

The Resilience of Illogical Belief*

Nathan Salmon

Although Professor Schiffer and I have many times disagreed, I share his deep and abiding commitment to argument as a primary philosophical tool. Regretting any communication failure that has occurred, I endeavor here to make clearer my earlier reply in “Illogical Belief” to Schiffer’s alleged problem for my version of Millianism.¹ I shall be skeletal, however; the interested reader is encouraged to turn to “Illogical Belief” for detail and elaboration.

I have argued that to bear a propositional attitude *de re* is to bear that attitude toward the corresponding singular proposition, no more and no less. If this is right, then according to Millianism every instance of the following modal schema is true:

S: Necessarily, α Vs that ϕ_β iff α Vs of β (*de re*) that ϕ_{it} ,

where α is any singular term of English, V is any of a range of transitive English verbs of propositional attitude (including ‘believe’, ‘disbelieve’, and ‘doubt’), β is any proper name or other Millian term of English, ϕ_{it} is any English “open sentence” in which the pronoun ‘it’ occurs as a free variable—alternatively ‘he’, ‘him’, ‘she’, or ‘her’—and ϕ_β is the same as ϕ_{it} except for having occurrences of β wherever ϕ_{it} has free occurrences of the relevant pronoun.²

Schiffer uses the epithet ‘Frege’s constraint’ for a principle that entails the following:

FC: (Necessarily) if x rationally believes y to be F while also disbelieving (or merely withholding believing) y to be F , for some property or singulary-functional concept F , then in so doing x takes y in differing ways, by means of distinct *guises* (“modes of

*I thank David Braun for comments on an earlier draft. I also thank the editors of this journal for providing me this opportunity.

presentation”) m and m' ; in so doing, x does not construe m and m' as separate ways of taking a single thing.

I have spent much of the past two decades arguing for a duly qualified version of *(FC)*. The primary rationale is that if x rationally believes y to be F while disbelieving z to be F , then x , in so doing, takes y and z to be distinct. Insofar as x is rational, he/she thereby takes y and z differently—even if, in fact, $y = z$. Similarly, if x rationally believes y to be F while also suspending judgment whether z is F , then ordinarily, in so doing x takes y and z differently.

Schiffer derives from these principles the conclusion that my Millianism is inconsistent with the possibility of a certain possible state of affairs (a): Jane’s rationally believing, even while she is fully aware that ‘George Eliot’ and ‘Mary Ann Evans’ co-designate, both that Ralph believes that George Eliot was a man and that Ralph does not believe that Mary Ann Evans was a man. For according to Millianism, in situation (a), Jane rationally believes both the singular proposition about Eliot, that Ralph believes she was a man, and its denial. Putting ‘Jane’ for α in (S), ‘George Eliot’ for β , ‘believe’ for V , and ‘Ralph believes *she* was a man’ for ϕ_{it} , and performing a bit of logic, one obtains the result that, in (a) Eliot is believed by Jane to be such that Ralph believes she was a man. Now putting for β instead ‘Mary Ann Evans’ and for ϕ_{it} ‘Ralph does *not* believe *she* was a man’, and drawing analogous inferences, one obtains the additional result that in (a) Eliot is also rationally believed by Jane *not* to be such that Ralph believes she was a man. Thus, in (a) Jane believes Eliot to be F while also believing Eliot not to be F , for a particular property or concept F . It follows by *(FC)* that in (a) Jane, insofar as she is rational, takes Eliot in differing ways, by means of a pair of guises that Jane does not thereby take to be of a single individual. But Jane does not do this in (a).

The *reductio* derivation is in fact fallacious. Specifically, a fallacy is committed when Schiffer erroneously “restates” the relevant half of the first premise as the thesis that every instance of the following alternative schema is true (putting ‘believe’ for V):

S' : Necessarily, if α believes that ϕ_β , then β is believed by α to be (something/someone) such that ϕ_{it} .³

Contradiction is indeed derivable from (S') taken together with Millianism, (FC), and the possibility of (a), exactly in the manner that Schiffer sets out. This is because the relevant instance of (S') is inconsistent with the facts. The derivation might even be taken as demonstrating this—at least by the Millian's lights. Importantly, Millianism is in no way committed to (S'), not even a Millianism like my own, which is committed to (S). I am committed to the existence of counter-instances of (S').

