

Separatory Confusion Does Not Corrupt¹

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If I am confused, and I think two people are one and the same, that may impair my ability to refer to either of them. This is combinatory confusion. What if I am confused, and think that one person is actually two people? This is separatory confusion, and it seems quite different. After all, even in my confusion, my thoughts and my referential devices seem to track back to a single individual. Unnsteinsson has recently argued that both types of confusion corrupt, i.e. they may prevent us from referring the right way. In this paper, I examine the four arguments he offers for this conclusion, and I argue that the intuitive view that separatory confusion does not corrupt can withstand his challenge.

1. Introduction

Confusion can corrupt. That is, when a speaker is confused about something, and they attempt to refer to it, their attempt may well fail because of their confusion. Here is a simple example:

Teddy Bears: my daughter gets a teddy bear called “Bill”, and loves it. Afraid that it might get damaged, the next day I buy her an identical teddy bear. I make sure every night to replace one with the other, so that neither gets visibly more used than the other. She often asks for Bill when she wants to play with her dolls, and I give her that day’s teddy bear.²

My daughter is confused: she thinks there is one single bear, and in fact there are two. Since she plays with them equally, there is no reason to think that “Bill” names just

¹ This is a draft; the final version of the paper will appear in the *Croatian Journal of Philosophy*.

² The case is adapted from (Unnsteinsson, 2022, p. 27); henceforth, all references surrounded by square brackets will be to this book. Similar cases have been widely discussed in the literature, but often in the context of belief reports, or other substitution worries. I will follow Unnsteinsson's lead here, and focus on the relevance of these cases to theories of reference *simpliciter*.

one of them. Suppose that years later, my daughter says “I really loved Bill”. Does she succeed in referring to anything? Or, if you prefer, does “Bill” refer to anything? Intuitively, there are two candidates, but neither is more likely than the other. Is she referring to both? That seems wrong too: she loved them both, but she intended to talk about one single bear, the only brown bear she thinks she ever owned. Since there is no such bear, a natural answer is that my daughter did not refer to anything. My daughter, it turns out, had two intentions where she thought she had only one, and since each terminated in a different object, reference fails. Of course, I knew what to do when she asked for Bill: I would hand her one of the two bears. And I now know how to handle the question: I come clean about my well-intentioned deceit. So the name is not useless noise. But it fails to refer, as does my daughter.

One might resist this description of the case in several ways. One might, for instance, insist that “Bill” refers to the first bear to whom the name was attached, whatever happened next. Or one might claim that the speaker’s intentions do not determine reference, and might look to other contextual factors to fix it in each context. One might reject the belief model of confusion, and insist that confusion does not reduce to false beliefs.³ Or one might claim that each time she referred to that day’s bear (which does not tell us what she referred to years later). I propose that we put these worries aside, and accept the claim that reference fails here. I want, instead, to see how corruptive confusion is.

Teddy Bears is a case about combinatory confusion: my daughter confused two things as being one. I want to address a different type of confusion: does separatory confusion also corrupt? That is, in cases where the speaker confuses one thing as two, can they refer to that thing, or does their confusion prevent them from doing so, like it prevented my daughter?

At first glance, one might think that there is no danger of corruption here. Let us look at an example:

Paderewski: Paderewski is a famous pianist who was also a famous politician. Peter believes that politicians do not have the time to become accomplished pianists, nor vice versa, so he believes that there are two people called “Paderewski”, one a politician, and one a musician. At some political event, he is introduced to Paderewski, whom he takes

³ See (Goodman, 2024), and Unnsteinsson’s answer (Unnsteinsson, 2024).

to be politician-Paderewski. He tells the politician “Paderewski is my favorite pianist; I just wish I could meet him one day”.⁴

Did Peter succeed in referring to Paderewski? Well, he got the name right, and we can assume that no other Paderewski was relevant to the conversation. He also intended to refer to the pianist, who does in fact have that name. Sure, at other times he intended to refer to the politician-Paderewski, but both of those intentions terminate in the same person, so whenever he used the name “Paderewski”, it looks like he was just referring to Paderewski. There seems to be no problem here.

