



A P O R I A

A STUDENT JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

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The *Aporia* staff is especially grateful to those who support makes this journal possible. Special thanks go to Professor Dennis Rasmussen, chair of the Department of Philosophy, Professor David Jensen, our faculty advisor, and to Linda Hunter Adams of the Humanities Publication Center. *Aporia* is funded by a generous contribution from the David H. Yarn Endowment. Those wishing to contribute to this fund may do so by contacting the BYU Department of Philosophy.

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A Puzzle about Kripke's Puzzle

D. R. FOSTER

Saul Kripke's theory of "rigid designation" (1980)¹ sparked a series of interlocking debates in semantics and metaphysics centered around the relationship between proper names and their referents. Kripke argues for the "Millian" view, put forward in Mill's *A System of Logic*, that proper names are causally, necessarily, and simply linked to their referents. This view is in contravention with the Fregean view, expressed by Russell in "On Denoting," that names are mere abbreviated descriptions—intentional sets that pick out referents only indirectly. Proponents of the Frege-Russell theory argue, contra Kripke, that rigid designation results in failures of substitutivity, i.e. that the substitution of distinct but coextensive proper names fail to preserve truth in certain propositions. In response, Kripke's 1979 "A Puzzle about Belief" advances, appropriately, a "puzzle about belief" that he claims illustrates that the same failures of substitutivity arise irrespective of Millian or Fregean-Russellian commitments. Kripke's puzzle is thus meant to show that the failure of substitutivity cannot count as evidence either for one theory or the other. Below, I argue that Kripke's puzzle fails to stalemate the Millian-Russellian debate. I begin by rehearsing the relevant arguments in

¹ Kripke's 1980 work *Naming and Necessity* will be referred to throughout this paper as *NN*; his 1979 "A Puzzle about Belief" will be called "A Puzzle."

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greater detail, and I follow by offering a substantive analysis of Kripke's puzzle and others like it. I attempt to undermine Kripke-style puzzles by showing certain flaws in their conceptual and pragmatic structure. Namely, I argue that they are constructed in a way that obfuscates potential practical solutions and ultimately rely on a mistaken conception of object-individuation. When stripped of these flaws, it is unclear that Kripke-style puzzles are really puzzles at all.

The Fregean-Russellian description theory holds that speakers attach to typical uses of a proper name "some property (or conjunction of properties) which determines its referent as the unique thing fulfilling the associated property (or properties). This property constitutes the 'sense' of the name" ("A Puzzle" 103). Thus, differing descriptions of Aristotle uttered by different speakers, e.g., "student of Plato," or "Stagirite philosopher," will have different senses or intentional meanings but will still be coextensive, that is, have the same referent. Some proponents of the Frege-Russell view supplement this with the further claim that, in order to refer, descriptions must satisfy several of an overlapping stock or "cluster" of properties whose referent is determined by "community-wide beliefs" (ibid.).

The extant alternative to the Frege-Russell framework is the theory of (Kripke's) Mill that a name is *simply* a name. "It *simply* refers to its bearer...[U]nlike a definite description, a name does not describe its bearer as possessing any special identifying properties" ("A Puzzle" 103). The Millian says that "the linguistic function of a proper name is completely exhausted by the fact that it names its bearer." So, "Cicero was lazy" has the same truth-value as "Tully was lazy," *and* both express the same proposition. This holds modally as well. If "Tully was *p*" expresses a necessary truth, so does "Cicero was *p*" ("A Puzzle" 104). Definite descriptions do not have this feature. The proposition "the smallest even number is prime" expresses a necessary truth, but the proposition "Jones's favorite number is prime"—even when Jones favorite number is the smallest even number—does *not* express necessity but a contingently true proposition ("A Puzzle" 105).

