausibly explained by the fact that we note a relevance-lowering (maxim-flouting) feature, but also, there is no need to avoid the semantic interpretation. The name-switch, further, cannot be interpreted so as to yield an interpretation somewhat deviating from, or additional to, the semantic content. This is so because the names co-refer and are not associated with different properties, contrary to “Superman” and “Clark Kent”. When there is a relevance-lowering (maxim-flouting) feature of an utterance that does not yield a pragmatic effect, interpreters (we) tend to get confused. When this is not so, there are often psychological explanations. One might think the speaker is not so quick-witted, and therefore does not see that there is a much more succinct way of expressing a certain thought. But for (6), it seems that no such explanation can be given, hence the confusion. I predict that for all cases of these two kinds, the same results can be inferred on a pragmatic account. Further, if the semantic content of a sentence is pragmatically inadequate to a certain *extent*, then, *ceteris paribus*, something about names will have been pragmatically communicated to that extent.

There is a case which also intuitively causes some confusion due to factors pulling in opposite directions, but in a somewhat reversed manner. To get the effect, assume that Pullo was a simple Roman who had never heard the names “Cicero” and “Tully”, but had seen the man and was wondering whether he was a senator. Now, take the sentence

- (7) If Pullo believed that Cicero was a senator, then he believed that Tully was a senator.

The default intuition concerning this sentence should be the same as of (2). But when reminded that Pullo did not know the names, this interpretation meets some resistance. We have no problem seeing that the antecedent of (7) could be true. Considering that he does not have the name, we realize that if so, then the consequent must be true too. But when looking back at the sentence, one senses again that there is something more said here than a triviality. In any case, there is some irritation, and the explanation on this pragmatic account is clear: certain now familiar features of (7) produce a clear pragmatic effect, but a certain piece of knowledge (that he did not know the names) makes us return to the semantic interpretation, and see that, on this interpretation, (7) must be true. But the pragmatic effect lingers and we end up being ambivalent.

What about sentences where propositional attitude verbs are iterated? For instance, it seems that

- (8) Mary believes that Tom believes that Cicero is Tully

says something other than that Mary believes that Tom believes that Cicero is Cicero. I believe this case is much like (5). If a proposition is trivial (i.e., that someone believes that

Cicero is Cicero), then the proposition that this proposition is believed is also rather trivial, and not one we expect someone to assert. (8) may be a little hard to grasp in its complexity, and our intuitions may not be entirely clear. If we think we have a clear opinion of what it says, it is probably because we first identify what is said by the complement clause, and then take the sentence to say that Mary believes *that* proposition. That proposition, of course, is that Tom believes that “Cicero” and “Tully” name the same person. It seems that our intuitions are weaker here than for (5), however, and this can most plausibly be explained by either or both of these facts: (a) the proposition semantically expressed is not as trivial as in (5), and (b) it is complex and parsed only with some difficulty. In any case, the pragmatic effect seems to be about as clear as it is clear that (8) is an apparent counter-example. Thus, (C) is corroborated. We should add that, switching from the trivial belief ascribed by (5) to a logically false one, as in

(9) Tom believes that Cicero is not Tully,

the effect, which seems to be the implication that Tom believes that “Cicero” and “Tully” do not name the same person, cannot be said to come from the absurd semantic content of (9), since Millians take such sentences to be sometimes semantically true. It must, rather, be the pragmatically inappropriate use of two names that produces it. This feature enriches the rather unspecific semantic content, which is that Tom has a false *de re* belief. This belief is best expressed using quantifiers: $\exists x \exists y (x=y=Cicero/Tully \ \& \ \text{Tom believes that } x \neq y)$. As will be clear from the discussion of examples (21)-(24) below, it is obvious that one can rationally have such beliefs. There, it will also be explained why we tend (at first) to deny that “Tom rationally believes that Cicero is not Cicero” can be true although it might be, given (M).

