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TRANSPARENT CONTENTS AND TRIVIAL INFERENCES

SUMMARY: A possible way out to Kripke's *Puzzle About Belief* could start from the rejection of the notion of epistemic transparency. Epistemic transparency seems, indeed, irremediably incompatible with an externalist conception of mental content. However, Brandom's inferentialism could be considered a version of externalism that allows, at least in some cases, to save the principle of transparency. Appealing to a normative account of the content of our beliefs, from the inferentialist's standpoint, it is possible to state that a content is transparent when name-components of that content are *a priori* associated with some application conditions and, at the same time, reflection alone provides an *a priori* access to those application conditions, with no need of any empirical investigation. Nevertheless, such requirements are only met in trivial cases. The aim of this paper is to argue that some application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, can be ontologically ampliative. As a result, the related contents can be regarded as transparent in a substantial and rich way.

KEYWORDS: referentialism, transparency, externalism, application conditions, trivial inferences.

1. INTRODUCTION

Kripke's puzzle about belief shows the incompatibility between the principle of transparency and externalism. The principle of transparency states that anyone is in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if one has them. If two of a thinker's token thoughts possess the same content, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do; and if two of a thinker's token thoughts pos-

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sess distinct contents, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do. According to the principle of transparency, a subject cannot consistently believe a proposition and its negation at the same time, since their contradictory nature must be reflectively accessible to her with no need for any empirical investigation. The intuitive appeal of this principle stems from the intuitive appeal of the idea that anyone is in a position to know the contents of one's propositional attitudes. But certainly, this idea cannot be taken for granted in an externalist framework.

Content externalism claims that the contents of linguistic expressions are determined partly by certain (environmental or social) factors external to an individual speaker's inner state. Once we endorse this thesis concerning the contents of linguistic expressions, then it becomes almost unavoidable to endorse the same thesis concerning the contents of propositional attitudes, since those two sorts of contents are arguably dependent on each other.¹ The external factors that the thesis claims partly determine the contents of our statements and propositional attitudes can be completely unknown to us. Consequently, the thesis of content externalism entails that the contents of linguistic expressions and propositional attitudes are in a sense beyond our *a priori* grasp. Nevertheless, transparency of propositional attitudes seems to demand the opposite. If the contents of propositional attitudes are determined partly by certain external factors, of which we can be completely unaware, then the transparency principle is threatened. Therefore, epistemic transparency seems irremediably incompatible with an externalist conception of mental content.

It is in principle possible to give a normative account of the content of our beliefs. The inferential semantics can be considered as a paradigmatic example of such an account. According to the semantic inferentialist's standpoint, the content of a belief consists in certain inferential relations. The content of a belief, or the content expressed by a corresponding assertion, is given by the inferences the speaker is committed to and the justifications that entitle the speaker to make the assertion. Speaking of contents of beliefs is, therefore, speaking of commitments and entitlements. These norms of commitments and entitlements may also be defined in terms of exit-rules for name-components (noun terms) of the prop-

¹ In this paper I avoid complication due to context-dependence in natural language and I endorsed what Recanati (2018) refer to as the "Simple view", according to which the central meta-semantic question about the relation between the notion of content used in belief-desire psychology and the notion of content or meaning applied to expressions of the language has a simple answer. Roughly, by uttering a sentence that means that *p*, the speaker expresses her belief that *p*. So there is a single entity which is both the content of the belief (expressed by the speaker, and communicated to the hearer) and the content of the sentence. The entity which is both the content of a (declarative) sentence and the content of the corresponding belief is a proposition. What is important about propositions, however we analyze them, is that they are truth-bearers: they are true or false. Accordingly, beliefs and sentences are truth-evaluable because they have contents (propositions).

ositions believed (which tell us what we are committed and entitled to on the basis of applying a term). However, other meaning-constituting rules for name-components of the propositions believed may also be involved, including not only exit rules but also application conditions which serve as something like introduction or entry rules. Given such a normative standpoint, it is possible to maintain that a content is transparent when it is *a priori* associated with application conditions of that sort and then reflection alone provides an *a priori* access to those application conditions, with no need of any empirical investigation. This is an account of transparency that also externalists may accept, although such requirements are taken to be met just in trivial cases. Application conditions are taken to be trivial (in the sense of not requiring substantive investigation) when they reflect conceptual truths. Conceptual truths are articulations of constitutive semantic rules that govern proper use for the very noun terms we master as we acquire language. They are known *a priori* in the sense that competent speakers are licensed, based on their competence, to accept them, since they are just object-language expressions of rules they master. Rules of use entitle us to make trivial inferences, which can be considered as illustrations of such rules.

In what follows I shall try to argue that some application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, are ontologically ampliative and, as a result, the related contents can be regarded as transparent in a substantial and rich way. They are existence entailing (ontologically ampliative), in a minimalist or “easy” approach to ontology, in the sense that beginning from an undisputed claim that makes no mention of a kind of entity *F*, we end with a claim that there are *F*s just by the undertaking of trivial inferences. Given an undisputed truth and by making use only of trivial reasoning, competent speakers are entailed to reach ontological conclusions that there are new entities not referred to in the undisputed truth. In this way, the existence of the entities in question can be known *a priori* insofar as the truth of the ontological claim may be inferred by any competent user of the term (who has mastered the relevant trivial inference) without the need for knowing any empirical truth (since one may begin the inference from conceptual truth).

