# Arguing for Frege's Fundamental Principle

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**Abstract:**  Saul Kripke's puzzle about belief demonstrates the lack of soundness of the traditional argument for the Fregean fundamental principle that the sentences 'S believes that *a* is F' and 'S believes that *b* is F' can differ in truth value even if *a* = *b*. This principle is a crucial premise in the traditional Fregean argument for the existence of semantically relevant senses, individuative elements of beliefs that are sensitive to our varying conceptions of what the beliefs are about. Joseph Owens has offered a new argument for this fundamental principle, one that is not subject to Kripke's criticisms. I argue that even though Owens' argument avoids Kripke's criticisms, it has other flaws.

Fregean and Millian theories come to a head on the issue of the behaviour of proper names in intentional contexts. Roughly put, Millians think that all there is to a proper name is its referent; so the belief that Orwell was a writer is identical with the belief that Blair was a writer (e.g. Salmon, 1986). It is easy to see how this leads to counterintuitive results. Mary, who lived next door to Orwell and knew him as 'Blair', vigorously dissented from 'Blair was a writer'. So one would think that she does not believe that Blair was a writer. Nonetheless, since she is an avid reader who honestly assents to 'Orwell was a writer', the Millian concludes that she really does believe that Blair was a writer. Fregeans disagree (e.g. Frege, 1892, 1918). According to them Mary must not believe that Blair was a writer even though she does believe that Orwell was a writer. So the beliefs that Orwell was writer and that Blair was a writer must be distinct. Thus, since the only differing parts of 'Orwell was a writer' and 'Blair was a writer' are the names, and the names are coreferential, the Fregean concludes that there must be distinct senses associated with 'Orwell' and 'Blair' in such a way that the contents of the beliefs expressed by those sentences are distinct. So goes the compelling Fregean argument for the conclusion that there are semantically relevant senses that are sensitive to our varying conceptions of the referents of those senses. What is noteworthy here is that this argument relies on the *fundamental principle* that interchanging coreferential names in an intentional context can alter the truth value of the sentence containing the context.

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The soundness of this Fregean argument for semantically relevant senses was challenged by Saul Kripke's puzzle about belief (Kripke 1979). As we will see below, the challenge is that the materials the Fregean uses to argue for the fundamental principle can be used to generate a contradiction. Thus, the Fregean has to start over in arguing for such senses via the fundamental principle; her time-honoured argument summarized above rests on an inadequately defended and question-begging premise, the fundamental principle.

In a recent article in this journal Joseph Owens (1995) claims to have found a new, compelling argument for Frege's fundamental principle, one that escapes the problems revealed by Kripke's puzzle and, in addition, cannot be rebutted by the resources of Millian theories. I will argue that Owens's claim on behalf of the Fregean is false. However, Owens has, I think, established the important result that the Millian needs a Fregean logic for some singly embedded intentional contexts. What, exactly, that amounts to will be set out below.

### 1. The Background: Kripke's Argument Against Fregean Arguments

The Kripkean argument given by Millians against Fregean arguments goes something like this. Suppose Peter is a monolingual English speaker who in 1996 learned of Geoffrey Hellman the philosopher of mathematics. Some time later in 1997 he heard about Geoffrey Hellman the pianist but did not learn that the philosopher is the pianist: he thinks there are two Hellmans. Peter assents to 'Hellman [the pianist] lives in Minneapolis'. So he seems to believe that Hellman lives in Minneapolis. He also assents to 'It's not the case that Hellman [the philosopher] lives in Minneapolis'. So he seems to occurrently believe that it's not the case that Hellman lives in Minneapolis. It is highly plausible to suppose that no one can be fully rational and believe that P and that it's not the case that P. But surely Peter is a paradigm of rationality. Thus, since we have reached a contradiction something must give way. What must give way is either Consistency (a fully rational individual cannot occurrently believe that P and that it's not the case that P) or Disquotation (if a fully rational person assents to an English sentence 'P', then she believes that P).