One might think that it is embarrassing for the general strategy pursued here that when considering the argument from (10) to (11),

(10) Tom believes that Cicero is Roman

(11) Tom believes that Tully is Roman,

we sense that it is invalid although we do not here have two distinct names in the same sentence. But the very proximity of the names simply means that they are in the same context, and therefore triggers an interpretation taking this into account. If, in a philosophical seminar, someone claims to intuit that (10) or (11), taken separately, seem to say something about names, this is because philosophers of language are unreliable subjects as far as intuitions about (10) and (11) is concerned, since the mere mentioning of “Cicero” will make many of them think of “Tully” and the discussion about names. If a normal speaker would consider (10) on its own, she would most certainly not take it to say anything about the name “Cicero”. The sentence

(12) Columbus believed that Cuba was in Asia

does not typically strike speakers as false, no matter how pedantic, even if they know that the name “Cuba” was not in use in Columbus’s days. Here, speakers’ judgments coincide with (M), so the criterion of success requires that the pragmatic effect does *not* arise. Since for the other cases, this effect is produced by the occurrence of two, co-referring names in the context, the fact that (12) has only one shows that the account predicts a lack of pragmatic

effect (this is the most important kind of case that the other pragmatic accounts fails to account for properly).

It is clear that the pragmatic defense must not take all single occurrences of names in propositional attitude contexts to lack pragmatic effects, for the following is clearly an intuitive counter-example to (M):

(13) Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly

This brings us to the problem of names which are intersubjectively associated with certain characteristics (non-semantically so, of course). In a normal conversation about this fiction, it is crucial which name is used. Further, as will be seen from an example of Berg's below, there is also a difference between the two names. Using "Clark Kent" will bring us further from the semantic content than "Superman". This is plausibly because the latter is his *real* name; the guise associated with it is not a *disguise*. If "Clark Kent" is used, then, there must be a point in using this name: it would be very misleading, for instance, to say "Clark Kent was born on Krypton". So strong is this pull that it outweighs the semantic truth of (13) so as to make us dissent from it. This may seem as an embarrassment, but the analysis is greatly confirmed by the fact, to be witnessed in example (17), that we even intuit that these names cannot be intersubstituted in *extensional* contexts. Consider also the sentence "Clark Kent is such that Lois Lane believes that he can fly". Ordinary speakers dissent from this sentence. Thus, because of the special role of "Clark Kent", the name itself strongly attracts focus in interpretation. Of course, not only the name, but also the characteristics it is associated with. We will now see how it is that these become part of what is communicated when these names are used.

Given what we know about the fiction, a speaker who utters

(14) Lois Lane does not know that Superman is Clark Kent

has intuitively said more than that she does not know that “Superman” and “Clark Kent” refer to a single person. This intuitively also ascribes to Lois factual, extralinguistic ignorance. In the same vein, (13) seems more different from

(15) Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly

than (10) is different from (11). We saw that in interpreting (B), there seemed to be nothing except the very identity of the synonyms that could be informing our interpretation of the sentence. Not so for “Superman” and “Clark Kent”. These crucially have properties that are well fit to make the pragmatic effects of (13)-(15) greater than our previous examples. I have in mind the fact, known to everyone familiar with the fiction, that

(L) Lois believes that there is someone by the name “Superman” who is superhuman, can fly, is brave, and so on, and there is someone by the name “Clark Kent” who is mild-mannered, has bad eye-sight, is a reporter, etc.⁹

Recall that, on (RT), if a speaker and audience share information i , and an utterance expresses the irrelevant proposition p , then, if q is most relevant and follows from i and p , then the utterance is taken to communicate q . (And that this identification of implicatures is common in Grice.) As has been argued, a clear implicature of (14) is that Lois does not know that “Superman” and “Clark Kent” name a single person. But this proposition is not relevant enough to be taken as the only thing communicated in a normal conversation about the fiction,

since it only concerns Lois's ignorance concerning the strings "Superman" and "Clark Kent", which might, as far as this proposition is concerned, refer to anything. But from this (in itself uninteresting) metalinguistic proposition and the shared information (L), it follows (with the assumption that Lois is minimally rational), that

(L') Lois believes that there is someone by the name "Superman" who is superhuman, can fly, is brave, and so on, and there is someone, *distinct from the first*, by the name "Clark Kent" who is mild-mannered, has bad eye-sight, is a reporter, and so on.

