

Belief Ascriptions: *de dicto* vs. *de re*

“Patrick believes that the dean is wise.”

De dicto:

De dicto means “concerning the *dictum* (thing said, proposition).”

Construed as *de dicto* belief ascriptions, these two statements can both be true:

Patrick believes that the dean is wise.

Patrick does not believe that Frank’s neighbor is wise.

even though the dean = Frank’s neighbor.

De re:

De re means “concerning the thing.”

Construed as a *de re* belief ascriptions, from

Patrick believes that the dean is wise.

The dean = Frank’s neighbor

it follows that

Patrick believes that Frank’s neighbor is wise.

The difference between *de dicto* and *de re* is whether substitutivity of co-referential terms is a valid form of inference.

In *de re* belief ascriptions, substitutivity works (by the very definition of ‘*de re* belief ascription’).

In *de dicto* belief ascriptions, substitutivity may fail to preserve truth-value.

Perry’s argument

Perry argues that there is neither a *de dicto* nor a *de re* analysis of belief ascriptions that will work for *I believe that I am making a mess*.