Now consider the traditional Fregean argument for the fundamental principle. Mary, a paradigm of rationality, assents to 'Orwell was a writer' and 'It's not the case that Blair was a writer'. The Fregean then infers from these assents that Mary believes that Orwell was a writer and that it's not the case that Blair was a writer. *Notice that this part of the Fregean argument relies on Disquotation*. Let *Substitutivity* be the principle that if English proper names *a* and *b* are coreferential, then 'S believes (thinks, etc.) that *a* is F' and 'S believes (thinks, etc.) that *b* is F' have the same truth value (assuming that the difference in *a* and *b* is the only one in the two sentences, the other linguistic parts agreeing in meaning, reference, etc.). Substitutivity is the

denial of the Fregean fundamental principle. If Substitutivity holds, then since Mary believes that Orwell was a writer she also believes that Blair was a writer. And we already saw from Disquotation that she believes that Blair was not a writer. But, the Fregean continues, this cannot be right: no fully rational person can believe that P and that it's not the case that P. *Notice that this part of the Fregean argument relies on Consistency.* The Fregean concludes that Mary does *not* believe that Blair was a writer, the thoughts that Orwell was a writer and that Blair was a writer are distinct, and Substitutivity is incorrect (so the fundamental principle is correct). But the Fregean had to use both Consistency and Disquotation in this argument—and we just saw that the conjunction of these two principles leads to a contradiction in the Peter–Hellman story. So the Fregean argument against Substitutivity has at least one false premise: Consistency or Disquotation. Thus, since the central Fregean argument rests on at least one false premise, the Millian, who endorses Substitutivity, may not be as crazy as we all used to think.

## 2. A New Argument Against Substitutivity and Millianism

Joseph Owens has attempted to give the Fregean a way to start over. Since this is the *only* positive, non-question-begging, Fregean argument against Substitutivity I am aware of that avoids the problems revealed by Kripke's puzzle, it is appropriate to examine it carefully. Owens argues, in effect, that given the demise of Consistency, the Fregean is not going to be able to use contexts such as 'S believes (thinks, doubts, wants, etc.) that Orwell was a writer' to argue against Substitutivity. A Millian such as Nathan Salmon (1986) can easily account for what he thinks is our mistaken intuition that Mary does not believe that Blair was a writer by appealing to guises as follows. When grasping the proposition that Blair was a writer under the guise Mary associates with 'Blair was a writer', she dissents. When grasping that *same* proposition under the guise she associates with 'Orwell was a writer', she assents. When we utter 'Mary believes that Blair was a writer', we speak the truth but mislead those who take our utterance to imply that she grasps the proposition that Blair was a writer under the guise typically associated with 'Blair was a writer'. So the Millian has a reasonable accounting of our Fregean intuitions regarding interchange of proper names, one that involves accepting Substitutivity for 'believes that' contexts (thereby rejecting the fundamental principle). But matters change, according to Owens, when we look at singly embedded intentional contexts for which the Millian explanation fails.

Owens asks us to consider the following pair of sentences.

(1) Smith persuasively demonstrated that the thought that Clemens is famous is the same as the thought that Twain is famous.
(2) Smith persuasively demonstrated that the thought that Clemens is famous is the same as the thought that Clemens is famous.

Owens thinks (1) and (2) can clearly differ in truth value; 'just think of a defense as being persuasive in the requisite way only if it is persuasive to a Fregean audience' (Owens, 1995, p. 268). In order to make (2) true all Smith need do is appeal to the law of self-identity. In order to make (1) true Smith needs to do the work that Salmon and other Millians have done: write many thought-provoking articles and books about Russellian propositions, guises, etc. Clearly it will not be sufficient to appeal to the law of identity: otherwise Millians have been wasting their time trying so hard to come up with a persuasive defence of Millianism!