Although this is already known to *connoisseurs* of the fiction, it is clearly more relevant and therefore communicated by (14). A mutually known proposition may of course be relevant to *highlight*, i.e., make accessible in the context. A truly novel claim, however, would be made by "Lois came to realize that Clark Kent can fly at a dinner party". By considering (L) and the metalinguistic proposition which, at the first stage, is communicated by this sentence, we can see which proposition follows, and that this is a good approximation of the intuitive content thereof. The same goes for (13).

It is clear that (13) and (15) are more different from one another than (10) and (11), and that (14) seems to "say more" than "Tom does not know that Cicero is Tully". By (C), the pragmatic effects of the former should therefore be stronger. This is accounted for by the fact that the information they communicate not only concerns attitudes to linguistic expressions, but also extralinguistic attitudes. That this is so has been derived on standard pragmatic theories given the fact that the speakers (we) are aware of such extralinguistic attitudes of the attributee.

The strongest counter-example to Millianism is probably the step from (14) above to

(16) Lois Lane does not know that Superman is Superman.

As we have seen, (14) pragmatically expresses true, important propositions, while (16) can only be interpreted as denying that Lois has knowledge which, in fact, she obviously has. But then, it is only natural that the inference appears especially absurd. Therefore, this account satisfies (C) in yielding the right predictions for “descriptive names”, and explaining the intuitive differences between sentences containing them and those containing other names like “Cicero”.

We will now mention two peculiar cases which seem in a way to support (M). Firstly, there are counter-examples which in fact suggest that co-referring names cannot be intersubstituted even in extensional contexts. For instance,

(17) Clark Kent was in despair because Lois had fallen for Superman

(for more examples, see Saul (1997: 102f.)). It should be rather uncontroversial that substitution in these contexts is valid (though Forbes (1997), (1999) and Moore (1999), (2000) actually deny this). If one agrees, then the explanation of the apparent failure of substitutivity must be accounted for pragmatically. Clearly, examples like (17) could not be given for “Cicero” and “Tully”. With our shared knowledge that the man presents himself using “Superman” when in his superhero-guise, and with “Clark Kent” in his reporter-guise, and since the semantic content of (17) makes no pragmatic sense, the most nearby interpretation (the one which takes least effort) is one to the effect that the man in question was in despair because Lois had fallen for him when in his superhero-guise. Perhaps one also

wants to take this to communicate that he does so when in his reporter-guise. To repeat, these examples are important for evaluating “Superman”-examples as objections to Millianism.

Secondly, there is an ingenious example by Jonathan Berg:

A viewer marvelling at Superman’s ability to conceal his identity might remark to another viewer, “Look, there’s Superman in his Clark Kent outfit; he’s incredibly convincing! *Everyone* thinks he’s a reporter – Jimmy Olson, Mr. White – why even that clever *Lois Lane* believes that *Superman is a reporter.*” (1988: 355, original emphasis)

If (C) is true, the features producing the pragmatic effects in the other cases must fail to do so here. The most obvious reason our truth-judgment of the last sentence here matches the semantic truth-value is that the features motivating the non-semantic interpretation in the other cases are much too weak to motivate the absurd interpretation that the viewer is saying that Lois believes that “Superman is a reporter” is true, rather than the semantically expressed proposition, that Lois believes of Superman that he is a reporter. I believe the case is also strengthened by the fact that the “viewer” here is described as looking at Superman, i.e., being able to ostensibly refer to him. The use of “Superman” will therefore, in this context, be taken somewhat deictically, i.e., as directly referential. In most other examples, we are not considering a real person actually uttering the sentences, but consider them in isolation, thus, with weaker bias toward interpreting them as true. What is imagined here is a rational speaker, speaking naturally, who is aware of Superman’s both guises, and thus not someone we expect to say what is mutually known to be false. Again, I also believe it is important that “Superman” is his real name. It makes more sense to say that he is still Superman when in his reporter guise than to say that he is still Clark Kent when in his superhero guise.

