MIŠČEVIĆ'S REPLY TO GEORGES REY

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ABSTRACT

I agree with Rey that concepts can yield analytic falsities. Both Rey and I have been discussing empirical concepts, mostly kind concepts that are to some extent adequate, but contain some inadequate elements in their accepted definitions.The second kind are superstitious terms and empirical kind concepts, like the full-blown astrological ones, or concepts characterizing professions (or similar features) ascribing to them magic powers. They usually concern human-social kinds, ascribing to them characteristics or powers in a problematic manner (for example, "witch" ascribes inexistent powers, and also bad character due to the witch-nature of the targeted person). Propositions analytic in such concepts are both false and a priori. The third kind encompasses positive and negative descriptive-evaluative terms and corresponding thick concepts, that are not empty, but that ascribe positive or negative features to members of a presumed social kind (or group) just in virtue of their belonging to the kind. The most common example in nowadays languages are on the negative side, namely slurs (pejoratives); nowadays rather rare positive counterparts are misplaced laudatives. Again, typical propositions analytic in such concepts are false, and knowable in virtue of being competent in the respective language.

Keywords: *analytic falsities, superstitious terms and empirical kind concepts, descriptive-evaluative terms, slurs*

Yes, Georges, I do regard your paper as a gift, and I thank you a lot! But before engaging in a philosophical conversation, with a lot of agreement this time, let me share some nice and important memories with our readers. Let me go back in time to the early eighties when I first met you, upon your arrival in Zadar for a longer stay; and let me switch to the third person. We discovered we shared a lot of interest, for example in music, where I learned a lot from Georges. In philosophy, it was a real discovery,

a bit of a shock for me. I came to analytic philosophy mainly from Wittgensteinian-Austinian tradition, and then discovered some of Davidson's work for myself. With Georges, I was suddenly confronted with a very different, and more recent development: primacy of mind over language, computational understanding of the important matters concerning the mind, causal theories of reference, all the stuff that now seems everyday knowledge, but that was pretty unfamiliar at that time in my surroundings. I was converting slowly, not like Saint Paul (my first conversion, to analytic philosophy in general, incarnated for me by the work of Austin and his peers, some five years before meeting Georges, was more brusque and Pauline), but radically. The other thing I learned had more to do with knowledge-how; I was raised in the Continental tradition of interpreting and re-interpreting great philosophers, and with Georges I finally encountered the analytic style of discussion in its best incarnation. It fitted well my Scorpio character (see below), its openness and competitiveness has been attracting me already from what I read, but I never encountered it literally in person. Like with ordinary computers, my mental philosophical computer got a full update both on data and on the way of functioning, demanded a complete restart, and got one, mainly thanks to everyday conversations with Georges. And this is my greatest debt to him.

Since I agree with a lot Georges says, I shall try here to widen a bit the area in which false analytic sentences pose interesting problems. Actually, after having worked on the same kind of false analytic sentences that Georges is discussing as well, I have moved to other kinds of examples. My initial motivation was different: I started working on pejoratives-slurs partly from social-political interest, and then noticed that some pejorative sentences behave in the way that was familiar to me from the earlier group of examples. Then, more and more analogies cropped up, so that it seems to me now that there is a wide, relatively unitary area, marked by concepts that suggest false analytic propositions. This will be my topic here, with lots of thanks to Georges!

Let me present three kinds of cases. The first is the one that both Georges and I focused upon, and that involves false but presumably analytic items linked to some word/concept with reference well fixed, typically a natural kind term. I shall then turn to two more problematic cases that concern social, rather than natural kinds, but exhibit interestingly similar behavior, with some peculiarities. The first group is descriptive, the second contains important, I would venture to say essential, evaluative elements.

First group first. Both Georges and I have detected a somewhat strange behavior of statements (judgments, propositions, and beliefs) that have to do with properties taken to characterize empirical items (whales, dogs, and the like) and involve presumably essential characteristics the concepts of which (seem to) enter the concepts of these empirical items.

What kind of concepts? Georges concentrates on the notion of concept as I-meanings and I shall here stay with him on this matter. So, back to our topic. Take DOG and ANIMAL: A dog is an animal seems to be analytic in the concept DOG. I shall call propositions analytic in empirical concepts "e-analytic", for short.

