You Can Be a Millian Heir
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0. Millian Heirs, Millianism, and Russellian Propositions.
A. Millianism is the claim that the semantic content of a proper name is the object to which it refers. (It is not merely the claim that proper names are rigid designators.)
B. Millianism is naturally combined with a Russellian view of propositions, which says that propositions have constituent structures, and the fundamental constituents of propositions are individuals, properties, and relations.
C. Singular propositions are propositions that have an individual as a constituent.

1. Some Motivations for Millianism
A. A non-demonstrative argument for Millianism: Humans believe singular propositions. So, they probably have some linguistic means to express their singular beliefs. So, they probably have sentences that semantically express those thoughts. Proper names seem to serve that purpose. So, proper names are Millian.
B. Why think that humans believe singular propositions? Humans can begin to think about an object given slender information, or misinformation, about it. They can continue to think about that same object through radical shifts in their opinions about it. Example:

3. Alice: “Boctello is pretty.” [not addressed to Betty, but overheard by her]
4. Betty: “Probably, Boctello is someone that Alice met recently.” [musing]

5. Betty: “Pocatello is pretty.”
C. How can humans have singular thoughts? A tempting partial answer: They have mental representations that resemble the individual constants of formal logic.
2. ‘The’-Predicativism
A. Sloat, (Burge), Bach, Geurts, Matushansky, Elbourne, Fara, and others have argued that proper names are predicates that semantically and syntactically resemble common nouns. When proper names seemingly appear alone in argument positions, they are accompanied by a silent occurrence of ‘the’. (Strikethrough indicates lack of pronunciation.)

6. Aristotle was wise.
6a. The Aristotle was wise.

B. ‘The’-predicativists say that the proper name ‘Aristotle’ applies to some objects and fails to apply to others. The name applies to an object just in case it is an Aristotle. The extension, or denotation, of ‘Aristotle’ is the set of Aristotles. The possible-worlds intension of ‘Aristotle’ is a function from worlds to sets, whose value at a world is the set of things that are Aristotles at that world.

C. The most common reason given for predicativism is that proper names appear in predicative positions.

7. My department has a couple of Davids.
8. Every Sarah in my logic course did very well on the last exam.
9. Most Marias come from South America, but most Marys come from the USA.

D. Predicativists typically hold that there is a strong connection between the property of being an Aristotle and the phonological string /Aristotle/, commonly spelled ‘A’-‘r’-‘i’-‘s’-‘t’-‘o’-‘t’-‘l’-‘e’. Different predicativists describe the relation differently.

10a. Necessarily, a thing is an Aristotle if and only if it is a bearer of ‘Aristotle’ (alternatively: a bearer of /Aristotle/).
10b. Necessarily, a thing is an Aristotle if and only if there is a semantic convention such that it falls in the extension of ‘Aristotle’ (or /Aristotle/) on that convention.
11. Possibly, more than one thing is a bearer of ‘Aristotle’.
12. Possibly, nothing is a bearer of ‘Aristotle’.

3. Millianism and Predicative Uses of Proper Names
A. How should Millians explain the data that predicativists point to?
B. Millians should expect predicative uses of proper names. Why? Humans have singular thoughts about many objects. It is impractical to introduce a unique individual constant for each such object. So, speakers would naturally re-use the same individual constant, or Millian proper name, for more than one individual. These re-used individual constants would be ambiguous (or perhaps indexical). But speakers would occasionally wish to use a predicate that applies to a thing iff it is semantically designated by that Millian name, under some disambiguation. Proper names themselves would be handy for that purpose. Thus we would find speakers uttering sentences such as “He is an Alfred.”
C. Perhaps the proper name becomes type-ambiguous (Schoubye) or perhaps the predicative uses are non-literal, merely pragmatic uses (Leckie). (I remain neutral on this.)

D. Proper names are used in many other ways as well: see Leckie, Jeshion, and Rami. Both Millians and predicativists need to explain these all of these uses. I believe that every view must resort to pragmatics for at least some uses.

4. Introduction to Modal Objections to ‘The’-Predicativism

A. On predicativist views, occurrences of ‘The $N$’ in argument positions are (almost always) occurrences of incomplete definite descriptions. So, they do not refer. But proper names appear to refer. And occurrences of them also seem to be occurrences of rigid designators.

B. Different predicativists have responded to these apparent difficulties in different ways. I will describe apparent problems with these responses that revolve around sentence (13) and variants on it.


I claim that (13), and certain variants on it, express propositions that are possibly true. But ‘the’-predicativist views entail that they do not.

5. A Modal Objection to Elbourne’s Theory

A. Elbourne seemingly assumes that speakers can have singular thoughts about a particular bearer of a name. On his view, ‘The $N$’, in a context, has a partially singular content.