Recently, Unnsteinsson has argued otherwise: he claims that both kinds of confusion can corrupt, and hence that there was something wrong about Peter’s attempt to refer in our scenario. In this paper, I defend separatory confusion from Unnsteinsson’s accusations of corruption. We will focus our discussion on proper names, but nothing depends on this choice, other than the ease of finding examples in the literature.

Here is the plan. In §2 I will present Unnsteinsson’s claim in some detail, enough to be able to understand the view, especially some key notions introduced or refined by Unnsteinsson. In §3, I present the four arguments that he offers specifically for the conclusion that separatory confusion can corrupt. Along the way, we see that the arguments are usually presented for the broader claim that all confusion can corrupt, but I argue that the arguments work only for combinatory confusion.

2. Spelling out Unnsteinsson’s Claim

Before we get to Unnsteinsson’s arguments, we need to look at the details of what he claims: that combinatory confusion leads to the corruption of *speaker reference*, with respect to its *proper function*, but only *in cases where the confusion is relevant* and of *the right type*. We need to spell out all four italicized parts of that claim before we can defend separatory confusion.

⁴ This case is adapted from [39], who adapts it from (Kripke, 1979). Kripke’s focus is belief, not speaker reference, and the differences are important, but they are irrelevant to our present goals.

2.1. Unnsteinsson's Notion of Speaker Reference

The notion of speaker reference belongs to the Gricean tradition of speaker meaning.⁵ The claim about the correlative power of confusion is made solely about speaker reference, thus allowing that it is possible that other types of reference could well go through. The claim is that the kind of reference that Griceans take as basic, which is about certain complex communicative intentions that the speaker has, can get corrupted by confusion.

Unnsteinsson puts his own spin on speaker reference. The differences from Grice and the tradition that grew out of his work are important and interesting, just like the reasons Unnsteinsson offers for those differences, but for the purposes of this paper I will simply take on Unnsteinsson's definition:

Speaker Reference: "Speaker S refers to object o with e in uttering U at time t iff U is an utterance of the linguistic expression type $\Sigma[e]$, and for some H and some propositional attitude A , S utters U intending

- (1) to produce thereby in H an $A(p[o])$ -state;
- (2) H to use the e -part of U as direct evidence that the content of the A -state S intends to produce in H is an o -dependent proposition;
- (3) H to recognize S 's intention (1);
- (4) U to recognize that S intends U to satisfy (1) on the basis of (3)." [131]⁶

The novel part of this definition is condition (2), and it is the one that will matter most for our discussion of separatory confusion. The part of the claim that we are interested in is that when a speaker attempts to refer with an expression, they have a communicative intention about a particular object, so that they use that singular expression as evidence for the hearer to figure out what the speaker intended to communicate about that object.

Let us see how this applies to combinatory confusion: when my daughter uses "Bill", that cannot function as evidence that would help me figure out which object she wanted to say something about. And the deeper reason for that is that she really did not have a singular thought about either of the bears that she intended to communicate, so nothing could count as evidence for communicative intentions about such a thought. So (1) fails (there is no intended proposition), and (2) also fails (nothing can count as such

⁵ See (Grice, 1989; Schiffer, 1972; Neale, 1992) for *loci classici*.

⁶ " $\Sigma[e]$ " is an expression of type Σ that contains expression e , and " $p[o]$ " is a proposition whose truth conditions depend on object o .

evidence), along with all other conditions (since they incorporate (1)). These failures make it that the mechanisms for referring fail to do their job. We will come back to separatory confusion in §2.4.