Georges has been concentrating upon one challenging features of e-analytic propositions, namely that they can easily turn out to be false. Combined with the usual assumption that beliefs in such propositions are a priory, this feature suggests an abundance of a priori but false beliefs.

My own line on the same topic was the following: I noted that many years ago Jerrold Katz had raised the question: if "Cats are animals" is analytic, why not "Whales are mammals" ? I agree, so I was using "Whales are mammals" as another example of a true concept-analyzing proposition, contrasting it with the false "Whales are fish." (assuming, as against Carnap, that "fish" here doesn't not stand merely for a "fishlike creature", but involves being of the same broad kind as say, tuna, or salmon." Add "Whales (cats) are material objects". For a long time the following has been part of definition of atom: "Atoms are indivisible". (As is nowadays the point about reflexes: "A reflex movement is not controlled by central nervous system") For a good measure take ancient Greek belief that water-hydor is an element, and assume that it was part of Greek definition of "hydor". (Miscevic, N. (2000) "Deep and superficial a priori", Acta Analytica, 24.)

I agree with Georges about the availability of such false analytic propositions, but I have been stressing other elements, in particular, I have been offering a characterization of apriority suggested by the challenging features of such e-analytic propositions. It is a commonplace in epistemology, stressed by Georges, that any analytic proposition (including e-analytic ones) is a priori. Against this commonplace (to be called Conceptual-to-a priori Conditional) I claim that e-analytic propositions are an interesting counterexample. Many e-analytic propositions have empirical counterparts that are expressed by the same form-of-words. (E.g. the form of words „Whales are mammals" can express both an e-analytic proposition and an empirical statement.) Here are the steps: Many e-analytic propositions derive from their empirical counterparts. Beliefs in such propositions (e-analytic beliefs) can be explicitly justified either a priori, by pointing out their conceptual, analytic status, or by reverting to their empirical counterparts. In some contexts, those of a very shallow evaluation-justification one may justify an e-analytic belief in the first, conceptual way. In most contexts e-analytic belief is being justified by appeal to their empirical counterparts. The empirical justification is normally taken as being ultimate and. is proper justification. Empirical counterparts are derivationally deeper than e-analytic propositions and empirical justification justificationally deeper than a priori one as well. Therefore, e-analytic propositions are deeply a

posteriori and superficially a priori.

So much about the first kind of puzzling propositions, featuring prominently natural kind examples. Let me now move to a second, but related kind, featuring human and social kinds. Take the concepts (I-meanings) from popular astrology, like SCORPIO or LIBRA, and add concepts having to do with practices like divination, for instance MEDICINE MAN. These are cases where religious or social beliefs mystify the characteristics of typical and definitory activities of certain social groups. Consider the term "medicine man". A relevant original group has been thus designated by original speakers (leaving the issue of translation aside). They were performing activities called by them and their audience "casting spells" and were assumed to have magic powers. The last assumption, is I submit, false. The "casting spells" characterization is ambiguous: first, it can mean pronouncing words and performing gestures that actually do produce results in a super-natural way, second, pronouncing words and performing gestures that are believed to produce the results in such a way by the relevant group of people, including the "medicine men" themselves.

Consider now the sentence, concerning three official "medicine men" of a given tribe, O, Lo and Bo: "O, Lo and Bo are medicine men". Is it true or false? Well, what about magic powers? Presumably, O, Lo and Bo do not have magic powers; so it is litterally false since they lack magic power. But, in the mouth of an anthropologist the sentence probably expresses the proposition that the three men do perform the required activities and are taken to have magic powers. This second proposition is true. (An analogous story can be told about the concept WITCH.)

Of course, there is an alternative candidate account, the one that takes "medicine man" to express two concepts, the first the tribal one that points to the concept involving magical powers, and is therefore empty (nobody has the required powers) and the second, say concept deployed by the anthropologist, that is non-empty. The account is hard on the tribal meaning: the members of the tribe point to O, Lo and Bo, take them to be exemplary medicine men, and so on. It is hard to believe that their concept is simply empty.

