Abstract: This paper considers the problem of intensional contexts that Saul Kripke presents in "A Puzzle about Belief." In an effort to resolve this seeming paradox, I identify an assumption that underlies most analyses of intensional contexts: that the content of the subject's belief is simply the proposition, and that statements containing co-referential names must somehow have different propositions. I argue against this assumption and propose a different understanding of the content of the subject's belief that allows that the propositions of sentences may be the same while maintaining that the content of someone's belief when these statements are put in intensional contexts may be different.

Kripke on Propositions in Intensional Contexts

In "A Puzzle about Belief," Kripke gives a notoriously difficult riddle that semantic theory has yet to solve. A simple version could go like this: Pierre lives in France and speaks only French. He hears frequently of a distant city that he (using only French, of course) calls *Londres*. He also hears frequently that this city is pretty, which (of course) he hears as "*Londres est jolie*". Hearing this frequently enough, he begins to believe it, and eventually starts to say to his neighbors, "*Londres est jolie*." Though Pierre doesn't know it, English speakers would report this belief by saying, "Pierre believes that London is pretty," and most of us would agree that in doing so we have accurately reported his beliefs. Later, after years of living in France, holding this belief, Pierre begins to feel adventurous and impulsively moves away from France. Not knowing where he's going, he eventually ends up in England. He ends up in an ugly part of London. Once he has learned some basic English, he begins to hear people complain about the ugliness of their city, which they call London. Of course, he hears this as "London is not pretty." Having heard this many times, and seeing the ugly city around him, he comes to believe

it, and starts to say to his neighbors, "London is not pretty." We would report this by saying,

'Pierre believes that London is not pretty," and we would feel that we have accurately reported

his beliefs by doing so. This, of course, leaves us with the contradiction that Pierre both does

believe that London is pretty and does not believe that London is pretty, and he seems perfectly

justified in having these beliefs. There is no logic that could tell him that one of these beliefs

must be wrong; in fact, he would be committing a fallacy if he concluded that one of them must

be wrong!

Pierre's error (if there is one) is that he drew conclusions using names, which

metaphysically bring the object to which they refer into the proposition, without having complete

knowledge of those objects. If I can believe one proposition containing a name, how can I not

believe another proposition with a different name for the same object? In Pierre's case, what

happened is clear: he did not know fully what either the name "*Londres"* or the name "London"

referred to. But if the only linguistic function of a name is to bring its object into the

proposition, then whether Pierre uses "*Londres"* or "London," he is, without knowing it,

bringing the exact same object into the proposition. The question generally asked when dealing

with puzzles about intensional contexts is, how can *"Londres est jolie"* and "London is pretty"

be different propositions? It is assumed that, in an intensional context, the content of the

subject's belief is simply the proposition, and that statements containing co-referential names

must somehow have different propositions; how else could I believe the one and not the other?

After considering more introductory matters, I will argue against this assumption and propose a

way that these epistemological differences can be maintained while still conceding that the

proposition of such sentences may be the same.

I. Theories of Reference and the Puzzle

At first glance, it seems that this puzzle would lend itself to a descriptivist theory of names. However, as Kripke points out, even a complete description of London in each language fails because it contains the same ambiguity. If Pierre defines "*Londres*" as "*la capitale de l'Angliterre*," he still may believe that England is a different country than "*l'Angliterre*." But really the point of Kripke's criticism of descriptivist name theory, and to some extent the puzzle itself, is just that a descriptivist theory of names is impossible because it requires some "absolute level" of specification, which uniquely identifies in all possible languages. But this is clearly impractical, perhaps impossible, and at any rate definitely not what we think of as the meaning of a name. In other words, reference requires some metaphysical component, contrary to Frege's and Russell's theory that reference could be reduced to a description, a purely epistemological component.

In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke proposes a new picture of reference often called the "causal theory of names." According to Kripke's general outline, when we use a name, we use it as we have heard it used, and we intend to refer to whatever the chain of reference leads to, whatever was named at the "initial baptism." In this essay I will not argue for this theory of naming, but I will nevertheless discuss issues in intensional contexts in terms of it. This theory is closer to that of John Stuart Mill and early Russell than to that of Frege and later Russell. The theory has many interesting implications, but the most important aspect for this paper is, as stated above, that the name literally brings the object named into the proposition. As Kripke says, "the linguistic function of a name is completely exhausted by the fact that it names its bearer" (434).

