

Kripke's Puzzle

Kripke famously introduced us to Peter, who hears a recording of the great pianist Paderewski and comes to believe that Paderewski had musical talent. When he later comes to know of a great Polish statesman called 'Paderewski', Peter doubts that it could be the same man and concludes that Paderewski did not have musical talent. In fact, there is only one Paderewski; the musician is the statesman. There is considerable pressure to attribute to Peter seemingly contradictory beliefs, even if Peter is a paradigm of rationality. What to do?

This paper advances a new approach to Kripke's puzzle. Kripke's examples bear a significant resemblance to the sorts of cases Frege used to motivate the distinction between sense and reference; just as Peter rationally believes that Paderewski is a musician and that Paderewski is not a musician, one might rationally believe that Hesperus is bright and that Phosphorus is not bright. Accordingly, the dominant accounts of Kripke's cases assimilate them to Frege puzzles. On the Fregean approach, both Frege puzzles and Kripke puzzles are explained by postulating fine-grained contents; Kripke's cases are held to show that contents must be more fine-grained than words of English. On the Millian approach, both sorts of case are treated in terms of Russellian propositions; Kripke puzzle cases are held to show that postulating fine-grained contents like Fregean senses gives no insight into cognitive distinctness.

I maintain that both approaches are mistaken. A better view admits two sorts of case, which are to be explained in two distinct ways. There are Fregean cases, in which the cognitive distinctness of two mental states is to be explained by the fact that they have different contents. But there are also cases in which a subject fails to recognize two mental states as having the same content.

My argument proceeds as follows: I first show that familiar styles of externalist argument due to Putnam and especially Burge motivate the claim that there is no difference in content between the thought Peter affirms and the thought he denies. Thus there are cases in which sameness of content is not transparent; a person can fail to recognize that two token thoughts have the same content. But it is not open to the proponent of the Putnam/Burge arguments to explain traditional Frege cases in this way. The externalist arguments depend on treating certain attributions of mental states as guides to the content of those states. But the belief that Hesperus is bright is treated differently than the belief that Phosphorus is bright in these attributions; treating the attributions as guide to the content of the beliefs would result in a fine-grained individuation of contents. It would thus be dialectically self-defeating for externalists to deny that content is fine-grained in Frege cases. Thus the externalist should hold that Frege's cases ought to be treated differently than Kripke's; she should admit both that content is fine-grained, and that identity of content is not always transparent.