Empty names have often been regarded as especially troublesome for Millians. Such sloppy formulations as “the meaning of a name is its referent” have been seen as implying

that empty names are “meaningless”, contrary to intuition. There is some controversy about how to characterize sentences with empty names, but I will here suppose that they do not semantically express any proposition. If so, then, of course, an utterance of a sentence like

(18) Tom believes that Pegasus is a winged horse,

which seems possibly true, must be taken to pragmatically communicate something close to the general semantic interpretation of sentences of this form. What exactly this is, is rather context-dependent. For (18), it depends on whether we believe the attributee takes the myth to be true, or simply has a true belief about it. In the first case, we might take the utterance to mean that Tom believes there is something named “Pegasus” which is a winged horse, and, in the second case, that Tom believes that “Pegasus is a winged horse” is true according to the myth. Here, it is important to take what is communicated to be metalinguistic, rather than, e.g., that Tom believes that the myth says that Pegasus is a winged horse. For, by (M), it follows from this that

(19) Something is such that Tom believes that it is a winged horse,

which, I believe, is false. In general, no plausible theory should be forced to *use* an empty name, even if the apparent truth of (18) suggests otherwise. By taking all these cases to pragmatically ascribe metalinguistic attitudes, we can avoid the consequence of having to say that (19) is true since (18) is. The effect arises because of the mutual assumption that the names are empty, so that the ordinary use cannot be the intended one.

Something similar must be said for freestanding occurrences of empty names, as in

(20) Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

This does not semantically say anything either, but communicates that someone by the name “Sherlock Holmes” is a detective. Of course, given how well-known this name is, most of us will realize that what has been said is that *according to the fiction*, someone by the name “Sherlock Holmes” is a detective, or that the sentence (20) is, in some sense to be explained, “in” the fiction. In any case, this account promises to hold on to (M) without being committed to the existence of fictional characters and still give the right truth-values to sentences with empty names.

Finally, we will consider Millianism’s notorious consequence of rational inconsistency. On (M), the argument from (21) to (22) is valid.

(21) Tom believes of Carl that he is paralyzed and that he is not paralyzed.

(22) Tom believes that Carl is paralyzed and that Carl is not paralyzed.

The belief semantically ascribed by (21) can uncontroversially be held without irrationality. Tom may have seen Carl first sitting in a wheelchair, and then walking, but not recognizing him as the man in the wheelchair. I doubt that ordinary speakers always intuit that (22) is false in such a case, however. It is clear that there are contexts in which

(23) Tom believes that Carl is paralyzed

(24) Tom believes that Carl is not paralyzed

taken separately would be assented to by a speaker who had been told this story. It might be thought that ordinary speakers' intuition that (22) ascribes an irrational belief contradicts (M) and so must be accounted for pragmatically. But a speaker who has been told the story about Tom and Carl (and has considered (23) and (24)) will not say so (I have tested non-philosophers on this). Only one who is presented with (22), but with no other information about Tom and Carl will. But such a speaker will also take (21) to ascribe an irrational belief. It is a philosophical convention to treat the name position in (21) as transparent, and thus, philosophers will be more disposed to take only (22), and not (21), to ascribe an irrational belief. Ordinary speakers make no such distinction. I believe ordinary speakers' (and philosophers') mistake of taking (21) and (22) to ascribe an irrational belief derives from their taking them to entail that Tom believes that someone is paralyzed and not paralyzed. But this does not follow from either. What follows, at most, is that Tom believes that someone is paralyzed and someone is not paralyzed. The explanation why we do not accept "Tom rationally believes that Carl is not Carl" (cf. the discussion of (9)) is similarly that one takes it to entail "Tom rationally believes that someone is distinct from himself". Note, however, that given the story and a few guiding inferences, a speaker will accept that this must be true, if (22) is (I have tested this too). The explanation of the denial of these sentences is thus not pragmatic, but draw on the unusual cases that make them true, and is strengthened by the fact that one can make speakers change their mind. I conclude that (21)-(24) present no problem to (M) and (C).