In Sect. 2, I will present Kripke’s puzzle about belief. In Sect. 3, I will argue that, in this puzzle, Kripke makes an assumption which conflicts with his referentialism: such an assumption is what Boghossian has called epistemic transparency. In Sect. 4, I will focus on the incompatibility between epistemic transparency and the externalist conception of mental contents. In Sect. 5, I will introduce the semantic inferentialist’s account of the content of our beliefs. In Sect. 6, I will conclude by rejecting the broader view that nothing is epistemically available simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence.

2. THE PUZZLE

In *A Puzzle About Belief* (1979, pp. 102–148) Kripke tries to disarm challenges to direct reference theories of proper names that are based on the apparent

failure of substitutivity in propositional attitude contexts. Kripke's puzzle is aimed at a variant of Frege's puzzle, which traditionally has been used to criticize referentialist views (Millianism). Kripke tries to draw the sting from Frege's puzzle by creating a similar paradox, but one which does not rest on Millianism in any way. The idea is, indeed, to show that it is illegitimate to blame the paradox on Millianism. Kripke's main contention is that the puzzle shows that the substitution-failures in propositional attitude contexts that are normally blamed on a substitutivity principle licensed by referentialism can be generated without using any such substitutivity principles. If correct, this contention would seem to disarm the argument from substitutivity failure as a criticism of referentialism.

In the original puzzle, Kripke constructs a situation in which the propositions expressed by the embedded sentences in belief ascriptions are contradictory. I won't present the details of Kripke's well-known article, which I assume to be familiar to the reader; I will just remind that Pierre in Kripke's example assents to two sentences that, unbeknownst to him, seem to contradict each other, namely that "London is not pretty" and "Londres est jolie". The possibility of this being an accurate belief ascription is then challenged by Kripke on the basis that Pierre would be sufficiently rational not to believe contradictory propositions.

The puzzle rests on two principles. The first is the *disquotation principle* (DP), which states that "if a normal English speaker, on reflection, sincerely assents to '*p*', then he believes that *p*" (p. 112). Kripke also states a biconditional form of the DP, namely that "a normal English speaker who is not reticent will be disposed to sincere reflective assent to '*p*' iff he believes that *p*" (p. 113). The biconditional DP implies that failure to assent indicates lack of belief, as assent indicates belief. The second principle that Kripke states is the *principle of translation* (TP). It states that "if a sentence of one language expresses a truth in that language, then any translation of it into any other language also expresses a truth (in that other language)" (p. 113).

It would seem that Pierre holds both beliefs, therefore, that he has contradictory beliefs. But, this option seems to lead to insuperable difficulties. We can assume that Pierre is a leading philosopher and logician, and "surely anyone, leading logician or no, is in principle in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if he has them" (p. 122). In brief, Kripke's puzzle attempts to arrive at a contradiction by stipulating that a subject is rational and then showing how the DP and TP lead to the subject having contradictory beliefs. This is supposed to be irrational, and hence a paradox arises. Kripke also constructs the so-called Paderewski-puzzle. This is used to show that the above problem can also arise within a single language, using phonetically identical tokens of a single name.

According to referentialism, the sole semantic function of a proper name is simply to refer; in other words, the view that what a singular term *a* contributes to determining the proposition expressed by "*a* is *F*" is simply its referent. It follows that if referentialism is true, then so is substitutivity:

(SU) If “ Fa ” is a sentence containing a referring term a , then substituting a by a referring term b does not change the truth-value of “ Fa ”, if a and b have the same reference.

While Kripke has pointed out the difficulties of an indirect theory of reference for names, he does not offer a solution to the problem of substitution of co-extensive names in belief contexts. Nevertheless, in order to link rationality with the absence of logically contradictory belief, we need to postulate another auxiliary principle, consistency:

(CO) If a speaker S reflectively and occurrently believes that a is F and that a is not F , then S is not fully rational.

The foregoing suggests that since (SU) follows straightforwardly from the referentialist semantics, because it is semantically irrelevant how that proposition is referred to, something better be amiss with (CO). The idea is then that if S is as rational as anyone gets, then S cannot hold contradictory beliefs. Reflection seems to be the operative principle behind consistency: since one can by reflection alone determine that one of one’s occurrent beliefs is the negation of another of one’s occurrent beliefs, if one is rational then upon reflection one should be able to detect the contradiction and thereby reject at least one of the beliefs.² No doubt most of us hold some contradictory beliefs without thereby being irrational, but we tend to think that had our cognitive abilities been as good as they get, we would not have held such belief.

Respectively, if the direct reference theorist does maintain this position, then we are left with the conflict between our logical instincts (if a equals b , then b can be substituted for a in a sentence without loss of truth) and our common sense (utterances may differ in truth value, because they may express different propositions). Nevertheless, I shall try to argue that the problem does not, strictly speaking, lie with the direct reference theory of names, but rather in the traditional view of believing.

3. TRANSPARENCY OF INCONSISTENCIES

The referentialist, however, may reject consistency: if the logical properties of belief content are not reflectively accessible to S , then S can hold contradictory beliefs without being irrational. The fact that Pierre’s beliefs have logically contradictory properties is not reflectively accessible to him; it can only be discovered by appropriate empirical investigations. It means that Pierre lacks reflective access to key logical properties of the sole propositional contents of his

² Similar results hold for other logical relations among thoughts: e.g., if thought A is the negation of thought B, then I can know by reflection alone that thought A is the negation of thought B.

occurrent beliefs, that is, he is ignorant of such basic inferential relations between them as identity or contradiction. Therefore, *a priori* reflection will not be sufficient for him to amend his error; what he needs to discover is that he is thinking about two different individuals, which he can learn only by empirical investigation.