The classic Fregean response argues that it is false that proper names preserve truth. The proposition "Hesperus is Hesperus," for instance, expresses a necessary and trivial truth while the proposition "Hesperus is Phosphorous" expresses an empirical discovery ("A Puzzle" 106–7). Salmon and Kripke both advance arguments that suggest these

instances of the “failure of substitutivity” do not amount to conclusive evidence either for or against the Millian theory. Salmon’s argument is less elaborate than Kripke’s, and its framework is easier to articulate. Therefore, I will begin by briefly outlining Salmon’s argument, and I will follow by exploring Kripke’s “puzzle about belief.”

The central thesis of Salmon’s paper, “How to Become a Millian Heir,” is that “ordinary proper names, demonstratives, other single-word indexicals or pronouns (such as ‘he’), and other simple singular terms are, in a given possible context of use, Russellian ‘genuine names in the strict logical sense.’” This is to say, in Salmon’s echoing of the Millian theory, “that the contribution made by an ordinary proper name or other simple singular term, to securing the information content of, or the proposition expressed by, declarative sentences (with respect to a given possible context of use) in which the term occurs...is just the referent of the term, or the bearer of the name (with respect to that context of use)” (“How to Become a Millian Heir” 211).²

Salmon asks us to consider the argument presupposed by the Hesperus/Phosphorus case:

- (1) $(x)[x = \text{the planet Venus} \ \& \ \text{Jones believes that } x \text{ is a star}]$

Expressed in colloquial English as:

- (2) Jones believes of the planet Venus that it is a star.

Now, (1) is true if and only if its component open sentence:

- (3) Jones believes that x is a star

is true under the assignment of the planet Venus as the value for the variable “ x .”

² Further references to Salmon’s work will simply use “Salmon” followed by the page number that is cited.

Similarly, (2) is true if and only if its component sentence:

(4) Jones believes that it is a star

is true under the anaphoric³ assignment of Venus as referent for the pronoun “it.”

This illustrates quite clearly that “the fundamental semantic characteristic of a variable with an assigned value, or of a pronoun with a particular referent, is precisely that its information value is just its referent” (Salmon 212–13). According to Salmon, there is a derivative relation in language between these open variables/pronouns and proper names—the latter are special restrictions of the former. Once a variable is assigned a particular value, it behaves, for all relevant purposes, as a constant. So, the open sentence (3), under the assignment of “Venus” as the value of “x,” is semantically equivalent to (contains the same singular proposition as) the closed sentence “Jones believes *a* is a star” where “*a*” is an individual constant that refers to Venus. Salmon argues that the proper names of ordinary language are nothing more than “invariable variables,” variables whose domains are restricted maximally, that is, restricted to one value (Salmon 214–15). If proper names and other singular indexical terms are indeed the constants of natural language—that is, if they can be treated as linguistic variables ranging over a domain containing exactly one value—then this consideration seems to favor the Millian theory because it would seem that “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” are two one-value variables that range over the same maximally restricted domain.

Salmon shows how this might happen even in a language stipulated to be Millian. In the hypothetical language, “Schmesperus” and “Schmosphorus” are stipulated to be two individual constants, the former taking as its only value the first heavenly body visible at dusk and the latter taking as its only value the first heavenly body to be visible at dawn. Some speakers of the language (the astronomers) know that “Schmesperus” and “Schmosphorus” are coextensive and thus perfectly

³ Here “anaphoric” describes the linguistic use in a sentence of one item to refer to another such as “her” refers to “Jill” in the sentence “Jill asked Tom to get her coat.”

synonymous (on the Millian account). That is, they are two constants ranging over the same maximally-restricted domain. But supposing the non-astronomer Jones fails to recognize the Millian coextensive synonymy, he may well assent to propositions about Schmesperus but refuse to assent to substitution instances containing Schmosphorus. Here the astronomers experience the same feelings of invalidity or contradiction in their ascription to Jones of the beliefs "Jones believes of Schmesperus that *p*" and "Jones believes of Schmosphorus that *p*," even though by fiat the language is Millian.