Take now another problematic group, the names of astrological signs, e.g. "Scorpio". The name presumably refers to persons born between October 23 and November 21; it has been transmitted for some thousands of years to the present times. On the other hand, it is also used to refer to people who presumably have such-and-such "Scorpionic" character in virtue of being born in the given period of time. Here is a description taken from the web site:

"Scorpio is the eighth sign of the zodiac, and that shouldn't be taken lightly -- nor should Scorpios! Those born under this sign are dead serious in their mission to learn about others. There's no fluff

or chatter for Scorpios, either; these folks will zero in on the essential questions, gleaning the secrets that lie within. Scorpios concern themselves with beginnings and endings, and are unafraid of either; they also travel in a world that is black and white and has little use for gray. The curiosity of Scorpios is immeasurable, which may be why they are such adept investigators. These folks love to probe and know how to get to the bottom of things. The fact that they have a keen sense of intuition certainly helps." http://www.astrology.com/scorpio-sun-sign-zodiac-signs/2-d-d-66949

I propose that in the context of astrology "Scorpio" is a hybrid name for presumed, but highly problematic psychological kind, whose reference is determined both causally and descriptively, whereby the descriptive component has two sub-components: the unproblematic, time interval component, and the problematic,superstitious character describing component (and, please note the prescriptive element in the first line of our quote, to the effect that the reader is not to take lightly the referents of the name).

Consider now the sentence: „Nenad is a Scorpio"; is it true or false? Suppose it expresses the neutral propositions:

> Nenad is a Scorpio, he is born on Nov. 1.
> It is true. But here is the non-neutral, superstitious reading:

> Nenad is a Scorpio. (as regards his character.)
> And this one is false.

On this proposal, the astrological concept SCORPIO is not empty, thanks to its the date-or-birth condition, but is highly problematic, and generates false analytic propositions.

The third group I would like to connect to the previous two are nouns (and concepts) that have a referential-cum-descriptive dimension, and a misplaced evaluative dimension. The best known and the most frequent are slurs, combining some kind of belonging to a group or category (race, gender, ethnicity) and negative evaluation connected to it. The examples that have been popular in literature is "Hun" (or "Boche) as used for Germans, and "Nigger" as used for Blacks. Their much rarer counterpart are misplaced laudative nouns, combining belonging to a group or category and an unjustified positive evaluation. The only clear example I was able to find in English is "Aryan", as used by Nazis and their followers. These nouns are like thick adjectives, combining descriptive and evaluative elements. Let me call them "misplaced thick nouns". I shall be talking mostly about slurs, and occasionally mentioning laudatives just to point to general features that are common to negative and positive (misplaced) nouns and corresponding concepts.

So, let me start with slurs-pejorative. The inferentialists about pejoratives, Dummett and Brandom, have correctly noticed that pejoratives seem to

license quite remarkable inferences. Their insight can be harnessed to defend the conceptual truth-conditional proposal. What we need is the additional premise, that the licensing of inferences happens because the pejorative concept suggests them in an analytic (or almost analytic) fashion. Take the Hun example, and consider the following inference:

<u>Hans is a German</u>

Hans is a Hun

The inference seems to be clearly an inference from concept of "Hun". But, the next typical inference does not differ essentially from the first one:

<u>Hans is a Hun.</u>

Hans is cruel and barbarous.

The inferentialists see the inferences as basic, or at least Brandom does (I am not sure about Dummett). However, the use of pejoratives certainly does not start with inferential rules, but rather with racist, homophobic, sexist or other negative views about the referent. At some point the view is encapsulated into an implicit definition, and the new concept is born (or, if you are a Platonist about concept "HUN", accessed in the platonic heaven of pejorative concepts). In short, most plausibly a pejorative concept is a conceptualized (negative) stereotype. In conceptualization, only the kernel negative features are built into the concept, so that only essential negative properties, denoted by features, are represented in the concept(-definition).

Take „Hun" as pejorative for German, and the sentence "Huns are cruel and barbarous." Looks like it expresses and analytic statement. If you are not a crazy German-hater, you will probably agree that it is false. So, it starts looking like Rey's „Cats are animals" in a Putnamesque scenario (see Rey's paper above). But there is a difference, and we shall return to it soon.