A number of philosophers have pointed out that Kripke makes an assumption which conflicts with his referentialism. This assumption is what Boghossian (1994, p. 33) has called “epistemic transparency”. He formulates it as follows: Epistemic content is transparent if, and only if

[when...] two of a thinker’s token thoughts possess the same content, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do; and (b) if two of a thinker’s token thoughts possess distinct contents, then the thinker must be able to know *a priori* that they do. (1994, p. 36)

If a person knows *a priori* whether or not the propositions expressed by two token thoughts are the same, then the logical properties of such propositions, i.e. whether they are consistent or contradictory, are similarly known by him *a priori*. Epistemic transparency would imply that determining and correcting contradictory beliefs is a matter of logical acumen, rather than acquiring information. But, as stated by Kallestrup: “[t]he fact that her beliefs have logically contradictory properties is not reflectively accessible to him; it can only be discovered by appropriate empirical means” (Kallestrup, 2003, p. 112).

On the contrary, epistemic opacity (the denial of epistemic transparency) would imply that logical acumen is not sufficient to detect all contradictory beliefs. The person would not be in a position to determine and correct all potentially contradictory beliefs unless he has acquired information regarding the content of the terms he used and thereby gained knowledge of the logical properties of the propositions expressed by two given sentences. What epistemic opacity denies is that propositional content is transparent in the sense that if *S* fully apprehends two propositional contents with a certain logical property, then *S* can come to know just by reflection that they have that property. Only then we accept epistemic opacity, *S* can consistently believe a proposition and its negation at the same time, since only then their contradictory nature is not reflectively accessible to her (Salmon, 1986, p. 132).

Referentialism and epistemic transparency turn out to be jointly inconsistent and what must be rejected, it seems, is epistemic transparency. This means that the referentialist should reject consistency, at least on our assumption that (CO) pertains to the propositions expressed by the embedded sentences, i.e., that if *S* occurrently and on reflection believes a proposition and its negation, then *S* is less than fully rational. Rejecting epistemic transparency would entail that also “a leading philosopher and logician” (Kripke, 1988, p. 123) can have contradictory beliefs, without this being irrational. Therefore, the most basic cleavage when considering the semantics of belief-attribution turns out to be between theories that claim content to be transparent and theories that do not.

Let me sum up. The paradox poses a difficulty for referentialism, because of its adherence to (SU). This reasoning has been argued to be fallacious based on the assumption of epistemic transparency. However, the referentialist may reject (CO), which relies on epistemic transparency, and so avoid inconsistency. If epistemic transparency is rejected, then it is a trivial matter to construct cases where *S*'s dissent from "*a* is *F*" does not imply that it is not the case that *S* believes that *a* is *F*. The implicit assumption of epistemic transparency is something that is peculiar to Kripkean puzzles; if epistemic transparency is refused, then the referentialist can easily avert the puzzle.

4. CONTENT EXTERNALISM

A referentialist view of the semantic content of proper names seems to represent a paradigm case of externalist content leading to epistemic opacity. Both Kripkean and Fregean puzzles involve a situation where an externalist would contradict the truth-value that the subject of a belief-attribution would assign to the belief-attribution. The referentialist can attribute contradictory beliefs to Pierre, safe in the knowledge that such attributions are made possible by the very nature of externalism. Epistemic opacity would seem to be a direct implication of holding an externalist conception of mental content. In such a conception of mental content, "[s]ubject's intentional states are individuated in part by certain sorts of facts about the physical and/or social environment in which he happens to be situated" (Boghossian, 1994, p. 34).

If my intentional states are individuated in terms of external facts (physical or social), then I cannot determine the logical properties of propositions expressed by token thoughts that are individuated in such a way without reference to, and knowledge of, these external facts. In other words, externalism would imply that determining the consistency of two token thoughts is sometimes a matter of acquiring information after all, and not only a matter of logical acumen. Boghossian, for instance, concludes that externalism entails a rejection of epistemic transparency, and takes this to be one of the main conclusions to be drawn from Kripke's puzzle:

Now, it is fairly easy to show that externalist conceptions of mental content do not satisfy the transparency of sameness. Kripke's notorious Frenchman, Pierre, already shows this for the special case of Millian contents (themselves, of course, a sort of externalist content). (Boghossian, 1994, p. 36)

Therefore, why are these semantical facts puzzling? They are puzzling because of transparency of inconsistency: that anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if he has them. So logic alone should teach Pierre that his beliefs are inconsistent, yet it cannot. No logical reflection can show him the inconsistency. The intuitive appeal of this principle draws from the intuitive appeal of the idea that anyone is, in principle, in a position to know the contents of one's propositional attitudes. But certainly, in the framework of

externalist semantics, this idea cannot be taken for granted. Under the externalist supposition that the contribution of the name-components to the propositions believed is fully determined by the identity of the bearers of the names, then, those semantical data should be regarded as puzzling only once a compelling argument for the validity of this principle in an externalist framework is suggested.