II. The Proposition of Sentences with Intensional Contexts

In "A Puzzle about Belief," Kripke states that the puzzle, and his discussion in general, deal only with *de dicto*, and not with *de re*, considerations (435). For example, Kripke states specifically that "A Puzzle about Belief" does not concern *de re* beliefs, such as "Jones believes, *of* Cicero, that he was bald." Rather, it concerns *de dicto* beliefs such as "Jones believes that: Cicero was bald," in which "the material after the colon expresses the *content* of Jones's belief" (435).

Let us look more closely at Kripke's formal recasting of a sentence with an intensional context: "the sentence 'Cicero was bald' gives the content of a belief of Jones." The problem of non-substitutability in intensional contexts is how such a statement, which is a *de dicto* summary of "Jones believes that Cicero was bald," is different from "the sentence 'Tully was bald' gives the content of a belief of Jones," which is a *de dicto* summary of "Jones believes that Tully was bald." However, if the sentence "gives" the content of a belief of Jones, this still leaves unanswered the question, of what *is* content of Jones's belief? Usually, the content of the belief is assumed to be the proposition of the sentence in question. Under this view, "Jones believes that Cicero was bald" can also be recast as "Jones believes the proposition of the sentence 'Cicero was bald,'" or "the proposition of the sentence 'Cicero was bald' is the content of a belief of Jones."

However, many of the problems perennially associated with intensional contexts disappear if we abandon this assumption that the content of the belief is simply the proposition of the statement in the intensional context. Consider the implications for the non-substitutability problem if we summarized "Jones believes Cicero was bald," instead of as shown above, rather as "Jones believes that the proposition of 'Cicero was bald' is true," or "the proposition of the sentence 'the proposition of the sentence 'Cicero was bald' is true' is the content of a belief of

Jones." Whereas the usual assumption is that the content of Jones's belief is the proposition of the sentence in question, here the assumption is that the content of Jones's belief is rather the proposition plus the predicate "is true." I will not now argue that this assumption is more justified than the usual assumption, but only that it has important and far-reaching implications for both Kripke's puzzle and the traditional problems of non-substitutability.

The first thing to note is that, unlike under the usual assumption, Cicero (the object, the actual person) appears nowhere in the proposition of "Jones believes that the proposition of the sentence 'Cicero was bald' is true," if this is interpreted *de dicto* and in secondary scope. A true Russellian paraphrase of such a sentence would be, "Jones believes that 'x is propositional and x is expressed by 'Cicero was bald' and x is true' is sometimes true". Paraphrasing this way retains "the proposition of 'Cicero was bald'" in secondary scope. If it were in primary scope, the summary would be "'x is propositional and 'Cicero was bald' expresses x' is sometimes true and Jones believes that x is true."

The difference here is crucial, and the problem of non-substitutability exists only in the latter (primary scope) paraphrase. In this summary, "x" is the proposition of "Cicero was bald," and therefore "x" contains the object, the person Cicero. To reiterate—if "Jones believes that the proposition of the sentence 'Cicero was bald' is true" is interpreted with "the proposition of the sentence 'Cicero was bald' in primary scope, then the proposition of "Cicero was bald," and therefore also Cicero himself, are *in the proposition of the entire sentence*. If, however, we take the former (secondary scope) paraphrase, there is no problem of non-substitutability. In such a summary, "x" is *not* the proposition of "Cicero was bald." "X" is rather *what Jones believes* is the proposition of "Cicero was bald." Therefore, the entire sentence contains only what Jones believes is the proposition, and not necessarily what the proposition in fact is.

In other words, Jones believes that the proposition of "Cicero was bald" is such that it is true, he does not believe, of the proposition of "Cicero was bald," that it is true. His belief about the proposition of "Cicero was bald" should be interpreted *de dicto*, and not *de re*. Interpreted this way, "Jones believes that Cicero was bald" and "Jones believes that Tully was bald" clearly have different propositions, even though "Cicero was bald" and "Tully was bald" share the same proposition. Cicero himself does not appear in intensional contexts, but rather the names "Cicero" and "Tully" are mentioned, not used.

III. Implications for the Puzzle

While this method does seem to work well in the usual cases of non-substitutability, its application to Kripke's puzzle is somewhat more complicated. Let us look at what this method would give us as the paraphrase of each of Pierre's beliefs. The first would be, "Pierre believes that the proposition of "*Londres est jolie*" is true." The second would be, "Pierre believes that the proposition of "London is not pretty" is true." In this method of paraphrase, what matters is not the proposition of "*Londres est jolie*," or "London is not pretty," but rather Pierre's belief about what the proposition is.

