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À Propos de Pierre, Does He . . . or Doesn't He?

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Six years after his landmark Princeton lectures on “Naming and Necessity”, Saul Kripke filled a much needed-to-be-filled gap with his landmark 1976 lecture on “A Puzzle about Belief”.¹ Kripke there defended Millianism against an oft-made but misplaced objection. Contrary to a common misconception, Kripke does not endorse Millianism—indeed, he adamantly asserted the denial of one of its consequences—but his defense is brilliantly forceful. Kripke hypothesized a normal French speaker, Pierre, who comes to speak English through immersion—and, as it happens, who scrupulously avoids contradicting himself. Unaware that the cities he calls ‘London’ and ‘*Londres*’ are one and the same, Pierre assents, reflectively and non-reticently, to ‘*Londres est jolie*’ but dissents from ‘London is pretty’, assenting instead to ‘London is not pretty’. Kripke asks, ‘Does Pierre believe that London is pretty?’ The Millian, such as myself, answers that Pierre unfortunately believes both that London is pretty and that it is not. The astute Millian concludes that Pierre even *knows* he believes both. How then to accommodate the fact that Pierre would never knowingly believe contradictory things?

In *Frege’s Puzzle* (Salmón 1986) and in “Being of Two Minds: Belief with Doubt” (Salmón 1995), I analyze the notion, *x believes p*, where *p* is a proposition, as

¹ Kripke (1979). See <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/05/03/fills-a-much-needed-gap-pt2/>.

B : $\exists g[x \text{ grasps } p \text{ by means of } g \ \& \ BEL(x, p, g)],$

where the variable 'g' ranges over something like ways of taking a proposition, or proposition guises, and *BEL* is a ternary relation of cognitive inward assent that a believer bears to a proposition by means of a guise. Analogous ternary relations are posited for certain other propositional attitudes, such as hope, wishing, and fear. I also analyze a notion, *x withholds believing p*:

WB : $\exists g[x \text{ grasps } p \text{ by means of } g \ \& \ \sim BEL(x, p, g)].$

One can withhold belief, in my sense, by disbelieving (believing the denial). Pierre both believes and withholds believing that London is pretty. Taking the proposition that London is pretty one way, *g*, Pierre believes it. Taking it another way, *g'*, he withholds belief—precisely by believing that London is not pretty, taking the negated proposition in a particular way, *Neg(g')*. Pierre is acquitted of irrationality because the guises through which he believes and withholds believing the same thing are distinct. We are acquitted of self-contradiction because *WB* is consistent with *B*.

Alas, the problem is not yet solved. Kripke suggested a way to fortify his puzzle. Suppose Pierre reflectively, non-reticently assents to '*Londres est jolie*', just as before, but now he neither assents to nor dissents from 'London is pretty', pleading ignorance. Asked 'Is London pretty?' he says he has no opinion, that he neither believes nor disbelieves. The grounds for saying that Pierre believes that London is pretty now seem exactly counterbalanced by grounds for saying he does not. Although one can both believe and withhold believing the same thing—as Pierre does—in the name of all that is decent, no one can both believe and not believe the same thing. If we say Pierre does not believe because he suspends judgment, how shall we express that he also believes? If we say he believes, how shall we express that he suspends judgment?²

² David Kaplan was first to urge the importance to belief attribution of suspension of judgment. See Kaplan (1971), at section XI, pp. 141–2. Kaplan's concern here is with suspension of judgment of *a, de re*, that it/they F (specifically, of Ortcutt that he is a spy); Kripke's concern is

Withheld belief, in my sense, is not to be confused with suspension of judgment, which is strictly a stronger notion. Yet it is still not so strong as to entail failure to believe:

SJ: $\exists g[x \text{ grasps } p \text{ by means of } g \ \& \ x \text{ grasps } \sim p \text{ by means of } \text{Neg}(g) \ \& \ \sim BEL(x, p, g) \ \& \ \sim BEL(x, \sim p, \text{Neg}(g))]$.

Crucially, *SJ* is—unlike failure to believe, $\sim B$ —perfectly compatible with *B*. One can suspend judgment concerning *p*, in my sense, while also believing *p*. Pierre does both.³

Belief attributions do not designate any particular way of taking the proposition—any particular guise—nor do guises figure in the semantic content. Guises do not play the semantic role of a Fregean *Sinn* or a Millian connotation. Nor do they play the semantic role of a Fregean *Bedeutung* or a Millian denotation. But belief attributions do traffic in guises, by existentially generalizing over them. Some philosophers of cognition oppose any involvement in guises, however honorably intended. They seek instead a pure “referentialist” picture, one that says yes to denotations but, unlike Mill, just says no to connotations, and even to utterly non-semantic guises.