Nevertheless, there may be convincing reasons why epistemic transparency is worth preserving. Usually, we think that it is an essential ingredient in what has come to be known as “privileged access”: the idea that *S* has a first-person authority with respect to the contents of her own occurrent mental states. If the subject lacks reflective access to key logical properties of the sole propositional contents of her occurrent beliefs, that is, she is ignorant of such basic inferential relations between them as identity or contradiction. This, in conjunction with the fact that our ordinary way of talking when attributing beliefs always agrees with the truth-value assignment made by any rational subject of a belief-attribution, then suffices to generate problematic belief attributions. In fact, the falsehood of the intuitive reflection principle, that one can by reflection alone determine the simple logical relations among one’s propositional attitudes, seems to conflict with our ordinary intuitions regarding belief. People commonly and without hesitation do accept the truth of the datum. This means that our common practices of belief-attribution treat the content embedded in propositional attitude contexts as epistemically transparent.³ Therefore, externalist theories will result in attributions that contradict our normal practice of belief-attribution and, accordingly, we can characterize the problem cases as those where an externalist would contradict the assignment of truth-values of a rational agent.⁴

We can differ from the truth-value assignments of a rational agent if the content is externalist, while internalist theories need not have these results. Internalism of this class thus decrees that some mental states are transparent in the general sense that they are fully “open to view” or “revealed by introspection”. From an internalist standpoint, it is natural to maintain that in some instances there is

³ However, our common practices of belief-attribution, like accepting the datum, only show that our common practices are committed to epistemic transparency, not that it is correct. This raises an intriguing possibility: what if our folk semantics is internalist, descriptivist and epistemically transparent, but actually wrong (and/or incoherent) in some sense?

⁴ Against the intuition that the job of semantics simply is to treat our common attribution of truth-values as data, various referentialists, for instance Salmon (1986), have argued that the datum is, in fact, false and that our ordinary way of speaking is to be explained with reference to Gricean implicatures and the like. Salmon claims that we often take a true sentence like “Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly”, which actually expresses a true singular proposition, to include the Gricean implicature that Lois Lane would assent to “Clark Kent can fly”. Here the implicature of the sentence would “lead speakers to deny it, despite its literal truth-conditions [being] fulfilled” (Salmon, p. 115).

a necessary connection between believing a proposition and its truth.⁵ This distinction and not the descriptivist/referentialist distinction could be considered the fundamental distinction in the semantics of belief-attributions.

In the same line, David Lewis states:

When we characterise the content of belief by assigning propositional (or other) objects, are we characterising an inner, narrowly psychological state of the believer? Are beliefs in the head? Or are we characterising partly the believer's inner state, partly the relations of that state to the outer world? If it is the latter, the objection may succeed; however, Kripke's puzzle vanishes. For if the assignment of propositional objects characterises more than the believer's inner state, then there is no reason to suppose that a leading philosopher and logician would never let contradictory beliefs pass, or that anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct contradictory beliefs if he has them. Anyone is in principle in a position to notice and correct a state of the head which can be characterised by assigning contradictory propositional objects, but why should philosophical and logical acumen help him if the trouble lies partly outside? (Lewis, 1981, pp. 288–289)

Briefly, if we agree with this kind of externalism that *a priori* reflection will not always suffice to ensure the validity of our inferences, then it looks like that embracing externalism and abandoning transparency “blurs the distinction between errors of reasoning and errors of fact” (Boghossian, 2011, p. 458). The point is that, if it were true that *a priori* reasoning did not suffice for avoiding logical errors, then we could not assure our status as rational agents by mere *a priori* reflection (and this last point is an important thesis for how we have traditionally understood what it is to be rational). But, even though we accept that content is not transparent and, therefore, that one might be condemned to make logical mistakes, we want, and must, consider Pierre to be a rational person!

5. CONTENT OF BELIEF

What is the content of a belief expressed by a sentence with a proper name? It is very difficult to have a uniform conception of the content of a belief and it is exactly the main problem arising from the discussion of Kripke's puzzle. A relevant assumption, which does not enter directly into the argument of the puzzle, works as the background for Kripke's assumptions about the propositional content of a belief:

⁵ However, internalism is a highly contentious position, reproved by the likes of Burge, Putnam, Kripke, and Williamson.

- Proper names are a basic ingredient in forming singular propositions, intended in a Russellian way; therefore the content of belief, or of other propositional attitudes, is given by an ordered pair with an object and a property; in the relevant cases—London, ugliness/prettiness—or—Paderewski, musical talent.

At the end of his paper, Kripke speaks of the “cloud” that the paradox places over the notion of content and this cloud seems to be placed mainly on the idea of a singular proposition. In general, if “*a* is *F*” expresses a singular proposition, then “*S* believes that *a* is *F*” is true iff “*S* believes of *a* that it is *F*” is true. According to millianism, singular propositions are individuated by their objectual constituents, independently of how they are conceptualized. An utterance of “*a* is *F*” thus expresses a singular proposition consisting of the referent of *a*, and an utterance of “*b* is *F*” expresses the same proposition if *a* = *b*. Likewise, the sole propositional content of a belief is a singular proposition consisting of an object and a property which are what the embedded sentence “*a* is *F*” refers to and it is semantically irrelevant how that proposition is referred to. Hence, contradictory beliefs are between singular propositions. It is also possible to assume a relational principle of belief on the referentialist account, according to which *S* believes that “*a* is *F*” says that *S* is belief-related to a singular proposition $B(S; (a, F\text{-ness}))$ and the only propositional content of *S*’s belief is a singular proposition. It is therefore not to be expected that speakers who entertain such propositions can come to know their logical properties “just by deploying their conceptual apparatus from the armchair” (Kallestrup, 2003, pp. 112–113). If so, then the content of one’s belief would still be unknown to the subject, and transparency would not be preserved, after all.