2.2. Unnsteinsson's Notion of Proper Function

Unnsteinsson's main focus in this book is not reference *simpliciter*. Rather, it is the proper function of speaker reference.⁷ Here is the central claim:

The Proper Function of Reference “The mechanism of reference has the proper function of directing the hearer's attention to the referent as a part of the means by which some attitude involving that referent is produced in the hearer.”⁸

As we can see, this is related to part (2) of the definition of speaker reference: since the speaker intends to use the singular expression as evidence about which object they intend to communicate, then it is natural to claim that a device of reference is doing its job when it does provide such evidence.⁹ As we saw above, confusion can lead to a failure of speaker reference, and this leads to a constraint on the proper functioning of devices of reference:

Edenic Constraint on Speaker Reference: “If *S* is relevantly confused about object *o* at time *t*, *S* cannot successfully perform an act of speaker reference to refer to *o* at *t*, i.e., *S*'s act of referring will be constitutively barred from performing its proper function.” [151]

Since the focus is on the proper function of, say, proper names, this leaves open two options in cases where names fail to fulfill that function: we can either say that reference always fails, or that reference may succeed, just not in the right way. Unnsteinsson is not perfectly clear about this. In one place, he says that “strictly speaking, we assign no referent to Peter's utterance of ‘Paderewski’”, so it looks like some cases of confusion lead to complete reference failure. In another place, he says that “such acts are best understood, theoretically speaking, in terms of deviations from proper function”, and that if reference happens, it's just a matter of luck [157].

⁷ Unnsteinsson is using Millikan's notion of a proper function here. See (Millikan, 1984; Garson, 2013; Neander, 2017).

⁸ (Unnsteinsson, 2022, p. 141)

⁹ Talk of attention is somewhat surprising here, since attention is not obviously needed in all cases in which condition (2) works out. But again, the focus of this paper is elsewhere, and attention will play no role hereafter.

Fortunately, we can avoid this issue: I propose that we stay onUnnsteinsson's side on whether reference happens when the edenic constraint is violated, and that we instead focus on the claim that proper names cannot perform their proper function when the speaker is relevantly confused.

2.3. When Confusion is Relevant

Suppose that I am confusing Francis Bacon, the Early Modern natural philosopher, with Francis Bacon, the 20th century painter. This fact does not by itself guarantee that all my uses of "Francis Bacon" fail to refer in the right way. Suppose that I am an art critic, who is at best marginally interested in Early Modern philosophy, and has merely heard the name "Francis Bacon" as having been a philosopher, and I took that to be about the painter, whose style I am very familiar with. This confusion notwithstanding, so long as I am in a conversation about painters and their styles, when I unfavorably compare the contemporary painter Adrian Ghenie with Bacon, I can do so using both their names, and my confusion does not corrupt.

The reason is that though I am confused, that confusion is not relevant to the communicative project at hand. My intentions are firmly anchored in my painter-beliefs, and there is no part of my plan that relates to my philosopher-beliefs. The addressee, presumably, is also interested in painting styles, and will easily figure out that I am talking about the painter. My belief about philosophy simply does not come into play, and does not serve as bad evidence for the interlocutor.¹⁰

There is room for clarification here: suppose, as above, that my philosopher-beliefs are indeed irrelevant to my overall plan, but the hearer thinks that they are. There is a sense in which the hearer can be misled by my utterance, due to their beliefs about my beliefs (which I do have, and are merely unactivated at this point). This is a case where the two considerations seem to come apart: what is it that matters, the structure of my communicative plan, or what the hearer reasonably takes the plan to be?

¹⁰ See [163]. Unnsteinsson uses a separatory confusion example there, but I want to keep that issue until §3, so I am using a combinatory confusion example.

While this is indeed a worry, I will only rely on cases that work exactly as Unnsteinsson wants them: cases where the speaker's confusion is relevant, and when that issue is a salient one for the hearer as well.

2.4. Which Kinds of Confusion Corrupt

Thus far, we have only given examples of confusion that originate in identity beliefs: confusing one person as two, or two as one. Of course, we ordinarily talk about many more ways of being confused. I may, for instance, mistakenly think that "Big Ben" is the name of a tower, rather than a clock. This involves merely having a false belief about a thing, a false belief that involves no identity.