The distinction between the *de re* constructions $\lceil \alpha$ believes of β that $\phi_{it} \rceil$ and $\lceil \beta$ is believed by α to be something such that $\phi_{it} \rceil$ may seem excessively subtle and delicate, but in the present instance it is crucial. The latter is the passive-voice transformation of a relational predication: **Believes_r**(α , β , to be something such that ϕ_{it}), where '**Believes_r**' is a triadic predicate for a ternary relation between a believer x , an object y , and importantly, a property or singulary-functional concept F that x attributes to y . Schema (S') is thus indeed a logical consequence of (S) in a special case: if the open sentence ϕ_{it} has monadic-predicational form, 'It' + VP , where VP is a monadic predicate in which the pronoun 'it' does not occur free. The predicate VP is then a term for a particular property or singulary-functional concept F . If someone x believes the singular proposition expressed by 'It' + VP under the assignment of a particular value y to the variable 'it', then the proposition believed—that y is F —has the simple structure, $\langle y, F \rangle$, so that x indeed believes y to be F .⁴

Not all *de re* beliefs about y involve the attribution of a property to y . Many singular propositions involving y have considerably more structure than $\langle y, F \rangle$. There are some propositions, expressed by complex sentences ϕ_β , such that someone might rationally believe the proposition even while doubting the consequence expressed by $\lceil \beta$ is something such that $\phi_{it} \rceil$. Some of these propositions are witness to the fact that (S') is no logical consequence of (S).

One example is due to David Kaplan. If Quine's Ralph believes that *this man* [pointing at a fuzzy picture of Ortcutt, his face covered by a large brown hat] is taller than Ortcutt, then Ralph believes the singular proposition about Ortcutt, that he (Ortcutt) is taller than he (Ortcutt) is. According to (S), Ralph thus believes that Ortcutt is taller than Ortcutt. But Ralph does not thereby believe Ortcutt to be someone taller than himself; i.e., Ortcutt is not believed by Ralph to be something z such that z is taller than z . The proposition Ralph believes has the binary-relational form: $\langle \text{Ortcutt}, \text{Ortcutt}, \textit{taller-than} \rangle$ —or perhaps, the special monadic-predicational form: $\langle \text{Ortcutt}, \langle \textit{taller-than}, \text{Ortcutt} \rangle \rangle$. It does not have the alternate monadic-predicational form: $\langle \text{Ortcutt}, \textit{being taller than oneself} \rangle$. Putting 'Ralph' for α , 'Ortcutt' for β , 'believe' for V , and 'He is taller than he is' for ϕ_{it} , the resulting instance of (S) is true, the resulting instance of (S') false.⁵

Schiffer's central example employs another such sentence: 'Ralph does not believe that Mary Ann Evans was a man'. This expresses a singular proposition about Eliot, that Ralph does not believe that she was a man, represented by the ordered pair $\langle \langle \text{Ralph}, \textit{believing}, \langle \text{Eliot}, \textit{having been a man} \rangle \rangle, \textit{being false} \rangle$. Jane rationally believes this proposition, while also believing precisely what it denies, as expressed by 'Ralph believes that George Eliot was a man' and represented by $\langle \text{Ralph}, \textit{believing}, \langle \text{Eliot}, \textit{having been a man} \rangle \rangle$. But Jane does not thereby both believe and disbelieve the singular proposition about Eliot, that she is believed by Ralph to have been a man, as represented by $\langle \text{Eliot}, \textit{being believed by Ralph to have been a man} \rangle$. The following dialogue illustrates Jane's pertinent beliefs:

Socrates: "Does Ralph believe that Mary Ann Evans was a man?"

Jane: "No, he doesn't."

Socrates: "Does Ralph believe that George Eliot was a man?"

Jane: "Yes."

Socrates: "So George Eliot is someone Ralph believes was a man?"

Jane: "Yes."

Socrates: “What about Mary Ann Evans, then? Does Ralph also believe *she* was a man?”

Jane: “Ralph doesn’t believe that *Mary Ann Evans* was a man. But you’re now asking about Mary Ann Evans herself. Mary Ann Evans and George Eliot are the same person, don’t you know? And Ralph does indeed believe she was a man.”