Nevertheless, the answer to this question can be given adequately also in the spirit of the use theory of meaning, from the semantic inferentialist’s standpoint. Roughly, the content of what we say and judge is inferentially articulated by being pragmatically determined in normative practices of scorekeeping. In accordance with Brandom’s inferential role semantics, the content of a belief, or the content expressed by a corresponding assertion, is given by the inferences the speaker is committed to and the justifications that entitle the speaker to make the assertion. Speaking of the content of a belief is, therefore, speaking of commitments and entitlements. Propositional contents consist in their distinctive role in inferences and can be identified with the inferential relations one is committed to, or with the inferential commitments one undertakes in expressing a claim or a belief.

From the inferentialist semantic standpoint, the representational aspect of the propositional content of a claim consists of the inferential roles of various true identity statements that describe the identity condition of the object. Inferential

roles are enabling us to make new substitutional commitments⁶ through substitutional inferences, i.e. the inferences that draw a consequence by simultaneously replacing a certain term occurring in a premise with another term based on an identity statement. Therefore, grasping the content of a statement consists of the ability to derive various substitutional commitments from the original statement together with those true identity statements making through substitutional inferences. By analogy, contents of beliefs can be also explained in a similar way.⁷ The occurring terms in belief ascription, as interpreted by the ascriber, reflect the ascriber's own acknowledged substitutional commitments, hence what the ascriber takes to be the objective substitutional norms governing these terms. And since objective norms bind everybody, the ascription thus captures substitutional commitments that, according to the ascriber, the ascribee is bound to acknowledge given the belief ascribed, whether or not the ascribee acknowledges them in fact.

One of the main tenets of *Making it Explicit* (Brandom, 1994) is that the constituents of propositional contents are the objective semantic norms governing the use of among speakers of English: this commits Brandom to a version of semantic externalism (Brandom, 1994, p. 632; 2000, pp. 359–360). In this sense, the content of a statement or belief is not only inferentially but also socially articulated in our inferential practice. In order to grasp the representational aspect of the propositional content of a statement or a belief, we should attend not merely to the inferentially articulated dimension, but also to the socially articulated dimension of our game of giving and asking for reasons. Moreover, a common content has to be considered not as something shared by every member of the society, but as generally accepted norms towards which all people should conform and do conform when properly guided.

In particular, according to inferentialism, propositions form equivalence classes under substitution in good material inferences. Once this is acknowledged and inferential roles are defined, it's easy to realize that the same substitutional strategy can be applied to obtain indirect sub-propositional inferential roles. Brandom's idea is precisely that keeping the score of simple material substitutional inferential commitments (SMSICs) requires treating speakers as committed to certain tokenings being part of certain recurrence structures which behave as anaphoric chains: a certain tokening is governed by certain SMSICs to the extent that it treated as part of a certain anaphoric chain. Brandom defines an *anaphoric commitment*, a commitment to treat tokening as belonging to a certain anaphoric chain. Surely anaphoric chains may extend not only intrapersonally but also interpersonally among tokenings by different speakers. This is crucial for the objectivity and the *scrutability* of reference. In fact, to treat one's own tokening as anaphorically dependent on another one's tokening

⁶A substitutional commitment of a claim is the commitment undertaken by an interlocutor from *de re* viewpoint (see Brandom, 1994, pp. 136–140, 370–376, 495–520).

⁷The content of a belief can be defined as the commitment to correct substitutions with respect to anaphoric chains.

is to treat it as governed by the same SMSICs that govern the antecedent. Of course, speakers might get anaphoric commitments wrong, as it happens in the case of Kripke's puzzle.

Remind that Pierre in Kripke's example assents to two sentences that, unbeknownst to him, seem to contradict each other, namely that "London is not pretty" and "Londres est jolie". The possibility of this being an accurate belief ascription is then challenged by Kripke on the basis that Pierre would be sufficiently rational not to believe contradictory propositions. In Brandom's framework, the contradiction is to be explained away simply pointing out that Pierre in fact does not realize that London₁ and Londres₂ (or Paderewski₁ and Paderewski₂) belong to the same anaphoric chain. This solution of the puzzle, of course, questions Kripke's tenant that when one finds oneself holding a contradiction as a consequence of the application of the principles of translation and disquotation, "logic alone should teach him that one of the beliefs is false" (Kripke, 1979, p. 399). In line with such a position, Pierre's two beliefs differ in their inferential roles. The substitutional commitment is undertaken through the substitutional inference based on an identity statement to which the interlocutor is committed, regardless that the speaker may acknowledge the commitment or not. Accordingly, Pierre erroneously attaches to the same type of name two different sets of inferential commitments, which are two different ways to keep track of the one individual, without acknowledging it. Pierre has, therefore, two different contents of belief, even if his beliefs are actually connected to the same referent (to the same object of belief).

6. APPLICATION CONDITIONS AND TRIVIAL INFERENCES

As we have seen, roughly speaking the content of a propositional attitude is transparent if there is no significant gap between the thought and what the thought is about. Unfortunately, the transparency seems incompatible with externalism conception of mental contents. The externalist cannot possibly maintain that contents are transparent due to some key logical properties, such as identity and contradiction, which are not immediately revealed by them. According to such a conception, contents are related to reality by facts external to our *a priori* grasp, hence it do lead us to deny that there can be any transparent contents. But, our terms also come with rules of use we master as we acquire language. Along with inferentialist account, we can speak more generally of the introduction rules for terms. In some cases, the introduction rules may license us to apply a term if certain application conditions⁸ are fulfilled. If one takes this general approach, application conditions for nouns can be treated as among the introduction rules licensing us to apply certain terms. All that is required here is that a content is

⁸ Application conditions can be, for instance, conditionals of the form "If x is P , then x falls under concept C " (or "If x falls under C , then x is P "), where P is some property (or set of properties) of the object x (see Diaz-Leon, 2014, p. 12; Levine, 2001).

transparent when it is *a priori* associated with application conditions of that sort and then reflection alone provides access to the application conditions for that content with no need of any empirical investigation or to be supported by empirical evidence about the relevant external conditions.