Salmon's argument relies on the same kind of reasoning that Kripke uses in *Naming and Necessity* to argue for a separation of the metaphysical from the epistemic question about the Hesperus/Phosphorus distinction. According to Kripke, "Hesperus is Phosphorous" is metaphysically necessary even if men do not believe it without empirical evidence" (NN 107). Kripke relies implicitly on this argument to construct the puzzle about beliefs set forth below. But Forbes' argument suggests that, in the context of belief descriptions, both Kripke and Salmon might be wrong in focusing on *what* the *ascribed* believes instead of on *how* the *ascriber* "in the know" should *evaluate the ascriber's beliefs*. But before I can discuss Forbes, I need to set out Kripke's puzzle.

Imagine Pierre, a monolingual French-speaker living in France, who hears about London's beauty and therefore assents to the sentence (in French):

Londres est jolie.

After a series of unfortunate events, he emigrates to London, where he learns English "directly" and, after observing his dismal surroundings, comes to assent to the sentence (in English):

London is not pretty

Without, of course, realizing that London and *Londres* are coextensive (have the same referent), he does not disavow his earlier belief that "*Londres est jolie.*" The puzzle is whether or not Pierre believes that London is pretty.

The task of Kripke's puzzle in defending his Millian view of proper names is to show that the same types of troubles that Fregeans blame on

the failure of substitutivity arise using much weaker suppositions. Indeed, Kripke's argument relies on two seemingly non-controversial principles:

Disquotational Principle: "If a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely assents to 'p,' then he believes that p" ("A Puzzle" 112–13).

Principle of Translation: "If a sentence of one language expresses a truth in that language, then any translation of it into another language also expresses a truth (in that other language)" ("A Puzzle" 114).

It is worth noting now that a similar puzzle, using only the disquotational principle, may arise with homophonic words in English alone. That is, a native monolingual speaker might fail to realize the coextension of a singular name "Paderewski" when he hears it in two different contexts and thus form seemingly paradoxical beliefs about Paderewski. I discuss the homophonic version later in relation to Forbes' argument. For the time I will restrict myself to considering Pierre's case.

Kripke claims that there are only four possibilities for characterizing Pierre while he is in London: "(a) that at that time we no longer respect his French utterance (*Londres est jolie*), that is we no longer ascribe to him the corresponding belief; (b) that we do not respect his English utterance (or lack of utterance); (c) that we respect neither; (d) that we respect both. Each possibility seems to lead us to say something either plainly false or even downright contradictory" ("A Puzzle" 123).

There are several intuitive ways out of the logical traps that these four possible responses cause. We might first want to say (it might be more *reasonable* to say) that what Pierre *really* believes is a conditional which takes as its antecedent the set of propositions *A*, which Pierre takes to describe a pretty city and which Pierre has heard in relation to *Londres*. So, Pierre believes that "if *A* is true of *Londres*, then *Londres* is pretty." Then we can see Pierre's belief as an open question; his knowledge of London does not, on internal epistemic grounds, give him reason to affirm the antecedent of his conditional belief. But let's take Kripke at his word and assume that Pierre believes the bold declarative that "*Londres est jolie*."

It might still be the case that, in this sentence, *Londres* has either an indeterminate referent or, if you like, refers *only* to a set of propositions (the set the French-speaking Pierre knows about *Londres*) which, to Pierre's beliefs, describe *a* pretty city and not to a concrete, particular London. We suppose this instead of begging any questions about the truth of the "rigid designator" theory of names that Kripke advocates. Notice that, unlike Pierre's French utterance in the sentence "London is not pretty," London refers to the contents of Pierre's sense data (or propositions which express the content of Pierre's sense data), i.e., what he has seen, felt, smelled, etc. of his immediate environment, which English speakers call "London." On an account that remains agnostic about rigid designators, it thus seems that "London" and "*Londres*" have not just different senses but *different referents*. One refers to a set of propositions *as* propositions, the other at least to a set of propositions as the expressers of the contents of sense impressions. This reading, I argue, gives us warrant to disambiguate Pierre's beliefs about London. Take the following example.