Unnsteinsson holds that only identity-based confusion can corrupt. The reasons he offers are broadly externalist in nature: one may believe that the Earth is flat, talk about the shape of the Earth, and still succeed in referring to the Earth, because reference does not happen via property satisfaction.¹¹ Note that the case does not change if the discussion is specifically about the shape of the Earth, so even if the confusion is relevant to the discussion, even its main topic, the name performs its function properly.

This introduces a constraint on Unnsteinsson's project: the arguments for the claim that a particular kind of confusion corrupts must not generalize to property-confusion. To see why, consider the line of thinking above: the speaker fails the Edenic constraint just in case they are not providing the right kind of evidence for the hearer to figure out which object they intend to communicate about. The flat-Earther will say of the Earth that it is flat, and one may come away from that doubting that they intend to say something about the Earth, for instance if the hearer has never come across or even heard of anyone who believes that the Earth is flat. And yet, according to Unnsteinsson, reference succeeds edenicly [166]. For now, I just want to flag the issue. We will come back to this tension in the next section.

3. The Arguments

¹¹ See [166] and the citations therein.

As I count them, Unnsteinsson offers four arguments for the claim that separatory confusion corrupts. This count is somewhat arbitrary, because these are not offered explicitly as separate arguments, and, more importantly, because the arguments are related. Still, one could offer versions of these arguments separately, so they each deserve their own discussion. In this section, I show that none of the arguments suffices to show that separatory confusion corrupts.

3.1. The No-Determination Argument

According to Unnsteinsson, a speaker succeeds in referring to an object by using a name just in case the speaker's relevant intentions fix that object as the referent. So one way for a speaker to fail to refer is for the intentions to determine no referent. I take this to be the most general, and the most fundamental, argument for the claim that confusion corrupts.

This kind of argument applies nicely to combinatory confusion: since my daughter's intentions fail to differentiate between the two teddy bears, when she uses "Bill", her intentions cannot determine either as the referent (and there are no other plausible candidates). Hence, reference failure.

What about separatory confusion? Even if the speaker has two intentions where optimally they would have only one, the problem is quite different: after all, both intentions pick out the same thing, so there seems to be no contradiction. Here is Unnsteinsson, talking about the Paderewski case:

No-Determination Argument: "if reference is metaphysically determined by Peter's referential intention, [we have a problem]. Peter definitely intends to refer to Paderewski and definitely intends not to refer to the man in front of him, who is identical to Paderewski. Hence, there is a problem: as long as the speaker's separatory confusion is sufficiently relevant to the determination of a singular referential intention on a given occasion of utterance, the same problem will arise" [150; see also 162].

In combinatory confusion cases, the failure of edenic reference stems from having intentions that terminate in two different things. In separatory confusion cases, Unnsteinsson finds a different problem: we have the intention to refer to a thing, plus the intention *not* to refer to that thing. This introduces a novel requirement for edenic reference: it must not only be the case that the speaker's intentions terminate in a particular object, it must also be the case that the speaker have no intentions not to refer to that object. Should we grant this constraint?

One problem with the No-Determination argument, as applied to separatory confusion, is that Unnsteinsson does not explain why it does not generalize to other kinds of false beliefs that the speaker might have about the purported referent. Consider the flat-Earther. Unnsteinsson claims that the speaker does manage to refer edenically to the Earth by using its name. Presumably, the reason is that their intention terminates in the same planet as our intentions. But the speaker also very much intends not to refer to a spherical thing. Since the Earth is spherical, can we not describe the speaker's intentions as conflicting in such a way that they fail to terminate in a single object, since there are no flat planets available for them to refer to?