This is an account of transparency that also externalists may accept, although such requirements are taken to be met just in trivial cases. That may be right, but it does not mean they never truly count as revealing anything. Indeed, some application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, can be ontologically ampliative, and hence the related contents can be regarded as transparent in a substantial and rich way.

Application conditions are taken to be trivial (in the sense of not requiring substantive investigation) when they reflect conceptual truths. Conceptual truths are articulations of rules of use for the introduced noun term. Application conditions of that sort are among the constitutive semantic rules that govern proper use for the very noun terms we master as we acquire language. Rules of use entitle us to make trivial inferences, which can be considered as illustrations of such rules. Therefore, conceptual truths may be seen as object-language articulations of the rules that may be used in introducing terms.

A trivial inference that relies on application conditions of that sort can be ontologically ampliative without being informationally ampliative.⁹ They are existence entailing (ontologically ampliative), conforming to a minimalist¹⁰ or “easy” approach to ontology, in the sense that beginning from an undisputed claim that makes no mention of an entity *F*, we end with a claim that there are *F*s. That is, we obtain a derived claim which entails the existence of *F*s, just by undertaking and making use of trivial inferences. In other words, given an undisputed truth and by engaging in trivial inferences, we can reach a truth that is intuitively redundant with respect to the first one, which yet leaves us with ontological commitments to disputed entities (Thomasson, 2015, p. 234). The point is that we can use trivial inferences of that sort to acquire commitments to trees, tables, volcanoes or any ordinary object if we start (in a metaphysical dispute, for instance) from an undisputed claim such as “there are particles arranged volcano-wise”. For it is a conceptual truth (a truth knowable *a priori* via command of the

⁹ David Chalmers speaks of an inference as ontologically ampliative if, roughly, “the consequent makes an existential claim that is not built into the antecedent” (Chalmers, 2009, p. 95). It is worth noting that this use of “ampliative” is crucially different from Contessa’s sense of informationally ampliative: the inference from (a) to (b) is informationally ampliative: when (b) contains new empirical information not present in (a) (Contessa, 2016, *passim*; see also Thomasson, 2017, p. 771)

¹⁰ The expression “ontological minimalism” is taken from the work of Thomasson (2001), where she uses it to describe her own and Schiffer’s view. Since Thomasson has moved away from that name and prefers “easy ontology”. Her reason for moving away from ontological minimalism is that it suggests, not her view that the standards for ontological commitment are minimal, but that the entities that exist, according to the view, are somehow minimal, an implication she rejects.

term) that the existence of volcanoes is guaranteed whenever there are particles arranged volcano-wise (Schiffer, 2003, p. 52; Thomasson, 2015, p. 149, 231).

In Schiffer's terms, they are "pleonastic something from nothing inferences". Engaging in pleonastic something from nothing inferences, we begin with undisputed truths and combine it with an analytic or conceptual truth that functions as what Schiffer calls a "transformation rule", to give us a derived claim that is, intuitively, redundant with respect to the undisputed claim, yet leaves us with (apparently new) ontological commitments to the disputed entities (Schiffer, 2003, p. 52). Versions of inferentialism make use of such a kind of trivial inferences, endorsed by Schiffer and Thomasson, in developing the easy approach to ontology. According to easy ontological views, many ontological debates may be resolved by engaging in inferences that seem redundant in ordinary English as genuinely trivial from uncontroversial premises. The view is motivated by its ability to tackle directly the question of how propositional thoughts about such objects are possible and how they can be knowledgeable. For given the trivial inferences that take us to claims about objects, we can see how speakers may acquire knowledge of these objects by knowing the uncontroversial truths and mastering the rules of use for the terms that entitle them to make inferences from those uncontroversial truths to the existence of them (Thomasson, 2015, chap. 3, pp. 127–160).

What the easy ontologist needs is clearly a normative claim, about what competent speakers are entitled to conclude (and what would be a mistake), not a descriptive one about what competent speakers will be disposed to assent to. That is to say, a normativist version of inferentialism which treats possessing a concept not as entailing that speakers are disposed to assent to certain statements, but rather that they ought to assent. Inferential rules (typically expressed by conditionals, material or formal) do not primarily consist in obligations for speakers or believers; they rather constraint our linguistic practices by delimitating what, from an inferential point of view, we may and may not do by entertaining propositional contents. They should better be seen as normative uniformities characterizing the pattern-governed behaviours of speakers. The view is not that someone's understanding the claim entails that she has a disposition to assent to it, but rather that mastery of the relevant linguistic rules governing the expressions used entitles one to make the relevant inference using those expressions and embrace the ontological conclusion and that rejecting it would leave one open to rebuke.¹¹

¹¹ There seem to be two separate questions here: how can an individual be obliged to reason according to certain rules, and why ought we (collectively) to have those rules rather than any others. On the first, the right approach seems to be that one can be so obliged by presenting oneself as a participant in the relevant public norm-governed practice (just as one can be obliged to follow the rules of soccer by joining the soccer game). The question of why we ought to adopt certain rules (or norms) rather than any others is far more difficult. One might look to the work of inferentialist logicians (Beall & Restall, 2013; Ripley, 2013) for a way of understanding certain basic norms regarding acceptance