I am not convinced that this argument against Substitutivity is successful. Owens is surely right that (1) and (2) can differ in truth value: Smith would hardly be persuasive to a Fregean audience if he merely cited the law of self-identity in both cases! So the Millian cannot appeal to guises to explain away the apparent failure of Substitutivity; for the failure is not merely apparent. But I think we can construct an explanation of this failure of Substitutivity on behalf of the Millian. First, she may agree that Substitutivity fails for 'S persuasively demonstrates that P' on the grounds that such contexts implicitly involve reference to guises, modes of presentation, and so forth—materials available to Millians as well as Fregeans. Clearly, an argument is persuasive only if it is *presented* in a certain manner, in a *form* or *guise* conducive to understanding, etc. So it is perfectly natural, perhaps even *mandatory*, to take 'S persuasively demonstrates that P' as having reference to modes of presentation or guises, references that affect truth value. The same holds for related contexts such as 'S convincingly demonstrated that P' and 'S satisfactorily explained that P'. Second, the Millian will balk at the claim that what holds for persuasive demonstration must hold for belief. S believes that P just in case S accepts that proposition under some guise or other, but one persuasively demonstrates that P just in case, roughly put, one demonstrates that P via guises which are such that astute, attentive, reflective observers of the demonstration (including Fregeans) can be expected to accept that proposition, presumably on the basis of that demonstration. The Millian can locate the failure of Substitutivity in the term 'persuasive'. Third, the context 'S demonstrated that P' will remain true to Substitutivity.[1] When Smith said that the identity of the 'Orwell' and 'Blair' thoughts followed from the law of self-identity, he had indeed demonstrated that the thoughts are identical: if Millianism is true, then the thoughts' identity is a straightforward instance of that logical truth. Owens is right in claiming that demonstration requires setting out other propositions as reasons for believing what is to be demonstrated, and he is arguably correct in noting that this is not a wholly internal matter: demonstrating requires external behaviour, not merely something like inward assent to a proposition. But Smith did all that when he cited the law of identity. The demonstration

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[1] Owens uses 'persuasively demonstrates' and 'demonstrates' interchangeably in his argument. But these seem importantly different on a Millian view.

may not be persuasive, but that is another matter entirely. The context 'S persuasively demonstrated that P' amounts to 'S demonstrated that P and that demonstration was persuasive'. When Smith cited the law of self-identity he made the first conjunct true; he failed to make the second true because that requires a demonstration presented with appropriate guises.

Owens considers the consequences of a Millian admitting that (1) and (2) can differ in truth value. First, he claims that our practice seems to demand a uniform treatment of 'believes that P' and 'demonstrates that P'. But this feature is intact on my Millian response; it is only with the addition of 'persuasively' (or 'satisfactorily', 'convincingly', etc.) that Substitutivity fails. Second, he claims that this partial rejection of Substitutivity on the part of the Millian is self-defeating. Once one has admitted that interchange fails in these cases, he argues, one has conceded:

> that there is a logic for sentences of the form:
>
> > (D) S persuasively demonstrated that P
>
> that accommodates the following facts: (i) the truth of (D) in no way entails that S uses the sentence 'P'. That is, an adequate logic cannot treat this indirect construction as a direct quotation construction, even if it does analyze it as involving implicit quotation. (ii) The truth value of (D) is not a function of the contained sentence 'P'. (iii) (D) may well be true even if referring expressions in 'P' lack a referent, and (iv), given the concession now being made [by the Millian regarding the partial failure of Substitutivity], the logic must be such as to block interchange of co-referential proper names. (Owens, 1995, p. 271)

Owens concludes that this is just to admit that there is a Fregean logic, an intensional logic, after all! Owens is correct thus far, but his final inference is this:

> If we admit that there must be a logic for sentences such as 'S demonstrates that P', a logic that blocks interchange, but still treats this as an indirect construction, then we are, in effect, admitting that there is a logic *for belief* that respects our deeply entrenched [Fregean] intuitions [against Substitutivity] . . . (Owens, 1995, p. 272; my emphasis)

Presumably this last inference is forced on us because (a) the logic of persuasively demonstrating is that of demonstrating, and (b) the logic of the latter is that of believing. But my Millian does not accept (a). Thus, Owens' argument that such a logic would also have to apply to 'S believes that P' is less than conclusive. Nonetheless, Owens has, I think, established the important result that *the Millian needs a Fregean logic* for 'S persuasively demonstrates that P'. Owens may well have intended to use this latter result thus:

since the Millian needs a Fregean logic for at least some singly embedded intentional contexts, and the only really good reason for adopting Millianism was the hope that it did not need this elusive logic, we have lost our best reason for adopting Millianism. I do not share this pessimistic view regarding the merits of arguments for Millianism, but it is clear that the matter requires detailed examination on behalf of the Millian.

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