14. Simplified version of Elbourne’s theory: If $N$ is a proper name, then an occurrence of ‘The $N$’ in argument position has the same semantic content, or at least the same intension, in a context $c$, as the following description, where the reference and content of ‘that’ is an individual fixed by the thoughts and intentions of the agent of $c$.

The thing that bears ‘$N$’ and is identical with that

B. Example: let ‘$A$’ be a genuinely logically proper name (a Millian name) for the ancient Greek philosopher who wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Then the intension of ‘The Aristotle’ is the same as that of the following description.

15. The thing that bears ‘Aristotle’ and is identical with $A$.

(15) is rigid in the following weak sense: There is no world in which it designates something other than Aristotle.

C. But there are plenty of worlds in which Aristotle exists and fails to bear the name ‘Aristotle’. (15) designates nothing in such worlds. (Merely persistent rigid designators vs. obstinate rigid designators.) That leads to trouble with (13).
13E. The thing that [bears ‘Aristotle’ and is identical with A] exists and nothing bears the name ‘Aristotle’.

D. Elbourne might resort to rigidifiers, such as ‘actually’. But then he faces Soames’s objections, and Schoubye’s charge of ad-hoc-ism.

6. A Modal Objection to a Version of Matushansky’s Theory
A. A simplified version of Matshansky’s 2008 view.

16. Matushansky on naming conventions and the extensions of proper-name predicates: The extension of the predicate ‘Aristotle’ varies from context to context, due to variation in the naming convention in force from context to context. The contextual variation in naming convention depends on the thoughts and intentions of the speaker and hearer(s) of the context.
In context $c_0$, the extension of ‘Aristotle’ is the set of things that bear naming convention $R_0$ to /Aristotle/.
In context $c_1$, the extension of ‘Aristotle’ is the set of things that bear naming convention $R_1$ to /Aristotle/.
And so on. For each naming convention $R_c$, there is at most object that bears that relation to the phonological string /Aristotle/. So, we can properly speak of the object that bears $R_c$ to /Aristotle/.

17. $\langle \text{the Aristotle} \rangle = \text{i}_{x} . \ R_0 \ (x) \ (/\text{Aristotle}/),$
where $R_0$ is the naming convention in force between the speaker and the hearer.

B. A paraphrase and some precisifying modifications.

18. $\langle \text{the Aristotle} \rangle = \text{the thing that stands in } R_0 \text{ to } /\text{Aristotle}/.$

19. For every context $c$, there is an associated naming convention $R_c$, determined by the thoughts and intentions of the speaker and hearer of $c$. Moreover, for any context $c$,
$\langle \text{the Aristotle} \rangle^c = \text{the thing that stands in } R_c \text{ to } /\text{Aristotle}/.$

20. For every context $c$, there is an associated naming convention $R_c$, determined by the thoughts and intentions of the speaker and hearer of $c$, and also an associated world $w_c$ (“the world of $c$”). Moreover, for any world $w$ and any context $c$,
$\langle \text{the Aristotle} \rangle^{w, c} = \text{the thing that stands in } R_c \text{ to } /\text{Aristotle}/ \text{ at } w.$

21. For every context $c$, there is an associated naming convention $R_c$, determined by the thoughts and intentions of the speaker and hearer of $c$, and also an associated world $w_c$ (“the world of $c$”). Moreover, for any world $w$ and any context $c$,
$\langle \text{the Aristotle} \rangle^{w, c} = \text{the thing that stands in } R_c \text{ to } /\text{Aristotle}/ \text{ at } w_c.$
C. (20) applies the standard rule for combining ‘the’ with a predicate. That rule correctly describes the intensions of definite descriptions formed from other context-sensitive predicate phrases, such as ‘the table I am looking at now’ and ‘the local restaurant’.

D. (21) applies a non-standard rule for ‘the’. It seems ad hoc. So, I will assume (20).

E. Matushansky tells us little about naming conventions. Presumably a given naming convention $R_c$ varies in its extension from world to world. Perhaps in some worlds, Aristotle does not stand in $R_c$ to /Aristotle/, but has a twin brother who does. In other worlds, *nothing* stands in $R_c$ to /Aristotle/. This strongly suggests that, on the (18) version of Matshansky’s view, ‘Aristotle’ is non-rigid.

F. Consider a use of ‘Aristotle’ in (actual world) context $c$. On the (20) version of Matushansky’s theory, it has the same intension as (22).

22. The thing that stands in $R_c$ to /Aristotle/.

Consider (13*), which is a variant on (13).

13*. Aristotle exists and nothing stands in $R_c$ to /Aristotle/.

Notice that (13*) is possibly true. Now substitute definite description (22) for ‘Aristotle’ in (13*) to obtain (13M).