Imagine I told Pierre, in French, "Saddam Hussein is a secular modernist who is good for the French economy." Pierre, trusting my report, now sincerely believes that "Saddam Hussein is good." Pierre then travels to Iraq and witnesses the Butcher of Baghdad commit many different types of improprieties and atrocities. He thus concludes that the Butcher of Baghdad is bad and would assent to the sentence "The Butcher of Baghdad is bad." Some time later, after Hussein's capture, Pierre is called as a material witness to testify at the war crimes trial. He testifies that "Saddam Hussein is good." The prosecutor asks Pierre on what grounds he believes this. Pierre responds that it came from a trusted report that described a man who is a secular modernist and good for the French economy. Pierre thus believes that if Saddam Hussein is this man, then Saddam Hussein is good. Since he trusts my report (the antecedent), he believes the consequent. The prosecutor, playing things close to the vest, then asks Pierre to assent to the sentence "The Butcher of Baghdad is bad," which Pierre enthusiastically and sincerely does. When pressed on his assent, Pierre describes the atrocities and improprieties he witnessed of a man called the "Butcher of Baghdad" in Iraq.

Which testimony will the jury take to heart, provided they know that Saddam Hussein is the Butcher of Baghdad? It seems quite clear that they will accept Pierre's latter testimony as true and disregard the former.

The “Butcher of Baghdad” testimony is an eyewitness account. The “Saddam Hussein” testimony is classic hearsay!

But again, while this example illustrates another way in which the damage of Kripke’s puzzle might be contained and suggests possible interpretations of exactly what it is Pierre believes thus undermining the force of Kripke’s argument, it nevertheless does not address Kripke in his own terms. Thus, I will now modify Kripke’s example in such a way that I believe allows it to retain all its essential features but nevertheless reveals something suspect about its structure.

Suppose Pierre arrives in the United Kingdom from France, makes his way to the outskirts of London, and makes his home. He learns English in the way described by Kripke and forms the belief that “London is not pretty.” By chance, he then stumbles across a community of French-speakers who live in a fairly self-contained community within London, a community marked by expansive flats, beautiful architecture, lush greenery, striking monuments, and a vibrant nightlife. The community welcomes Pierre, and he makes his new home with one of the French residents. As native speakers of French, of course, the inhabitants of the neighborhood call the place they live “*Londres*,” and all the signs in the neighborhood say the same. “Finally,” exclaims Pierre. “I have found *Londres*. *Londres* is pretty. I will never go back to London again!”

But does Pierre here hold contradictory beliefs? It seems doubtful. The reason it is doubtful is that the question is raised: what thing(s), exactly, do London and *Londres* name? Do they name a unitary whole or individual? Or do they name complexes? It seems that if we look at a bare ontology that all London and *Londres* name is a contingently, territorially defined region of space.

The difficulty posed to Kripke’s puzzle by these considerations is exemplified in yet another hypothetical. Suppose I discover some ancient ruins, and I name them “Kripketown.” As the discoverer, I stipulate that “Kripketown” is to name some spatial region. I then walk about Kripketown and come across a pretty statue. I point to the statue (and the spatial region immediately around it, a region subsumed by the region named “Kripketown”), and I say “Kripketown is pretty” thus expressing my belief that Kripketown is indeed pretty. As I walk along some more, I see an old slum. I point to that sub-region and say “Kripketown is not pretty.” According to our stipulations, it does not seem that I have expressed inconsistent beliefs. What I have expressed is an analogue of

one of the four options delineated by Kripke for dealing with Pierre's utterances. As regards Kripketown, I have the belief that Kripketown is *both pretty and not pretty*. *But this is a consistent belief because of the kind of thing Kripketown is*. In fact, I need not even rely on the territorial surface area of Kripketown to generate a consistent belief like this one. I could swap the breadth dimension for the depth dimension and suppose that I found the basement of a building in Kripketown to be ugly, while I found a spot on the fifth-level of the same building, *directly above the ugly spot*, to be pretty.