I do grant Unnsteinsson the claim that false beliefs about the properties of the purported referent are irrelevant to the speaker's referring abilities. But why not say the same thing about confusion cases? In combinatory confusion, given all that we granted at the beginning of this paper, there is an answer here: if the speaker's intentions are so messed up that they fail to terminate, they can fix no object as the referent. But in the case of separatory confusion, the intentions to refer do terminate in a particular object. Sure, there are other intentions around, like the intention not to refer to the person in front of you. But why not treat that like the intention not to refer to a spherical planet? Intentions not to refer to something do not obviously need to play the same kind of role as the intentions to refer.

3.2. The Bad Evidence Argument

The No-Determination argument was about a constitutive feature of speaker reference: the referent must be determined by the speaker's intentions. No determining,

no referring. The next argument is about a different feature, namely the claim that the proper function of referring terms is to provide evidence to the hearer, evidence that would help them figure out the object that the speaker intends to communicate about. Here is Unnsteinsson, this time discussing a case where Lois Lane does not know that Superman is Clark Kent:

Bad Evidence Argument: “The hearer’s attention is intentionally directed at an object o while, simultaneously, it is intentionally not directed at an x such that $x = o$. More specifically, there is no object which is Superman while not being Clark and, so, the utterance is evidence for no actual object (or, perhaps, an impossible object) while its proper function is to provide such evidence. And this is precisely because of Lois’s false identity belief.” [162]

The Bad Evidence argument is, in principle, separable from the No-Determination argument. First, it is obviously possible for the speaker’s intentions to determine a particular referent, while the utterance provides poor evidence for the hearer to figure out the purported referent. Unnsteinsson would probably agree that this is possible, for reasons unconnected to identity beliefs. Second, even in cases of false identity beliefs, it is in principle possible to claim that speakers who suffer from combinatory confusion might have intentions that determine a referent, but that their false beliefs provide bad evidence for the hearer, and hence that the overall referential act is not edenic. Unnsteinsson clearly believes that both arguments show that all confusion corrupts, but I will treat the two arguments as separate.

Alas, I believe that the Bad Evidence argument has the same problem as the No-Determination argument: if it works, it generalizes to all false beliefs about the referent, which is a conclusion that Unnsteinsson wants to avoid. The reason is that Lois Lane does not just intend to draw our attention to Clark Kent. She also intends to draw our attention to someone whose eyesight is not perfect. But Clark Kent’s glasses are just for disguise. So again, there is something in Lane’s thinking that could be misleading, especially to someone who is aware of Lane’s beliefs, and their relevance to the discussion. But if this type of false belief does not give evidence bad enough to corrupt, why think that false identity beliefs do? In Ch. 2, Unnsteinsson talks at length, and persuasively, about the special place that identity beliefs play in our cognitive architecture, and about how they can make it difficult for us to express our beliefs. But

as far as I can tell, none of these obviously count as reasons to say that all kinds of confusion lead to the failure of edenic reference. After all, it can always be the case that certain faculties are insulated from the damage wrought by certain types of sub-optimal functioning, no matter how acute that may be.

There is another issue as well: the cases do not seem to me to provide any evidence of bad evidence. Here is why: suppose that we know that Superman is Clark Kent, but we know that Lois Lane does not know, and we do not want to inform her. She says to us: "I find Clark Kent boring". Since we know about her confusion, we know that her telling us that is not evidence about her beliefs about Superman. In fact, we might even know that she does not think Superman boring. All this is rational on her part. Has she provided us with bad evidence? Well, if we simply take into account her intentions not to refer to Superman, that would be bad evidence for us hearers. But we know about her confusion. We would not be misled. Instead, we would not care about her intention not to refer to Superman, and we would work off her intention to refer to Clark Kent.