Socrates: “Very well. Is Mary Ann Evans someone Ralph also *doesn’t* believe was a man?”

Jane: “Of course not; that would be logically impossible. I just told you: Mary Ann Evans is someone Ralph *does* believe was a man.”

Socrates: “Is George Eliot someone Ralph *doesn’t* believe was a man?”

Jane: “You’re not listening to me: George Eliot and Mary Ann Evans are the same person. Ralph *does* believe she was a man.”

Jane’s position is rational, sophisticated, even subtle. It is perfectly coherent (even if it is inconsistent, at least by Millian lights). It is part of a neo-Fregean theory that purports to analyze or explain *de re* constructions solely in terms of Fregean thoughts. Putting ‘Jane’ for α , ‘George Eliot’ for β , ‘believe’ for V , and ‘Ralph believes *she* was a man’ for ϕ_{it} , the resulting instance of (S) is true, the resulting instance of (S’) false. Schiffer’s *reductio* derivation fallaciously infers the latter from the former on its way to deriving a contradiction.

Schiffer’s objection can make do without this fallacious inference if (FC) can be extended into the following:

FC’: (Necessarily) if α rationally believes of β that ϕ_{it} while also disbelieving (or merely withholding believing) of β that ϕ_{it} , then in so doing α takes β in differing ways.

(Schiffer proposes a related generalization.) But as remarked earlier, there are complex singular propositions about y that one can rationally believe without attributing the corresponding property to y . Someone can rationally believe and disbelieve one of these propositions without taking y to be distinct things. Given the existence of such cases, there is no obvious rationale for (FC’).

Indeed, the very situation (*a*) arguably yields a counter-instance. I maintain that in (*a*), Jane rationally both believes and disbelieves of George Eliot, *de re*, that Ralph believes she was a man—even though in so doing, Jane does not take Eliot to be two separate people. It is unclear how, or even whether, a neo-Fregean can plausibly avoid this conclusion.⁶

There remains a bit of a mystery: How *can* someone both believe and disbelieve a singular proposition about *y* without thereby taking *y* to be distinct things?

The solution is not far to find. There is a potentially sound substitute for Schiffer's fallacious *reductio*, an alternative derivation that relies on (*FC*) and (*S*) without fatally detouring through dubious generalizations. This time, putting for β the 'that'-clause 'that George Eliot was a man' and putting for ϕ_{it} the open sentence '*It* is something Ralph believes', the relevant half of the resulting instance of (*S*) states that necessarily, if Jane believes that (the proposition) that Eliot was a man is something Ralph believes, then Jane believes of (the proposition) that George Eliot was a man, *de re*, that it is something Ralph believes. In situation (*a*), it may be supposed, so Jane does. One similarly obtains the result that necessarily, if Jane believes that (the proposition) that Mary Ann Evans was a man is something Ralph does not believe, then Jane believes of (the proposition) that Mary Ann Evans was a man, *de re*, that it is something Ralph does not believe. In situation (*a*), it may be supposed, so Jane does. According to Millianism, the propositions to which Jane in (*a*) *de re* attributes complementary properties (being believed by Ralph and not) are one and the same. Reasoning from (*FC*), it follows that Jane, insofar as she is rational in (*a*), must take this proposition in differing ways.

In situation (*a*), it may be supposed, so Jane does. She evidently mistakes this singular proposition for two independent thoughts (or at least is committed to doing so), one that Ralph believes, the other (according to Jane) not. No contradiction is derived and no problem for Millianism generated. On the contrary, our conclusion solves the riddle of how, without mistaking Eliot for two distinct people, one can rationally both believe and disbelieve of Eliot, *de re*, that Ralph believes she was a man. Though Jane does not mistake Eliot for distinct people, she may nevertheless mistake the singular proposition that Eliot was a man for distinct thoughts.⁷

With this new derivation, Jane has been outed as a proto- or closet neo-Fregean. With a little further Socratic questioning, she might be induced to embrace her neo-Fregeanism with pride.