Pierre knows that he believes that London is pretty, but he also sincerely says in English that he does not. Does the latter fact perhaps provide a way to evade guises?

In Crawford (2004), Sean Crawford proposes that my notion *WB* be replaced by a notion of second-order belief, which is also compatible with believing but which evidently avoids guises and *BEL* altogether, at least if believing does:

$B \sim B$: x believes that $\sim(x$ believes $p)$.

Crawford claims to reject my notion of withheld belief. It might be more accurate, however, to say instead that Crawford proposes an alternative

with *de dicto* suspension of judgment concerning whether *Fa* (specifically, whether London is pretty). From the perspective of Millianism, these are two sides of the same coin, a distinction without a difference.

³ Cf. Salmón (1986), pp. 111, 172n1.

analysis of the relevant notion in terms of second-order belief in lieu of *BEL*. Suspension of judgment concerning p could then be analyzed thus:

x believes that $\sim(x$ believes $p)$ & x believes that $\sim(x$ believes $\sim p)$.⁴

In this way, 'Ralph suspends judgment concerning whether Ortcutt is a spy' can be true despite Ralph's also believing of Ortcutt as *the man in the brown hat*, that he is a spy,⁵ and 'Pierre suspends judgment concerning whether London is pretty' can be true despite Pierre's remaining steadfast that *Londres* is pretty.⁶

One positive feature of Crawford's clever proposal is that it easily extends to notions of withheld wishing, withheld hoping, withheld fearing, and so on, by assigning pride of place to meta-belief. One can say, for example, that x withholds hope from p iff x believes that $\sim(x$ hopes $p)$. One can also say that x suspends hope concerning p iff: (x withholds hope from p) & (x withholds hope from $\sim p$).

On the other side, I contend against Crawford that withheld belief is no more a matter of one's beliefs about one's beliefs than ordinary belief is. Typically, if x believes p then x believes that x believes p , but this is not invariably true. In any case, as will become clear presently, it is possible for x to believe mistakenly that x believes p . The slippage between first-order and second-order belief points to a fundamental flaw in Crawford's attempt to avoid guises.

I can accept that Crawford's preferred notion $B\sim B$ is extensionally equivalent to WB if, but only if, the following biconditional obtains:

$$WB \leftrightarrow B\sim B.$$

There's the rub. I flatly reject the right-to-left conditional, $B\sim B \rightarrow WB$. For $B\sim B$ will be true by my lights if x mistakenly believes *that person*

⁴ This is significantly different from the analysis Crawford actually provides, and also from the one I proposed in "Being of Two Minds". Arguably, these differences are merely a matter of terminology.

⁵ See Quine (1971), and n. 3 above.

⁶ Kripke (1979), at p. 258. See also my Salmón (1998), especially at pp. 108–10. Both this article and "Being of Two Minds" are reprinted in Salmón (2007).

[pointing to an image in a large, wall-size mirror] is not themselves but someone else altogether, while (for whatever reason) x also mistakenly believes that *that person* [same mirror image] does not believe p . This can occur even when x does not withhold belief from p , in the relevant sense.

This consideration also shows that $B\sim B$ is in fact inadequate to Crawford's objective of capturing the cognitive state of the believer who also withholds belief. Furthermore, it is difficult to see how $B\sim B$ could be strengthened sufficiently without in the end appealing to something along the lines of a guise. In particular, Héctor-Neri Castañeda's construction

x believes that *they themselves* do not believe p

(or ' x believes that they* do not believe p ') evidently attributes a second-order belief by means of a first-person, *de se* guise.⁷

Since the relevant notion of withheld belief evidently unavoidably invokes guises, the sort of consideration raised here is not merely a peripheral point but in fact central to the main issue at hand. Guises are not semantic values of belief attributions, but they are something.^{8,9}

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⁷ Castañeda's original "quasi-indexical" constructions are 'he himself' and 'he*'.

⁸ The criticism of Crawford presented here is different from those presented in a couple of insightful essays: Philip Atkins (2017), at pp. 3032–5; and Chris Tillman (2005).

⁹ I am grateful to Teresa Robertson Ishii for discussion, and to Clairol for their catchphrase.

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