One might object that this discussion rides on our being informed about Lois Lane's confusion. So let us look at an addressee who is just as ignorant as Lois Lane: Perry White, who is the boss of both Lois Lane and Clark Kent. Suppose that Lane says to White: "I find Clark Kent boring". White takes the use of "Clark Kent" as evidence that Lane wants to say something about Clark Kent. He also knows, let us assume, that neither of them finds Superman boring. So White takes the use of "Clark Kent" not to be intended to pick out Superman. Does Lane thereby provide bad evidence to White? I think not. Lane and White are both thinking about Clark Kent, and the evidence worked well to make that happen. Their coordination is partly based on a shared mistake, but it is not accidental. And, as we just saw, sharing in the mistake is not necessary for what appears to be successful referring.

All this talk of what the addressee knows about the speaker may raise the following worry: is the hearer now merely in the business of repair, of trying to make the best of the attempted communication, and thus aren't they going beyond what the speaker meant and what the speaker referred to? This is a legitimate worry, and it clearly depends on much deeper issues than could be settled in this paper. I have no knock-down way to prove that this response does not work. But then again, there are ways to resist it. Note that we considered both a case in which the addressee knew about

the speaker's confusion, and one where they shared the confusion. If it turns out that, no matter what the addressee believes about the hearer, the attempt to refer does its communicative job, this looks like a sign that perhaps the attempt to refer did exactly what it was supposed to do, in the way that it was supposed to do it. Much more would need to be said here; so ultimately I leave it as a challenge to Unnsteinsson.¹²

3.3. The Non-Starter Argument

The first two arguments were of a general nature: they were designed to show that confusion leads to corruption because it leads to a failure with respect to some central part of the definition of speaker reference. The next two arguments are of a more consequentialist nature: they purport to show that accepting combinatorily confused speakers as edenic referrers would lead to some counterintuitive claim about language use.

The Non-Starter argument is part of Unnsteinsson's discussion of flat Earth believers, but it can be presented separately from it. Here it is in its original context:

The Non-Starter Argument: "A group of three speakers where the majority of each speaker's Earth-beliefs are false and no two of them share the same false Earth-beliefs would still be able to communicate perfectly with each other about the Earth. If we picture the same situation except that the beliefs in question are all false beliefs about the identity or distinctness of the Earth, the practice of using the name wouldn't get off the ground—the name wouldn't function properly in interpersonal communication." [166-167]

The argument is found in the second sentence above: the claim is that the prevalence of combinatory confusion in a population would make it impossible for the name to circulate in that population, because it would not be able to do its job.¹³ I find this argument plausible: if a whole population were confusing two things as one, it would be hard to believe that there would be a sustained use of a particular name.

¹² I thank Unnsteinsson for pointing out this response.

¹³ This passage in the book comes with a reference to (Devitt, 1974, p. 201), where a similar discussion is restricted to combinatory confusion.

Perhaps a new use could arise out of that, for instance if there were a myth involving two gods, but then the later tradition would take there to have been only one god with two personalities. But keeping focused on the original use, its stability would be fairly hard to sustain.

Unnsteinsson claims that this argument shows that identity confusions in general face this problem [167]. But is that plausible for separatory confusion? Consider one of the cases he discusses most often, that of Superman. There clearly is a widespread practice of using two names for the same individual, where only very few people know the truth. In a limit case, I see no reason why it could not happen that nobody knew the truth at any point in time, and still, I see no reason why their practice would not be stable. They would consistently deal with the same person under two names, and so long as Superman keeps being very careful, nobody may ever come to realize the problem. The practices are constant, in their own way: they keep referring to the same thing. Most things said using the names are true, or as true as statements generally are, except in the cases where issues of identifying Superman become important, when people will generally think false thoughts. But the names seem to live within a stable, continuing practice.

The conclusion here is that the Non-Starter argument shows that combinatory confusion makes it at best difficult for the practice of using a name to be established and to continue in a regular way. But separatory confusion seems to lead to no such problems.