13M. The thing that stands in $R_c$ to /Aristotle/ exists and nothing stands in $R_c$ to /Aristotle/.

(13M) is not possibly true. So, (13*) and (13M) do not have the same intension, contrary to the (20) version of Matshansky’s theory.

7. A Modal Objection (and a Non-Modal Objection) to a Contextual Supplementation Theory

A. Fara mentions, but does not endorse, a contextual supplementation version of ‘the’-predicativism.

23. *Simplified version of a contextual supplementation theory*: If $N$ is a proper name, then an occurrence of the $N$ in argument position has the same semantic content, or at least the same intension, in a context $c$, as the following description, where the semantic content (or at least the intension) of ‘$F_c$’ is fixed by $c$.

   The thing that bears ‘$N$’ and is $F_c$

But suppose that ‘Aristotle’ is supplemented, in context $c$, with the property of writing the *Nicomachean Ethics*. Then (13) has the same intension as (13C) in $c$. But (13) is possibly true, whereas (13C) is not.
13C. The thing that [bears ‘Aristotle’ and wrote the *Nicomachean Ethics*] exists and nothing bears ‘Aristotle’.

B. Even worse, the contextual supplementation theory can get reference wrong even within the actual world, because of ignorant and erroneous speakers.

24C. The thing that bears ‘Aristotle’ and wrote *The Republic* lived in Athens.

8. An Objection from Attitude Ascriptions to All of the Above Theories
A. All three of the preceding views have at least *prima facie* problems with attitude ascriptions. Suppose Erika is a German speaker who has never heard any English.

26. Erika said, and believes, that Germany is pretty.
26E. Erika said, and believes, that the thing that bears ‘Germany’ and is identical with \( G \) is pretty.
26M. Erika said, and believes, that the thing that bears \( R_c \) to /Germany/ is pretty.
26C. Erika said, and believes, that the thing that bears ‘Germany’ and is \( F_c \) is pretty.

B. The belief ascription in (26) is true, and has no false readings. But each predicativist version of that ascription has a false narrow scope reading, for Erika has never heard of the name ‘Germany’, and may never have thought about \( R_c \) or \( F_c \).

9. A Modal Objection to a Version of ‘The’-Predicativism that Appeals to Referentially-Used Definite Descriptions
A. ‘The’-predicativists may fare better by appealing to pragmatics, and in particular to referential uses of (incomplete) definite descriptions.

27. *The Referentially-Used Description Theory*: If \( N \) is a proper name, then an occurrence of \([\text{The } N]\) in argument position has the same semantic content, or at least the same intension, as the following description.
   
   The thing that bears ‘\( N \)’

   But speakers who utter sentences containing \([\text{The } N]\) in argument positions nearly always use all occurrences of it *referentially*. When they do so, the semantic content of \([\text{The } N]\) remains as above. But these speakers do not assert the semantic content of the sentence. Instead, the sole proposition that they assert is singular with respect to all occurrences of \([\text{The } N]\).

28. *The* Aristotle wrote *Nicomachean Ethics*.
28S. The thing that bears ‘Aristotle’ wrote *Nicomachean Ethics*.
28R. *A* wrote *Nicomachean Ethics*. 
The proposition semantically expressed by (28) has the same intension as (28S). ‘The thing that bears ‘Aristotle’’ is non-denoting (because incomplete) and so (28S) is false or truth-value-less. But someone who utters sentence (28) typically asserts a proposition distinct from its semantic content, namely the proposition expressed by (28R), and nothing else. That asserted proposition is true.

B. The advocate of this view could claim that our intuition that (13) is possibly true is driven by our intuitions about what a typical speaker asserts or means by uttering (13) (namely (13R)), rather than by what (13) semantically expresses (namely, a proposition that is necessarily equivalent to (13S)).

13S. The thing that bears ‘Aristotle’ exists and nothing bears ‘Aristotle’.
13R. A exists and nothing bears ‘Aristotle’.

C. But the above view of referential uses of definite descriptions is non-standard. Even when definite descriptions are used referentially, they typically are used to assert at least one proposition that is at least partly descriptive.

29. David: “The plumber charged us $200 for 10 minutes of work.”
   Gail: “David said that a plumber charged us $200 for 10 minutes of work.”

This is evidence that among the propositions David asserts are the Elbourne-like propositions semantically expressed by (30) and (31), where ‘P’ is a Millian name for the plumber.

30. The plumber who is identical with P charged us $200 for 10 minutes of work.
31. A plumber who is identical with P charged us $200 for 10 minutes of work.

D. If this is correct, then a speaker who utters (13) while intending to use ‘the Aristotle’, referentially would assert something like (13R*).

