Fregeanism about the contents of thought

So the contents of perceptual experiences are Russellian propositions. To turn this conclusion into an argument for nonconceptualism, what we need is an argument for the claim that the contents of belief and thought are something else — for example, Fregean propositions.

Two reasons to be initially skeptical: (i) transitions between experiences and beliefs; (ii) metaphysical parsimony.

The central arguments in favor of Fregean views of the content of experience are the various versions of Frege's puzzle. The simplest version of the argument is that, whatever else we might think about names, our view of the meanings of names had better explain the distinction between trivial, uninformative identities like

> Hesperus is Hesperus

and non-trivial, potentially informative identities like

> Hesperus is Phosporus.

But, given a plausible compositionality principle, we can't explain this difference if we take the meanings of simple names to be the object for which they stand. Hence, instead, we must take the meaning of a name to be a mode of presentation of that object — i.e., a Fregean sense.

Anti-Millianism vs. Fregeanism; Kripke's arguments as a possible reason to prefer the latter to the former.

It's important to first be clear about how the Fregean aims to solve Frege's puzzle. The basic idea is that we explain the difference between our two identity sentences by, first, postulating the existence of distinct entities — the senses of the two names — and, second, claiming that the informativeness (or lack thereof) of sentences is to be explained by reference to entities of this sort.

An initial worry is that this explanation will be an empty one — a "virtus dormativa" explanation. If we explain differences in informativeness via postulation of certain entities, and are given no more information about these entities than that they explain differences in informativeness, then we'll have redescribed the problem rather than solved it. One can't explain some semantic phenomenon by, first postulating a semantic property of the

relevant expressions and, second, defining that property in terms of the phenomenon to be explained.

To assuage this sort of worry, Fregeans need to say more about the posulated entities — about senses. One way to do this would be to give conditions (not themselves given in terms of the informativeness of sentences) under which expressions have the same, or different, sense. A standard statement of sufficient conditions for difference in sense of lingusitic expressions goes along the following lines:[1]

> [FC] e and e* differ in sense if there is a pair of sentences S and S* which
> differ only in the substitution of e and e* which are such that a subject
> who understood both could rationally doubt (in the same context)
> whether they have the same truth-value.

One way to bring out the problems with [FC] is to begin with one of the instances of Frege's puzzle discussed by Kripke in "A Puzzle About Belief." There Kripke discusses the example of Peter, who hears the name "Paderewski" on two different occasions, once as a name for a famous pianist, and once as a name for a statesman. Peter, Kripke points out, may well wonder whether the two are the same, and hence may be unsure whether a token of "Paderewski is Paderewski" is true.

Such a use of "Paderewski is Paderewski" is plainly relevantly like the stock example of "Hesperus is Phosphorus" rather than the usual understanding of "Hesperus is Hesperus" — like the former, and unlike the latter, it is informative and non-trivial. Hence any satisfactory treatment of Frege's puzzle should handle Peter's use of "Paderewski is Paderewski" in the same way that it handles "Hesperus is Phosphorus." Can the Fregean who accepts [FC] do this?

In order to do so, we must think of the values of e and e* (and S and S*) as token expressions rather than expression types. After all, we need to get the result that, in the sentence in question, the first and second tokens of "Paderewski" differ in sense; and the only way to secure this result is to consider two different tokens of the sentence "Paderewski is Paderewski", and note that a subject who understood both could be unsure whether they have the same truth-value.

But here a problem with the interpetation of [FC] lurks just below the surface. Consider Peter's two tokens of "Paderewski." On the suggested understanding of [FC], in order to see whether these differ in sense, we have to consider whether any subject could consider a pair of sentences, one of which contains one of these tokens, and one of which contains the other, and be unsure whether those sentences had the same truth-value.

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[1] [cite frege letter]

But it's not clear that this even makes sense. When we consider other subjects' uses of "Paderewski", we are not considering the very token that Peter uttered on the day in question — we're considering other expressions of the same type.

This suggests that [FC] must be complicated to give us the desired result. When we consider other speakers' uses of "Paderewski", what we presumably want is that their tokens of this name bear some important relation to the tokens of the name which we wish to evaluate. That is, we want something like

> [FC*] Token expressions e and e* differ in sense if there is a pair of sentence tokens S and S* which differ only in the substitution of e' and e'* which are such that (i) R(e,e'), (ii) R(e*,e'*), and (iiii) a subject who understood both could rationally doubt (in the same context) whether they have the same truth-value.

The key question, then, is: what is the relevant relation R between expression tokens?

One natural option is something like the following:

> [i] A's use of e in C is R related to B's use of e* in C* iff A could use e, as he uses it in C, to truly report the claims that B makes with e*, as she uses it in C*.

This fits nicely with a naive semantics for attitude reports, according to which an ascription ⌜A said that S⌝ is true iff the content of S in the context of the ascription is the proposition which the reference of A said.

Unfortunately, though, [i] seems to lead to the result that just about any two tokens of a name differ in sense. Consider again Peter, and his uses of "Paderewski." Let's divide his uses of this name into pianist-tokenings and statesman-tokenings. Suppose that Paul is an ordinary, un-confused user of "Paderewski", who knows that Paderewski is both a pianist and a statesman. When Peter says, "Paderewski is my favorite pianist," it seems that Paul can truly report his speech by saying "Peter said that Paderewski is his favorite pianist" — and can do so even if he knows nothing about Peter's ignorance, and does not intend to use "Paderewski" in any special way. Hence Paul's tokenings of "Paderewski", given [i], are R-related to Peter's pianist-tokenings.

Further, when Peter says, "Paderewski is the very model of a corrupt politician", Paul can truly report his speech by saying "Peter said that Paderewski is the very model of a corrupt politician" — and, again, can do so without any special intentions or knowledge of Peter's ignorance. Hence, it seems, Paul's tokening of "Paderewski", given [i], is also R-related to Peter's statesman-tokenings.

But we already know (if the Fregean solution to Frege's puzzle is to be general) that Peter's can rationally be in doubt about whether an utterance of "Paderewski is

Paderewski" is true where one is a pianist-tokening and one a statesman-tokening, without being in doubt about whether "Paderewski is Paderewski" is true where both are pianist-tokenings. From this it follows, given [FC] and [i], that Paul's two tokenings of "Paderewski" differ in sense from each other.

Given that we can come up with Paderewski-type scenarios for virtually any name, it looks like this pattern of argument generalizes to the conclusion that distinct tokenings of a name for a single speaker will almost always differ in sense.

This is certainly surprising. But can the Fregean perhaps simply bite the bullet here, and accept this as a surprising consequence of her theory? Not without undermining the present argument for Fregeanism. After all, on that view, both "Hesperus is Hesperus" and "Hesperus is Phosphorus" would be identity sentences involving names with the same reference but distinct sense — which would leave the intuitive distinction between the sentences unexplained, and Frege's puzzle unsolved.

So definition [i] of R is not what we want; instead, we should want something much more demanding, to avoid consequences like Peter's and Paul's "Paderewski" tokenings being R-related. But it's not obvious how to do this. We could define stronger intrapersonal relations, as in

> [ii] A's use of e in C is R related to his later use of e* in C* iff A intends in
> C* to use e* with the same meaning he used e with in C.

But this will lead to the unwelcome result that "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" will have the same sense for speakers who are sure that the two names are coferential; they, after all, will not be unsure whether any sentences which differ only in the substitution of the two names have the same truth-value.

How else might we define R?

Brief discussion of some Millian solutions to Frege's puzzle.