In cases in which scientific investigation *seems* to have disproven common sense claims, metaphysicians have often offered eliminativist paraphrases. Eliminativists attempt to avoid commitment to disputed entities by translating all the ordinary language claims apparently requiring quantification back into statements that (try to) avoid such quantification. Following the well-known Van Inwagen's example (1990), "There is a chair here" would be paraphrased as "There are particles arranged chair-wise here" thereby quantifying only over particles, not chairs, thus supposedly avoiding commitment to chairs. Nevertheless, the two sentences involve sortal terms which, although different, are found to have the same application conditions—where "application conditions" (Thomasson, 2015, p. 90) can be said to be among the semantic rules of use for the sortal terms we master as we acquire language that determine in which situations they are successfully applied. This is so because the sortal term for the given kind of entity "chair" may be derived simply by pleonastic transformations (Schiffer, 2003) from the basic sentences "There are particles arranged chair-wise here", which does not quantify over anything of that kind. In particular, from the language of refuge, the statement "There are particles arranged chair-wise" one could still form the nominalization "A chair-wise arrangement (of particles)" or, for short, "A chair." Accordingly, if the latter claim "There are particles arranged chair-wise here" turns out to be true, then so it will be the former claim "There is a chair here." For the fulfillment of the application conditions of the first sortal may be sufficient to the fulfillment of the application conditions of the other. In this case, we are genuinely introducing reference to a new entity, not just relabeling an old entity of the same sort and we could state the application conditions for "Chair" without appealing the existence of a chair or indeed of any object at all. These conditions may be stated in the form of rules that enable us to move from talk that did not make use of the relevant noun term (or any synonymous or co-referring term) to talk that does—though again, it's worth emphasizing that there is no requirement that these application conditions be stachair at all.

Therefore, the question "Is there a chair there?", can be straightforwardly answered by beginning from a claim that is not a point of controversy between realists and (most) eliminativists:

- Uncontroversial claim: "There are particles arranged chair-wise".

But, the following seems to be a conceptual truth:

- Conceptual truth: "If there are particles arranged chair-wise, then there is a chair".

and rejection as constitutive norms for thought, and thus as non-optional. And we might look for a pragmatic justification for adopting other (less basic) norms or rules.

Indeed, the occurrence of the situation in which eliminativists would say particles are arranged chair-wise guarantees that the application conditions for the ordinary term “chair” are met. Thus, competent speakers who master the application conditions for “chair” are licensed to infer the derived ontological claim:

- Derived/ontological claim: “There is a chair”.

In this way, ontological debates about the existence of concrete objects can be settled just as “easily”. Ontological claims may be derived by competent speakers, through inferences, from uncontroversial claims combined with conceptual truths. Accordingly, by trivial reasoning a speaker may entitle her to reach new conclusions. For mastery of the rules of use for terms license the speaker to make easy inferences from basic, uncontroversial truths to the existence of the entities in question and to move from knowledge of the conceptual truth to knowledge that the things in question exist.¹²

This seems perfectly consistent with our ordinary talk about existence (i.e., outside the ontology room): from the fact that there are (according to the eliminativist’s theory) simples arranged chair-wise, we may infer that there is a chair. For according to ordinary usage, nothing more is required. Considered as part of normal English speech, the two sentences are inferentially bound to each other and the truth of the former is analytically sufficient (in the epistemic sense of being available to the speaker simply on the basis of linguistic/conceptual competence; Thomasson, 2007, p. 165) to ensure the truth of the latter—that is, epistemically available to the speaker simply on the basis of conceptual and linguistic competences. In this case, accepting the existence of a chair is analytically entailed by accepting the truth of the sentences describing the former state, therefore, accepting the truth of “There are simples arranged chair-wise” but denying the truth of “There are chairs” would be pointless. By treating the paraphrases as true and the direct claims about chairs as untrue, in fact, the eliminativist would sever trivial connections allowed in ordinary speech between sentences. As a consequence, treating the statements as lacking the same truth-value could only be done “by artificially inflating the application conditions for “chair” beyond those enshrined in normal use of the term” (Thomasson, 2007, p. 165).

To conclude, let’s focus again on attitude reports. Imagine that Pierre finally arrives in London and enters a restaurant. Pierre has meanwhile become a mereological nihilist, so that he assents to the two following sentences: “There are particles arranged chair-wise” but “There is no chair”. Accordingly, we can report:

- i. Pierre believes there are particles arranged chair-wise.

¹² By adopting, perhaps, a minimalist approach to truth (see Price, 2011, pp. 253–279).

ii. Pierre believes that there is no chair.

However, given the aforementioned conceptual truth “if there are particles arranged chair-wise, then there is a chair”, which is supposed to establish the application conditions of the noun term “chair” and to govern its use, if Pierre asserts that there are particles arranged chair-wise and we take him to be a competent speaker, then we are licensed to infer “Pierre believes that there is a chair”. As a result, we end up attributing to Pierre both the belief in the proposition that “there is a chair” and the belief in its negation at the same time.¹³

But, as I tried to show, Pierre can consistently believe both propositions at the same time, only if their contradictory nature is not reflectively accessible to him. That is not going to happen here. In this case, unlike Kripke’s original example, we can accept epistemic transparency. Indeed, the fact that Pierre’s beliefs have logically contradictory properties should be accessible to him simply by reflecting on the way the word “chair” is actually used in linguistic practice and not through any empirical investigation. Mastering the rules of use of the noun term “chair” in linguistic practice is sufficient to determine that one of his occurrent beliefs is the negation of another of his occurrent beliefs. It means that *a priori* reflection would be sufficient for him to detect that he is holding contradictory beliefs and to amend his error. Therefore, if in this case the logical properties of the belief content are reflectively accessible to Pierre, then Pierre cannot hold such contradictory beliefs without being regarded as irrational (or, at least, as a non-competent speaker). That is, if Pierre occurrently and on reflection believes the proposition “There is no chair” and its negation at the same time, then we cannot take him to be fully rational (or rather, we cannot take him to be a competent speaker). Because if Pierre was rational (or better, a competent

¹³ In order to make this case fit with referentialism and *direct reference* theories of proper names, we can imagine Pierre naming the particles arranged chair-wise in front of him as “Sum” and the alleged non-existent chair “Tab”. Then we can report:

Pierre believes that Sum exists.

