

Fregean problems with attitude ascriptions

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Fregeans focus on problems Russellians face in giving a treatment of propositional attitude ascriptions which squares with our intuitions about the truth conditions of various sentences. But Fregeans also face some problems with sentences of this kind.

1 Quantifying in

Sentences are common in which one apparently quantifies into the scope of a propositional attitude verb. For example,

Someone on Notre Dame's faculty is such that I believe that he's a spy.

This clearly differs in meaning from

I believe that someone on Notre Dame's faculty is a spy.

The former but not the latter requires that my belief be *of* a particular person; it is a *de* rebelief. The natural analysis of the quantification in the former is

$\exists x (x \text{ is on Notre Dame's faculty} \ \& \ \text{I believe: } x \text{ is a spy})$

Here we have a quantifier with wide scope over the sentence which apparently binds one variable within, and one variable outside of, the propositional attitude verb.

The standard semantics for the existential quantifier says that a formula $\exists x\phi x$ is true iff there's some object o in the domain such that ϕx is true relative to an assignment of o to x . Russellianism is able to respect this rule, and give the above analysis a face-value reading: it is true iff there's some object o such that o is on Notre Dame's faculty, and I believe the proposition which attributes spy-hood to o .

The Fregean, on the other hand, cannot take this formula at face value. There is no such thing as "the proposition which attributes spy-hood to o ", since objects cannot be constituents of Fregean propositions. There are, rather, indefinitely many propositions which attribute spy-hood to o under some mode of presentation or other. For this reason, the formula

$\exists x (x \text{ is on Notre Dame's faculty} \ \& \ \text{I believe: } x \text{ is a spy})$

is not one that the Fregean can accept as intelligible, if ‘ x ’ is a standard variable over objects, rather than over Fregean senses. (And it can’t be a variable over Fregean senses, since there are no Fregean senses on Notre Dame’s faculty.) The standard Fregean reinterpretation will be some version of the following, where ‘ α ’ is a variable over Fregean senses:

$\exists x (x \text{ is on Notre Dame's faculty} \ \& \ \exists \alpha (R(x, \alpha) \ \& \ \text{I believe: } \alpha \text{ is a spy}))$

Intuitively: there is someone on ND’s faculty, and there’s some mode of presentation of that person such that I believe a proposition whose content is that mode of presentation + the sense of ‘is a spy.’

The clear problem here is that we need to spell out some very strong conditions on R . Otherwise, the worry is that the following argument will end up valid:

1. The spy on Notre Dame’s faculty is the most sneaky person on the faculty.
 2. I believe that the most sneaky person on the faculty is a spy.
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- C. There is someone on Notre Dame’s faculty such that I believe that he’s a spy.

But this argument should clearly not be valid. I might believe that the most sneaky person on the faculty is a spy without having any idea who that person is.

For an extended discussion of possible Fregean solutions to this problem, see David Kaplan’s paper, ‘Quantifying in.’ In general, quantifying into belief contexts does not seem problematic — so it is worrying that Fregeanism makes it seem as though it is.

2 Which sense?

A further problem is very simple. Suppose that I say:

Aristotle believed that Plato was pretty smart.

Then I am attributing to Aristotle a belief whose content includes some mode of presentation of Plato, along with whatever sense is expressed by ‘pretty smart.’ Let’s suppose that what I say is true. Then it must be the case that Aristotle had thoughts about Plato under some mode of presentation which is also the mode of presentation corresponding to my term ‘Plato.’ But what are the odds of that? Remember how finely individuated Fregean modes of presentation are; presumably ‘Ted Warfield’ and ‘Fritz Warfield’ have different senses for me. And ‘Plato’, out of my mouth, is more similar in sense than that to some mode of presentation under which Aristotle thought about Plato? It seems

as though Fregeanism will have the opposite vice of Russellianism: if Russellianism intuitively licenses the truth of too many attitude ascriptions, Fregeanism will license the truth of too few.

(One suspects that there is not more concern about this problem only because we've been told too little about Fregean senses to generate more specific counterexamples.)

The Fregean can respond by relaxing the conditions on reporting the thoughts of others — maybe it is enough for the truth of the ascription if the sense expressed by 'Plato' out of my mouth is 'close enough' to one of Aristotle's modes of presentation of Plato. But this is a dangerous move for the Fregean to make.

Are the senses I attach to 'Fritz Warfield' and 'Ted Warfield' also close enough? If so, then imagine that someone says to me 'I didn't know that Fritz Warfield was Ted Warfield'. Presumably I can report what they say by saying to someone else:

So-and-so didn't know that Ted Warfield was Fritz Warfield.

but then, if the senses I attach to these two names are 'close enough', it is also true for me to say

So-and-so didn't know that Fritz Warfield was Fritz Warfield.

But the view that this expresses a truth in such a situation is what was supposed to be so bad about Russellianism.

For a good discussion of these two problems, see Chapter 9 of Nathan Salmon's *Frege's Puzzle*.