

Becky Clay  
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Dr. Marcello Fiocco  
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### Millianism and Descriptivism

In the following paper, I will explain the difference between Millianism and descriptivism and present three objections to Millianism that might motivate one to accept descriptivism. I will then present Salmon's response to these objections, and present Jackson's "Objection (to descriptivism) from Ignorance" that he discusses. Finally, I will present Jackson's proposal to meet this objection and explain why such a response does not seem satisfying.

"Information content" (also called "semantic content") is the contribution that a term makes to the proposition expressed by a sentence. For the Fregean, the information content is a sense; an abstract entity that embodies a set conditions which uniquely identifies a particular object in the world. This "sense" is an account of descriptivism, or a general account of reference that states that linguistic expressions have associated descriptive content, and that what an expression refers to is the thing in the world that fits that descriptive content. For the Millian, the information content of a term is still an abstract entity, like a sense is, but it differs in that it is not something that embodies any uniquely characterizing conditions. Rather, there are no conditions at all and the information content of a term is simply the referent of the name.

Frege's puzzle presents an objection to Millianism and seems to provide good reasons for why one might be motivated to accept descriptivism. This puzzle illustrates how statements such as "Clark Kent is Clark Kent" seem uninformative, while, intuitively; statements such as "Clark Kent is Superman" seem to be informative. Because the Millian believes that the information content of a name is merely the referent of the name, and given that Clark Kent and Superman both have the same referent, it seems that the Millian believes "Clark Kent is Superman" expresses nothing more than "Clark Kent is Clark Kent", which seems to be a counterintuitive claim. It is this failure to account for the

informativeness of co-referential terms in identity statements that led Frege to posit senses into his theory of reference. With descriptive fit, co-referential terms can differ in information content while still referring to the same thing in the world, which seems to account for the change in informativeness.

Nathan Salmon argues that Frege's puzzle should not be taken to show anything conclusive about the information content of a term. He considers a case where it is admitted that two terms express the very same sense, "catsup" and "ketchup", and shows that although the terms appear to differ in informativeness, both terms actually express the same information content. He explains that the extra information or "informativeness" one receives by such statements is something about language (pragmatics), not anything about what is being contributed to the proposition (semantics).

A second objection to Millianism that might motivate one to accept descriptivism is the substitution failure of co-referential terms in belief contexts. Given the premise, "Lois believes Clark Kent can't fly," followed by a second premise, "Clark Kent is Superman," the conclusion seems to follow that, "Lois believes Superman can't fly." But since Lois *does* believe that Superman *can* fly, this argument is invalid, meaning that the conclusion is false and that something has failed with the substitution of the co-referential terms. The descriptivist can explain this apparent invalidity because, on the descriptivist view, each term can express different information content and therefore distinguish between Clark Kent and Superman.

Salmon argues that an appropriate understanding of what belief is enables the Millian to quell these concerns. He claims that belief is a relation between a subject, a proposition, and a subject's way of taking that proposition. In other words, a subject has a belief in a proposition, and as long as there is one way of taking a proposition that the subject accepts, then the proposition becomes true. So, when Lois believes that Superman can fly, it is true when is taken in a certain way (namely, when Superman is understood as Superman). And when Lois believes that Superman can't fly, that is also true, but only when taken in a different way (namely, when Superman is understood as Clark Kent). The fact that Lois

is able to hold both of these beliefs is completely rational because she is accepting each of them in a different way. An irrational belief would be if she were to hold two contrasting beliefs of a proposition taken in one single way.

A third objection to Millianism that might motivate descriptivism is the problem of negative existentials, or the problem of non-referring expressions. For example, given the sentence, "Sarah lives in Irvine," the Millian is able to say that the proposition expressed includes the referent of "Sarah." However, a sentence like, "Santa Clause lives in Irvine," is problematic for the Millian because if the contribution a name makes to a proposition is simply the referent of the name, and the referent of the name is unknown, then what is being contributed to the proposition is also unknown. On a descriptivist view, negative existentials are not problematic because the name would refer to the thing in the world that fits the descriptive content of the name, and thus has no problem referring.

Frank Jackson presents an "Objection from Ignorance" that has been used to reject descriptivism on the grounds that it seems possible to pick out particular things in the world without having in mind a set of uniquely characterizing properties. He uses Hilary Putnam's example of how he "cannot distinguish between beeches and elms" but yet is still able to successfully refer to beeches, despite not having a set of uniquely characterizing conditions of "beeches" in mind. But Jackson claims that what enables Putnam to successfully refer is not just descriptive fit, but descriptive fit that includes causal properties (causal descriptivism).

The problem with Jackson's response is that he claims that these causal properties associated with a term are always implicitly before the mind (not explicitly), which seems to be contradictory. He argues that the descriptivist's failure to articulate these properties is not problematic, provided that whatever is meant by the expression is understood in the right way. This response seems unsatisfying since it does not seem that Jackson has coherently expressed how these causal properties determine reference.