IV

We will end with a brief discussion of how a Millian-pragmatic account of the diversity of linguistic intuitions fares in comparison with a purely semantic one. Since many of the

relevant sentences have metalinguistic readings in some contexts and not in others, it would seem that a purely semantic account of them must take them to be ambiguous. The alternatives to Millianism that take them to unambiguously say something about linguistic expressions (Richard (1990), (1995) and Larson and Ludlow (1993)) make the right predictions for the special cases discussed by philosophers (e.g., (2)-(5)), but fail to account for simpler cases, like (10)-(12) (taken separately), where nothing about names seems to have been said (cf. Soames (2002: 165ff.)). They also fail to explain the differences between the “Cicero”-cases and the “Superman”-cases. Fregean theories which operate with modes of presentation do not account for the metalinguistic readings, and generally fail because most co-referring names and synonyms simply do not have distinct modes of presentation. There is also an account which takes these sentences to be unambiguous and which does not deem intuitively true sentences to be false or *vice versa*, but which posits a presupposition for truth-value (Pagin (1992)). But on this account, either “Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent cannot fly” or “Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly” must lack truth-value, whereas both are intuitively true.

On accounts which take the relevant sentences to be ambiguous, the reading that makes most sense pragmatically will be picked, just as with other cases of semantic ambiguity. But, first, a theory which appeals to pragmatics to deal with context-dependent differences in truth-judgment is of course always to be preferred, *ceteris paribus*, over one appealing to semantic ambiguity. Moreover, sentences with propositional attitude verbs are usually taken to be ambiguous in virtue of an ambiguity in these verbs. But then, sentences like (17) cannot be accounted for. They would then have to take names to be ambiguous too. One may also wonder how they are to explain the difference between the “Cicero”-cases and the “Superman”-cases without positing yet further ambiguities.

Semantic ambiguity is a rather special phenomenon which can be justifiably appealed to when, e.g., a word has two separate etymologies, as with “bank”, or when there is a difference in scope which can be clearly explained and demonstrated by paraphrase. But there is no paradigmatic case of semantic ambiguity which the ambiguity-theorist can compare with to support his case. But the lack of a paradigmatic case to compare with has been a main objection against the pragmatic defense of Millianism.

There are no languages in which the alleged semantic ambiguity is marked by the use of separate words (cf. Berg (1988: 366)). And which semantic interpretation shall we choose when encountering a different belief-ascription, like “I believe it is raining”? Further, in normal cases like (10)-(12) taken in isolation, there is simply no perception of any ambiguity at all. The lack of a perceivable difference in meaning is another main objection against the pragmatic defense of Millianism. But why should the positing of an unperceived semantic ambiguity be more acceptable than that of a context-dependent difference depending on pragmatic effects? The fact that we perceive no semantic ambiguity but see that we interpret sentences differently depending on the context indicates that Millianism with its pragmatic defense is true. As I hope the reader now agrees, it also proves to account well for the variety of linguistic intuitions.

¹ Or, if you will, “ $\exists x(x=a \ \& \ S(x))$ iff $S(a)$ ”. I owe an anonymous referee at *Philosophical Studies* for suggestions concerning the formulation.

² Some may wish to make an exception to (M) for quote-contexts. I find this confused, however, since names do not occur in these contexts, any more than the noun “cat” occurs in “cattle”. What occurs in quote-names of an expression, rather, is a token sequence of letters that belongs to a type-sequence some of whose tokens are tokens of that expression. Had the name “Cicero” occurred in the quote-name ““Cicero””, the referent of the latter would have depended on the referent of the former, but clearly doesn’t. Those in doubt may read in an exception to (M), however.