Before discussing the particular role of translation in this puzzle, it will be useful to consider the role of translation in general. Consider the sentence, "Julius Caesar said, 'the die is cast.'" Does such a report accurately reflect what Julius Caesar said? It is clear that Julius Caesar did not in fact say the words, "the die is cast." The words he said were, "alea jacta est." And yet most of us consider words even in translation to be an accurate report. However, there are circumstances in which translation cannot communicate all that we intend to communicate. Take, for example, the sentence "when Caesar said "*alea jacta est*," he pronounced the 'J' as we

today would pronounce an 'I.'" Does such a sentence survive translation? Could we say, "when Caesar said, 'the die is cast,' he pronounced the 'J' as we today would pronounce an 'I'? It seems reasonable that in such a circumstance, in which our interest is primarily in the words, translation is not possible. However, there are some circumstances where the words in question may survive translation. It is said that when the first Christian missionaries reached England, they were surprised at the gentleness of the Angles, and said "non sunt Anglia, sed sunt angelia," which means "they are not Angles, but angels." In this case it could be said that translation is acceptable, because it retains the joke, but it should be noted that it is only by coincidence. Such a sentence would obviously not survive translation into Chinese, for example, without significant loss.

Therefore, in considering the sentences "Pierre believes that the proposition of '*Londres est jolie*" is true," and "Pierre believes that the proposition of 'London is not pretty' is true," it is important to remember that the important thing is the *words*, particularly Pierre's beliefs about what proposition the words express. And Pierre clearly believes that "*Londres est jolie*" and "London is pretty" express two different propositions—if he did not, he would commit a logical fallacy by declaring a belief in both. And because the emphasis here is on the words, because the difference for Pierre lies in which words are used, in this case translation would be unacceptable.

If translation is unacceptable in this case, though, how is it that we believe that translation usually still gives a legitimate report of someone's beliefs? Whenever we translate a sentence containing an intensional context, we have to make a certain educated guess. If Pierre spoke no English at all, and his only belief was "the proposition of the sentence '*Londres est jolie*' is true," then it may be acceptable to translate "*Londres est jolie*" as "London is pretty." However, it should be kept in mind that this is only an educated guess as to what Pierre believes. We can

never be sure that Pierre believes that the proposition of "*Londres est jolie*" is the same as

proposition as "London is pretty," because Pierre does not speak English, and there is a small

chance that he will end up in some strange situation such as that proposed by Kripke, in which he

will not believe that the propositions of these two sentences are identical. When we translate, we

have to take a *de re* interpretation of "the proposition of '*Londres est jolie.*'" And so we have to

guess what Pierre believes is the proposition, which is usually unproblematic. Only in extreme

cases such as that given by Kripke does this become an issue, and the solution is simply to say

that if we are truly on dealing with *de dicto* questions, we have to simply forbid translation.

This conclusion, that any question of translation necessarily entails a *de re* interpretation,

is supported by what Kripke says about the puzzle. As he says, however we describe "what is

really going on" in the puzzle, that still does not answer the question, what does Pierre really

believe about London (446)? But Kripke already said that statements such as "Pierre believes, of

London, X" are not what he is talking about in the puzzle. But if we stick with a strictly *de dicto*

interpretation, translation is impossible, and the puzzle disappears.

IV. Conclusion

The method I have proposed requires abandoning the assumption that what is believed in

intensional contexts is simply the proposition itself and adopting the assumption that what is

believed is rather the proposition plus the predicate "is true," with the proposition in secondary

position. Thus, though the proposition of "Cicero was bald" is the same as that of "Tully was

bald," the proposition of "Jones believes Cicero was bald" is nevertheless different from that of

"Jones believes Tully was bald." It may be objected that putting the proposition in secondary

position begs the question, because the summary of the intensional context contains yet another

intensional context. This objection may have merit. Unfortunately, there is not space in this

paper to consider the arguments for and against each assumption. It may be that the assumption I have outlined, that what is believed is the proposition in second position plus a truth value, is untenable. In this paper I have sought only to show that such an assumption, if it is possible, gives some key insights into and points toward a solution of Kripke's puzzle and also many of the problems of intensional contexts.

Works Cited

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