We run into the same kinds of epistemic troubles with beliefs about things that are *abstract* complexes, as in the case of "isms," like "materialism" or "liberalism." Speaking of "isms," Lovejoy notes that "these trouble-breeding and usually thought-obscuring terms . . . are names of complexes. . . . They stand, as a rule, not for one doctrine, but for several distinct and often conflicting doctrines held by different individuals or groups to whose way of thinking these appellations have been applied" (Lovejoy 5). Take, for example, the doctrine of individualism. If what Lovejoy says is true—if a general inclination toward one of several possible doctrines (or even one or several ideas within said doctrine), which, by reasonable intersubjective consensus, has been placed under the historical and conceptual blanket of "individualism" is sufficient to call oneself an individualist and assent to the proposition "I believe in individualism"—then we have set ourselves up for a great deal of Kripke-style puzzles about belief. Suppose Pierre assents to propositions about the goodness or rightness of *individualisme* while in France but is disgusted by what he is told are expressions of *individualism* in London and thus withholds assent for propositions about the rightness or goodness of individualism. Assuming the principle of translation, it seems we have generated a puzzle about Pierre's belief in individualism. But of course we have not. Both of Pierre's beliefs are valid, so long as they both stand in relation to doctrines or ideas that meet intersubjectively, which is the determined criterion for membership in the "individualism" set. The *very criterion* for subsumption under the banner of individualism is the problem. It allows Pierre to hold inconsistent beliefs about a *complex* concurrently because they allow as *components* objects or concepts with inconsistent properties (incidentally, there may be some merit to viewing this as a sort of special case of Wittgenstein's family-resemblance problem). Pierre's contradictory beliefs may well pass quietly in the night, so long as he is never forced to

come to terms with the translatability of individualism and *individualisme* and therefore with the epistemic puzzle about beliefs in complexes.

Supposing my arguments suffice to show the potential flaws in the structure of Kripke's place-name example, I'll move on to Forbes' analysis of Kripke's homophonic person-name example with an aim to show how principles about beliefs in complexes can be of some assistance here as well. To reiterate the homophonic argument:⁴ Peter may learn the name "Paderewski" with an identification of the person named as a famous pianist, and we can infer that

(18) Peter believes that Paderewski had musical talent.

Later, in a different circle, Peter learns of someone called "Paderewski" who was a Polish prime minister and then assents to "Paderewski had no musical talent." Should we infer that:

(19) Peter believes that Paderewski had no musical talent

Or should we not?

Forbes claims that what this example illustrates is "not a puzzle about belief but a quandary about belief *ascription*: how should someone who only has one name with a single sense express the facts about Peter's beliefs?" One problem is that if we assert both (18) and (19), we make Peter's beliefs *sound* contradictory though we know that, to Peter, they are not (for reasons similar to the ones I have given above). But if we assert both (18) and:

(20) Peter does not believe Paderewski had musical talent.

"We seem to involve *ourselves* in a contradiction. On the other hand, aren't (18) and (20) both true?" (Salmon 557–58).

⁴ The following is a condensed excerpt from Salmon.

According to Forbes, the correct analysis of this sequence is to give different labels to (18) and (19) corresponding to Peter's distinct "ways of thinking" of Paderewski. It is suggested that we add qualifying predicates to our belief ascriptions to the effect that "Peter believes Paderewski-the-pianist had musical talent" and "Peter believed Paderewski-the-statesman had no musical talent" correspond to different "dossiers" possessed by Peter. But these ascriptions are not conclusions about Peter's beliefs *themselves*. Rather, they are qualifications necessary for the *ascriber* to overcome the "expressive inadequacy" of the language available to someone who "knows the facts" about Paderewski. The effect of augmenting one's language by adding the two names "Paderewski the pianist" and "Paderewski the Prime Minister" is to adjust the linguistic counterpart relation: one of Peter's names "Paderewski" becomes the linguistic counterpart of the ascriber's "Paderewski the pianist" and the other the linguistic counterpart of "Paderewski the Prime Minister." Knowing the counterparts thus gives the ascriber a way of selecting the dossier possessed by Peter which is relevant to evaluating a given belief ascriptions.