Before that, let me mention another similarity, having to do with the epistemic status of the statement. Is it knowable a priori, or a posteriori? Once you learn the German-directed meaning of "Hun" you also learn that it points to the alleged cruelty and barbarousness of Germans. So, you should know a priory that this is what Huns are like. It all sounds a lot like George's cats example. The important difference is that in the scenario he is proposing (along the lines of Putnam) there are no cats. Now, what about Huns? There are Germans, so what shall we do?

This issue is importantly different from those raised by Rey's examples. There are philosophers, most notably Ch. Hom, who decided to bite the bullet and accept that slurs are empty. But then, whom can a slurring sentence insult? Targets are not there, so who should feel attacked?

We need reference, not empty concepts. Here is my proposal: pejoratives,

say "N", are negative (derogatory) social kind terms, with hybrid nature. Their reference is partly determined by causal chain: the target group G has been called by somebody "N", the name has been tra(nsmitted to the present users, and it refers to the group G and its members. Their descriptive senses have a neutral part (given by a neutral description, say „German"), and the bad part (primitive, hateful, stupid, etc.) plus more, essentially some prescriptive and expressive components. (see my most recent statement in my paper „Tim Williamson on Pejoratives and their Semantic Status - A Critical Discussion, forthcoming in The Philosophical Forum).

Of course there are alternative accounts of the meanings of slurs-pejoratives, and I cannot go into criticizing them here. What is important for me in this reply to Georges is to point to a real possibility of a wide range of phenomena analogous to the initial false-analytic-a priori-knowable propositions (statements).

Let me add a relatively rare example of a stupid positive and laudative I-meaning symmetrical to the negative meaning of slurs. Take the word "Aryan" as used by the racist: "Aryans are a superior race" seems definitory of such a meaning. (I was told that the word "dapper" originally had a laudatory meaning connected to the good status of a country squire. In my language, Croatian, we have a laudative "Hrvatina"; one is a Hrvatina, i.e. impressive and superior in virtue of being a true Croat, and so on.)

The I-meanings connected to slurs and to such laudative nouns as "Aryan" are strictly symmetrical to each other; the nouns do not seem to be empty, and some causal-historical explanation of non-emptiness seems the best candidate. Such misplaced thick nouns might form the third group or kind of words that point to deficient concepts and possible false analytic statements.

So, let me summarize. There are at least three kinds of empirical concepts that can produce analytic falsities, and two of them produce them systematically. In spite of falsities, they manage to refer, presumably through some kind of causal transmission network, so they are not empty.

The first kind are "normal" (and non-evaluative) empirical concepts, mostly kind concepts that are to some extent adequate, but contain some inadequate elements in their accepted definitions. This is the kind discussed both by Georges and myself. We agree that some propositions analytic in such concepts are false, and we also agree that analytic propositions are a priori knowable. Georges stresses the combination of falsity and apriority, whereas I try to refine the idea of apriority, distinguishing deep and superficial varieties, the latter characterizing propositions analytic in an empirical concept.

The second kind are superstitious terms and empirical kind concepts, like the full-blown astrological ones, or concepts characterizing professions

(or similar features) ascribing to them magic powers. They usually concern human-social kinds, ascribing to them characteristics or powers in a problematic manner (for example, "witch" ascribes inexistent powers, and also bad character due to the witch-nature of the targeted person). Propositions analytic in such concepts are both false and a priori.

The third kind encompasses positive and negative descriptive-evaluative terms and corresponding thick concepts, that are not empty, but that ascribe positive or negative features to members of a presumed social kind (or group) just in virtue of their belonging to the kind. The most common example in nowadays languages are on the negative side, namely slurs (pejoratives); nowadays rather rare positive counterparts are misplaced laudatives. Again, typical propositions analytic in such concepts are false, and knowable in virtue of being competent in the respective language.

I repeat that there are alternative theories about each of the groups, but that my preferred theory is analogous for all the three. If it is correct, it offers a unified account of a deficient conceptual behavior in various areas.

If Georges agrees with my understanding of the two additional kinds of concepts (exemplified by the superstitious ones and by slurs-laudatives), he can extend his challenging analysis to these more socially oriented concepts and expressions. If not, I would be curious to know why and to learn about his reasons for disagreement.

Let me end with one more ……… thanks.