³ The idea is primarily associated with Nathan Salmon (1986: Ch. 6), (1989: III) and Scott Soames (2002: Chs. 3-4, 7-8). Soames's account of names in propositional attitude contexts appeals mainly to a principle stating that "[a]n assertive utterance in a context C of a propositional attitude ascription, *a believes that Fn*, containing an ordinary proper name *n*, results in the assertion of the proposition (semantically) expressed by *a believes that F[the x: (Dx & x = n)]* in C if (i) it is part of the common background information shared by speakers and hearers in C that the name *n* is associated by them with the description *the x: (Dx & x = n)*, and as a result of this, an assertive utterance of *Fn* in C would result in an assertion of the proposition (semantically) expressed by *F[the x: (Dx & x = n)]* in C; and (ii) the common background information shared by speakers and hearers in C is such that given it, conversational participants in C will readily assume that if the speaker's assertive utterance is true in the context, then the proposition (semantically) expressed by *a believes that F[the x: (Dx & x = n)]* is true; moreover, each knows this about the other." (2002: 221f.). This is meant to explain intuitions of substitution failures. However, we are not really told when a simple utterance of "*Fn*" results in an assertion of a descriptively enhanced proposition. Note, first, that there is a *de re-de dicto* ambiguity of definite descriptions in attitude contexts. On a *de re* reading, the principle is obviously true, but unhelpful, since on this interpretation, the attributed belief is simply the singular belief. So we must stick to the *de dicto* reading. Now, if the descriptively enhanced proposition is asserted whenever the participants of conversation associate the corresponding description with the name, then the principle is definitely too strong. But even if there were an account of when such a proposition is asserted, it does not seem to help with cases where all participants of the conversation associate the same descriptions with two names. We associate the same descriptions with "Cicero" and "Tully", but nevertheless have counter-Millian intuitions with regard to these names. For instance, we take "Tom believes that Cicero is Tully" to ascribe a non-trivial belief. In this case, one cannot appeal our beliefs about "Tom's" relations to these names (cf. 2002: 212ff.), because "Tom" functions here as a "dummy name", and not one for some particular person. Soames's account has also been criticized by Kroon (2004), McKinsey (2005), Richard (2006), Sider and Braun (2006), and Caplan (forthcoming) (see also Soames (2005), (2006)).

Prior to Salmon, the idea that pragmatics may help defend Millianism has been vented by Urmson (1968), Tye (1978: 224), McKay (1981: 294f.), Sainsbury (1981: 12ff.) and Barwise and Perry (1983). More recently, Jennifer Saul has given an account, which follows Salmon in taking "believe" to be a three-place predicate with a place for terms picking out guises of beliefs. She takes the relevant pragmatic principle to be the Maxim of Quantity, requiring that speakers be as informative as required (1998: 383f.). Further, on her view, sentences of the form "*x believes that p*" carry a generalized implicature to the effect that *x* believes the

proposition that p under a guise similar to the sentence “ p ”. Saul thinks that the implicature is created because “we often require some sort of information about how the belief is held” (1998: 384). She here follows Berg’s very brief pragmatic defense (1988: 358). But implicatures are of course created by *violations* of maxims. But it is difficult to see how the violation is supposed to occur, since the relevant belief sentences always have a complement clause, which, on Saul’s view, is supposed to identify the implicature. In any case, such general accounts do not seem capable of explaining why sentences with names in belief-contexts typically do *not* carry metalinguistic implicatures (cf. (12) below). Saul has now abandoned this idea (2002). Salmon (1989: III) properly identifies a case of maxim violation, namely, where the utterance is “literally false”. However, we will see that there are counter-Millian intuitions also where sentences are semantically true. Salmon also does not explain positively which proposition is implicated and how.

⁴ There is also a common but confused idea that propositions *are* truth-conditions. First, it seems that indeed all conditions are propositions, for we say, for instance, that a condition for x is that p . If “that”-clauses always refer to propositions, then this follows. But surely, a proposition can also *have* truth-conditions. This only means that there are conditions under which it is true. There are thus semantic truth-conditions and pragmatic ones. In my view, the habitual idea that semantics somehow has more to do with truth than pragmatics is unfounded. Whatever one wishes to single out as essential to semantics (e.g., context-invariance) can be said without mention of truth, and whatever one takes to single out pragmatics can be said with it.

⁵ Putnam (1954) and Burge (1978) have furthered Mates’s case, and, for rejoinders, see Church (1954), Sellars (1955) and Carnap (1955).

⁶ Exceptions are special cases as when one is speaking merely to delay some event, etc. (1986: 161).

⁷ Church (1954), Carnap (1955) and Sellars (1955) all respond to the Mates-Burge argument that there is a linguistic and a non-linguistic reading of sentences like (B), but do not account for the difference any further.

⁸ Possibly with the exception of a seminar on Millianism, but this does not seem true either. I sense rather strongly that I am saying something false when uttering “If Lois Believes Superman can fly, she must believe Clark Kent can fly”.

⁹ It might seem more appropriate to say, “Lois believes that the person named by “Superman” is superhuman...”. But the ambiguity of definite descriptions in propositional attitude contexts makes this ambiguous in a crucial and harmful way. The controversy surrounding the semantics of descriptions also make them less suitable here. What is important is that (L) is clearly true (in the fiction) and unambiguous.

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