13R*. The thing that [bears ‘Aristotle’ and is identical with A] exists and nothing bears ‘Aristotle’.

(13R*) expresses a proposition that is not possibly true. But (13) expresses a proposition that is possibly true.
10. Classic Objections to Millianism

A. Objections from differences in cognitive significance.

32. Twain is identical with Twain.
33. Twain is identical with Clemens.
32p. \(<\text{Twain, Twain, being identical}> = <\uparrow, \uparrow, \text{being identical}>\)
33p. \(<\text{Twain, Twain, being identical}> = <\uparrow, \uparrow, \text{being identical}>\)

Twain himself!

34. Twain smokes.
35. Clemens smokes.

B. Objections from belief ascriptions.

36. Sam believes that Twain is identical with Twain.
37. Sam believes that Twain is identical with Clemens.

C. Objections from non-referring (empty) names.

38. Vulcan is a large planet.
39. Santa Claus is coming to town.
40. Sherlock Holmes is a detective.

11. Reply to the Objection from Cognitive Significance: Ways of Believing Propositions

A. Start with an analogy: Assertion is a binary relation that holds between people and propositions. But it is mediated by sentences. So, there is a clear sense in which it is possible to assert the same propositions in different ways, by uttering different sentences.

41. Alice: “You are standing.” [addressing Betty]
   Betty: “I am standing.”
   Carla: “Betty is standing."

B. Millians typically hold that belief is also a mediated relation. So, one can believe a single proposition in significantly different ways. The relevant mediators are often called guises. We can say that agents believe propositions under guises.

C. Some Millians take guises to be mental representations. (32mr) and (33mr) are formulas in a Language of Thought, which serve as guises for the propositions expressed by both (32) and (33). (34mr) is the guise-negation of (32mr).

32. Twain is identical with Twain.
33. Twain is identical with Clemens.
32mr. \(t=t\).
33mr. \(t=c\).
34mr. \(\neg t=c\)
12. Non-referring Proper Names: Fictional and Mythical Names
A. The problem sentences, again.
   38. Vulcan is a large planet.
   39. Santa Claus is coming to town.
   40. Sherlock Holmes is a detective.
B. My view, roughly: ‘Santa Claus’ and ‘Sherlock Holmes’ refer to mythical and fictional characters. The name ‘Vulcan’, however, fails to refer, at least when used by Le Verrier and those who accept his theory.

13. Reference to Fictional and Mythical Characters
A. Van Inwagen, Kripke, Thomasson, and Salmon: (41) seems true, and apparently entails that fictional characters exist.
   41. Sherlock Holmes is a fictional character that appears in more than one of Conan Doyle’s stories.
B. The metaphysics of fictional and mythical characters: Fictional characters are abstract artifacts. They are abstract because they have no (precise) physical locations. They are artifacts because they depend for their existence on human thoughts, intentions, and activities. In these respects, fictional characters resemble academic degrees, mortgages, and checking accounts. Fictional characters are no more mysterious than checking accounts. Similar points hold for mythical characters.
C. If ‘Santa Claus’ and ‘Sherlock Holmes’ refer, then Millianism entails that sentences (39) and (40) express singular propositions about those referents.
   39. Santa Claus is coming to town.
   39p. <Santa Claus, coming to town>
   40. Sherlock Holmes is a detective.
   40p. <Sherlock Holmes, being a detective>
D. Fictional and mythical characters are abstract artifacts. So, they do not come to town, and are never detectives. (In this respect, they are like checking accounts.) So, (39) and (40) are false.
E. (40) may appear to be true, but that is because it is typically used to assert propositions other than its semantic content, such as the propositions expressed by (40a)-(40c).
   40a. According to some stories by Conan Doyle, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.
   40b. Those stories say that Sherlock Holmes is a detective.
   40c. In that story we read, Sherlock Holmes is a detective.
14. Genuine Reference Failure

A. Sometimes there is genuine reference failure.

42. Le Verrier: “From here on, the name ‘Vulcan’ shall refer to the planet orbiting between Mercury and the Sun, if there is exactly one such planet, and to nothing, if there is no such planet.”

43. Vulcan is a planet.

B. The semantic content of (41) is a *gappy* proposition.

44. Mars is a planet.

44p1. <Mars, being a planet>

44p2. <{Mars}, {being a planet}>

44p3. 

Mars                                being a planet

43. Vulcan is a planet.

43p1. <____, being a planet>

43p2. <{}, {being a planet}>

43p3. 

being a planet

C. The gappy proposition that Vulcan is a planet is either false or truth-value-less.

D. Guises for non-gappy and gappy propositions.

44mr. $P(m)$

43mr. $P(v)$

E. Le Verrier’s activities create a mythical object, but he does not refer to it or think about it.