Pierre believes that Tab does not exist.

But, since the application conditions of Tab allows to assert that if there is Sum, then there is Tab, we are licensed to infer “Pierre believes that Tab exists” (or better, he should if he was a competent speaker). So, we end up by acknowledging that:

Pierre believes that Tab exists.

Pierre believes that Tab does not exist.

As a result, we end up attributing to Pierre both the belief in the proposition that “There is a chair” and the belief in its negation at the same time. But Pierre can consistently believe both propositions at the same time, only if their contradictory nature is not reflectively accessible to him. That is not going to happen here. In this case, unlike Kripke’s original example, we can accept epistemic transparency. Indeed, the fact that Pierre’s beliefs have logically contradictory properties should be accessible to him simply by reflecting on the way the word “chair” is actually used in linguistic practice and not through any empirical investigation.

speaker), then he should be able to detect the contradiction and thereby reject at least one of the beliefs.

In the light of the above, it is possible to conclude that sometime competent speakers are *a priori* licensed to accept conceptual truths (object-language expression of rules they master) and to underwrite trivial inferences which are ontologically ampliative (without being informationally ampliative).¹⁴ Therefore, in those circumstances, they can reach and acquire ontological conclusions without the need for knowing any empirical truths.¹⁵

7. CONCLUSION

Kripke's Puzzle about Belief shows how externalism and transparency of contents are always mutually incompatible. As stated above, although the inferentialist standpoint can be understood as a sort of externalism, it allows some inferential relations be epistemically transparent (epistemically available to the speaker simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence).¹⁶ Such inferential relations, albeit trivial, turn out to be somehow existence-entailing (ontologically ampliative in Chalmers's terms [2009, p. 95]), that is, they can reveal ontological commitments—insofar as the conclusions seems to commit us to the existence of things of a *sort* not mentioned in the premises. So, even with-

¹⁴ Once again, an Inference can be considered not informationally ampliative roughly if the conclusion does not add any empirical information to the premise.

¹⁵ An example of a trivial inference that is not ontologically ampliative is the following: I accept that there are female foxes (uncontroversial truth), female foxes are vixens, then there are vixens. Even though this inference can be deemed as transparent, it is not existence entailing: female foxes just are vixens—we are not inferring the existence of anything new. The particular conceptual truths used in easy ontological arguments do raise distinct cause for concern. For these have a peculiar feature that inferences like the above do not: the easy ontologist's inferences are existence entailing in the sense that we begin from an undisputed claim that makes no mention of Fs (or any coextensive concept) and end with a claim that there are Fs, a new kind of entity not previously mentioned, or an entity of a different sort. This is crucial to the idea that some existence questions may be answered easily by making use of application conditions, without this turning out to be circular. Thanks to an anonymous referee for asking me to clarify this distinction.

¹⁶ Note that the view is not that the speaker must necessarily be aware of the relevant linguistic/conceptual norms in the sense of being able to formulate them in object language, but rather that mastery of the relevant linguistic/conceptual rules governing the expressions used entitles one to make the relevant inference using those expressions (and embrace the ontological conclusions). If we focus on the linking conceptual truth rather than the inference, we can express this as saying that mastery of the relevant linguistic/conceptual rules entitles one to accept the conceptual truth (without the need for any further investigation), and that rejecting it would be a mistake. What we need is a normative claim, about what competent speakers are entitled to conclude (and what would be a mistake). That is to say, speakers who master the relevant conceptual/linguistic rules are entitled to make the relevant inference, and to accept the conceptual truth (and are open to reproach if they refuse to).

out endorsing internalism, we can conclude that there are some transparent contents. At the same time, this leads us to reject the broader externalist view that nothing ampliative is epistemically available to the speaker simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence.

I started this paper by summarizing Kripke's puzzle about belief. I suggested that one of the main achievements of this puzzle is to show the incompatibility between Boghossian's principle of epistemic transparency and externalism of mental contents. According to the latter, contents are related to reality by facts external to our *a priori* grasp (epistemic opacity). As a consequence, there cannot be any transparent content.

I then focused on the semantic inferentialist's account of the content of our beliefs. I put forward the idea that, on the basis of this normative standpoint, a content can be taken to be transparent when name-components of that content are *a priori* associated with some application conditions and then reflection alone provides an *a priori* access to those application conditions, with no need of any empirical investigation. In this way, it was possible to provide an account of transparency compatible with externalism. An account, though, that works just in trivial cases. Trivial application conditions reflect conceptual truths. I argued that inferences that rely on application conditions of that sort, albeit trivial, can be existence entailing—according to a minimalist or “easy” approach to ontology. Accordingly, I concluded that some transparent contents (contents epistemically available simply on the basis of linguistic and conceptual competence) turn out to be, to some extent, ampliative.

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