Schiffer defends his objection to Millianism asserting, "... the only reasonable construal of *propositional* modes of presentation is that they are structured entities whose basic components are modes of presentation of the basic components of the Russellian propositions of which the propositional modes of presentation are modes of presentation." Since Jane does not have the requisite differing modes of presentation of Eliot (nor of the property or concept of *having been a man*), she also does not have differing modes of presentation of the (putatively singular) proposition that Eliot was a man, as would be required by (*FC*).

With all due respect, it is unreasonable to suppose that the only proposition guises are such composite constructions as Schiffer envisions. The rational neo-Fregean who takes the proposition that George Eliot was a man to be believed by Ralph and also takes the proposition that Mary Ann Evans was a man not to be believed by Ralph takes a single proposition to be two thoughts, and thereby takes it differently. The proposition might be taken as invoking Ralph's concept of who George Eliot is, and alternatively, as not doing so. The former is a misconception, to be sure, but misconceiving is a way of taking.

Notes

¹In J. Tomberlin, *ed*, *Philosophical Perspectives, 3: Philosophy of Mind and Action Theory* (Atascadero, Ca.: Ridgeview, 1989), pp. 243-285, at part VII, pp. 264-273. Schiffer had presented his problem for Millianism in "The 'Fido'-Fido Theory of Belief," in J. Tomberlin, *ed*, *Philosophical Perspectives, 1: Metaphysics* (Atascadero, Ca.: Ridgeview, 1987), pp. 445-480. The earliest forum for our debate was a Pacific Division meeting of the American Philosophical Association in March 1987.

²The relevant pronoun occurrences are anaphoric, hence bound, within (*S*) itself. See my "Pronouns as Variables," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, forthcoming 2005.

³I have reformulated Schiffer's "restatement" to conform to the present notation, in a manner that accords with the intent indicated by Schiffer's applications of the schema. Schiffer commits the fallacy precisely at his step (iii), when he derives his (c).

As I argued in “Illogical Belief” pp. (265-267), Millianism is inessential to Schiffer’s alleged problem. With a change of example to one of a sort made famous by Benson Mates, a similar derivation can be constructed without any appeal to Millianism. This consideration alone bursts Schiffer’s attempt to refute Millianism.

⁴I assume here that (necessarily) x believes y to be F iff x believes of y , *de re*, that it (he, she) is F . For more on this assumed equivalence, see Kaplan, “Afterthoughts” in J. Almog, J. Perry, and H. Wettstein, eds, *Themes from Kaplan* (Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 565-614, at 605-606; and my “Relational Belief,” in P. Leonardi and M. Santambrogio, eds, *On Quine: New Essays* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 206-228, at 214-216, 219.

In contrast to $\lceil \alpha$ believes of β that $\phi_{it} \rceil$, $\lceil \beta$ is believed by α to be something such that $\phi_{it} \rceil$ is what David Kaplan calls a *syntactically de re* construction. Cf. his “Opacity,” in L. E. Hahn and P. A. Schilpp, eds, *The Philosophy of W. V. Quine* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1986), pp. 229-288, at 268. The former is equivalent to $\lceil (\lambda\gamma)[\alpha \text{ believes } \wedge \phi_{\gamma} \wedge](\beta) \rceil$; the latter to $\lceil (\lambda\gamma)[\alpha \text{ believes } \wedge (\lambda\zeta)[\phi_{\zeta}](\gamma) \wedge](\beta) \rceil$, where ‘ \wedge ’ is a content-quotation mark. Given Millianism, (S') entails:

$$\Box[\alpha \text{ believes } \wedge \phi_{\beta} \wedge \supset \alpha \text{ believes } \wedge (\lambda\gamma)[\phi_{\gamma}](\beta) \wedge],$$

where β is any proper name or other Millian term.

⁵See Kaplan, “Opacity,” at pp. 269-272, and my “Relational Belief,” especially pp. 213-214. I investigated these matters in some detail in “Reflexivity,” *Notre Dame Journal of Formal Logic*, 27, 3 (July 1986), pp. 401-429, and “Reflections on Reflexivity,” *Linguistics and Philosophy*, 15, 1 (February 1992), pp. 53-63.

⁶See “Relational Belief,” pp. 217-218

⁷See “Relational Belief,” pp. 218-219.

University of California, Santa Barbara

nsalmon@philosophy.ucsb.edu