3.4. The Lack of Consent Argument

If I am combinatorily confused, and I think that two people are a single one, I cannot marry either of them by using the name I use indiscriminately when I meet one of them. Nor, let us assume, can I marry both of them (let us assume that I neither want that, nor would the laws allow me to). So combinatory confusion leads to the

impossibility of consenting to marriage, at least if a proper name is involved in the right way in the ceremony.¹⁴

It is not obvious that consent would be altogether impossible even when combinatory confusion is involved. Suppose that the officiant merely asks whether I would marry the person next to me. I assume that there is exactly one person there, and the fact that I believe a lot of false things about them does not seem to take away my power to refer to them, or my power to marry them. I suspect that Unnsteinsson would disagree with this, and claim that my confusion makes it simply impossible for me to consent, no matter how that consent is to be formulated. I am not entirely convinced by this, but the point remains that if the name is an integral part of the ceremony, something has gone so badly that consent cannot properly be said to have been expressed.

What about separatory confusion? Unnsteinsson claims that this confused person is also not in a position to express consent. Here is the argument, using Lois Lane again:

The Lack of Consent Argument: “Lois Lane marries ‘Superman,’ but ‘Clark Kent’ had also proposed to her and she refused. ‘They’ could also constantly switch places during the ceremony and Lois would accordingly change her beliefs as to whether she is with someone to whom she is getting married or not. Let us assume that marriage must be consensual in that one cannot marry x if one intends not to marry x . Thus, since she intended to marry x by saying ‘I do,’ and she intended to remain unmarried to y while in fact $x = y$, it is hard to say exactly whom she married, if anyone. Especially if y , the person Lois calls ‘Clark Kent,’ is quite salient in the context—he ran out of the church yelling—it is reasonable to think that the act was not consensual for Lois. Reference is like marriage in presuming uniqueness and consent.” [156]

As described, this case does not feature any utterance of any name. So the question is whether Lois’s “I do”, said while Superman is next to her, constitutes consent. Unnsteinsson claims that it does not, since it is particularly salient in the context that Lane does not want to marry Kent. So her confusion, claims Unnsteinsson, makes it that she cannot express consent, because she does not consent to marrying

¹⁴ Unnsteinsson uses a more complex example, but the same point is being made. See [155-156].

Kent, who is, after all, Superman. Again, I am not sure that this argument works. Consent is about the person next to you. Lane does have false beliefs about him, but that seems to be on a par with false beliefs that anyone may have towards their possible future partner. “I thought you were a different person” does not usually mean literally that the speaker had false identity beliefs; but it does express regret to having consented to marriage, because of false beliefs about the person, and thus makes it clear that consent did happen.

Suppose now that the name “Superman” features prominently in the ceremony. Suppose that Lane says “I consent to marrying Superman”. Does that present a problem? Again, I think not. Any hearer will correctly take her to be talking about the person next to her. The evidence provided is strong. Yes, her public refusal to Kent’s proposal does make it unclear that the marriage will work out, assuming she does find out the truth. But consent is being given, and the fact that she uses the name seems to make no difference.

One could reasonably disagree with this argument. Is the eventual regret a sign that consent was given, but the speaker is unhappy about it, or is it a sign that the speaker was never in a position to give consent, and are now regretting that turn of events? We could turn to the law here, but that would not settle the matter. Law is about being practical, and certain simplifying conventions are necessary in ways that our talk of consent need not agree with. It might be the case that other types of speech act would provide clarity here; I have not found anything that would satisfy all the parties to the dispute, but I am open to the possibility. Still, I take it that the argument, as presented, does not suffice to prove its point.¹⁵

4. Conclusion

We have looked at four arguments for the claim that separatory confusion makes edenic reference impossible. They were all designed in parallel to similar arguments for combinatory confusion. I have argued that this parallel fails consistently, and for similar

¹⁵ I thank Unnsteinsson for pointing out the complications here.

reasons: combinatory confused speakers can think about and refer to the things they are confused about, because their false identity beliefs, and their intention not to refer to the referent under some other guise, seem not to infect the work that their positive referential intention does. The remaining conclusion is that the intuition I expressed at the beginning remains the more plausible option: combinatory confusion can lead to a failure to refer; separatory confusion cannot.

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