If Forbes' ascriber-side analysis is correct, it gives support to my contention that what Pierre/Peter *name* as the objects of their beliefs are not unitary individuals at all but at best physical or conceptual "cuts" of real or abstract objects, which may also be complexes. Again, suppose Peter assents to belief propositions about Complex 1 (C1) that we define, independently of Peter and by intersubjective consensus, as containing components *F* and *G*. Suppose further that component *F* has the properties x, y, z , while component *G* has the properties $y, q, \sim x$. Notice that some properties are repeated (y) and that component *G* has property $\sim x$, the negation (the contrary) of a property held by component *F*. This contradiction is not a problem for Peter in his praxis so long as he is not called upon to affirm or negate x . Assuming he is not, C1 contains what we might call a *passive contradiction*. Assuming, however, that Peter is called on to affirm or negate x , he is faced with an *active contradiction*—at least in theory. Pragmatically, Peter may (depending on his inclination) simply not choose effectively nullifying his belief in Complex one. He may also choose freely or randomly, in effect accessing one component without reference to the other. (Notice that in either case he has the option of affirming an existing belief. This may be preferable insofar as there is general agreement that human beings tend to prefer truth to falsity and affirmation to negation.)

What should be clear from such an analysis is that what Kripke-style puzzles do is merely add another obstacle for Pierre/Peter's discovery of the contradictions contained in beliefs about certain complexes. In the bilingual examples, this obstacle comes in the form of Pierre's contingent lack of command of a certain translational formula that holds between London and *Londres*. In the monolingual examples, the obstacle is instead a consequence of Peter generalizing, according to some relatively subjective calculus, that two handfuls of known properties ascribed to "Paderewski" are unlikely to be coextensive—that is, they are unlikely to be possessed by a selfsame Paderewski. But Kripke and other Millians rely on these contingencies of Pierre/Peter's contextual knowledge to generate puzzles about belief rather than breaking down what it is about the objects of belief themselves that makes them so sensitive to context. This is no doubt because Kripke and his supporters find it difficult not to beg questions about what it means for a name to refer in the first place. On the Kripkean view, proper names refer to something like Aristotelian substance—unitary, whole, and indivisible.⁵ But designation, even proper name designation, is often a lot messier than this. Absent sense data in the form of ostensive reference to a "Paderewski substance" (i.e., absent someone pointing to Paderewski), Peter is left to form beliefs on the basis of indefinite descriptions regardless of which metaphysic of proper name designation turns out to be the right one. It is even harder to argue for substance-hood and thus for rigid-designation in the case of something like a city, which is both obviously heterogenous and contingently delimited. So too with concept names like "individualism."⁶ It is likely that such names will often refer only arbitrarily, contingently, ambiguously, vaguely, and pragmatically. So, while there may be independently compelling reasons to consider human beings as unitary wholes or substances, we might be better off dismissing monolithic concepts of "London" and "individualism" as superficial and problematic. In other words, while Kripke's monolingual puzzle leaves Peter with the wrong idea about Paderewski, his bilingual puzzle might actually do Pierre a favor by indirectly pointing to the source of

⁵ See Aristotle's *Categories* and *Metaphysics*. Cf. David Wiggins, *Sameness and Substance Renewed*. Also, my own "Are There Aristotelian Substances?"

⁶ We might even think of "Individualism" with a capital "I" as a kind of proper name for a more or less canonized set of doctrines.

his contradictory beliefs—in these cases, the very nature of the referents. Thus, what Kripke gives us is not a puzzle about belief but, as Forbes rightly concludes, a puzzle about belief ascription—and worse yet a puzzle inextricably linked to the inadequacies of the very theory of reference Kripke seeks to defend in presenting it.

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