

### Response to Dennis Darland

The problem of opacity runs as follows: 1) Cicero = Tully. 2) S believes that Cicero denounced Cataline. 3) S does not believe that Tully denounced Cataline. 4) From 1 and 2 it follows that S believes that Tully denounced Cataline (accepting a principle of substitutivity, roughly that identical items can be substituted for each other in propositions). 3 and 4 are an outright contradiction. What has gone wrong?

To root out the problem, we can first distinguish between opaque and non-opaque propositions<sup>1</sup>. A non-opaque proposition would be: Cicero denounced Cataline. There, Tully can be substituted for Cicero with no change in the propositions' truth-value, though possibly a change in what it expresses. An opaque proposition, as we have seen, would be: S believes that Cicero denounced Cataline. We cannot substitute Tully for Cicero without altering the truth-value of the proposition, for it may well be the case that S does not believe that Tully denounced Cataline. Crucially, we note that it is not important whether the content of the proposition survives the substitution, but whether the truth-value does.

The difference between opaque and non-opaque propositions seems to hinge on the degree of omniscience governing the proposition. This needs explication. In the non-opaque proposition, what is expressed is a report of "what is" independent of any merely perspectival, possibly incorrect representation. The opaque proposition differs precisely by reporting a limited representation of reality, which, in the problem of opacity, is fallible. Propositions about mental propositional attitudes are the perfect candidates for opacity. S is ignorant of Tully's identity with Cicero, whereas in the non-opaque proposition, there is nobody to be ignorant of this fact; i.e. that proposition presumes omniscience by being a *direct* representation of reality.

Dennis Darland has proposed a solution to the problem of opacity which I believe does solve the problem, but is in need of interrogation. This solution is within his larger-scale project to give an analysis of belief, and I believe, an analysis of most all propositional attitudes. He claims that in opaque propositions, ones which report perspectival, generally mental facts, the propositional attitudes expressed act on words rather than the referents those words pick out<sup>2</sup>. This is unpacked as follows: "S believes that Cicero denounced Cataline" is analyzed as "S believes that 'Cicero' 'denounced' 'Cataline.'" Though Tully = Cicero, it is not the case that the name 'Cicero' = the name 'Tully.' Therefore, it is not entailed that "S believes 'Tully' 'denounced' 'Cicero,'" nor is it entailed that "S believes Tully denounced Cicero," both of which are false. By having

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<sup>1</sup> I will be talking about propositions whereas Darland talks about positions in sentences. I think this reflects my overall inclination to move from talk of sentences to propositions, and make clear the actual features of opaque positions, i.e. that their being part of the sentence/proposition that cannot be freely substituted depends on larger scale features of the sentence/proposition. The entailment is from opaque sentences/propositions to opaque positions, and not vice-versa. I don't think this terminological switch-up will affect the relevance of my critique. I also understand that Darland has a theory of propositions, which I don't think is substantially different than mine: i.e. a proposition being what is represented by a given sentence. Even so, as Quine said, you can only repair the boat of one's knowledge piecemeal. Above all, I hope that this terminological move is not seen as begging the question against Darland's analysis of belief. One can have a direct representation of having no direct representations, if we take seriously Russell's paradox and his 'vicious circle principle.'

<sup>2</sup> It is interesting to note that Darland's philosophy has much in common with Rorty's in his 1979 *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (pg. 371-372), a parallel I'm not sure Darland would be happy about:

propositional attitudes act upon words rather than what those words represent, and given that different words which represent identical things are not themselves identical, the problem of opacity does not arise.

The broader scale analyses Darland wants to give are of the convoluted concept of belief, and propositional attitudes generally. I will consider the coherence of his larger scale analyses before attacking what he actually commits himself to, to solve the problem of opacity. First, he analyzes belief into belief<sub>r</sub>. Belief<sub>r</sub> is belief in the symbols of what a belief would standardly purport to be 'about.' Instead of "S believes that Cicero denounced Cataline," we have "S believes<sub>r</sub> 'Cicero,' 'denounced,' 'Cataline.'" He supplements this with a host of symbol<sub>r</sub> relations, which I will not delve into individually<sup>3</sup>. A symbol<sub>r</sub> relation is a holder of a belief<sub>r</sub>'s association of the symbols involved in her belief<sub>r</sub> with 'real world' referents. For example, 'symbol<sub>r</sub> "S, time t, 'Cicero,' Cicero,'" where the unquoted Cicero signifies the 'real' thing Cicero. What goes wrong for S in the case of opacity, is his symbol<sub>r</sub> relation for Tully: 'symbol<sub>r</sub> "S, time t, 'Tully,' ~Cicero,'" which is false. The symbol<sub>r</sub> relations are generally not explicit to the holder of a given belief<sub>r</sub>. The conjunction of belief<sub>r</sub> and symbol<sub>r</sub> is sufficient for standard belief. It is worth investigating the interactions of these various concepts. Darland seems to believe that the 'real' referent in the symbol<sub>r</sub> relation is not capable of being substituted for the symbol in belief<sub>r</sub><sup>4</sup>. I don't see why not, at least from a practical standpoint. The problem of opacity still will not arise because it is made clear that for S Tully and Cicero refer to different things, and so the substitutivity of those names fails on an ontological level when the referent of those names is used instead of the mere names. For example, "S believes that Cicero denounced Cataline," and "S believed that <something that isn't Cicero named Tully> denounced Cataline," are clearly compatible, though the second is false. To S, Cicero is not identical with Tully. Though others may perceive this identity, S does not, and so, while he may be wrong about something, he is not expressly committing himself to contradiction. Allowing substitution from the symbol<sub>r</sub> relation referent to the belief<sub>r</sub> symbol also makes clear the philosophical error behind opacity: forcing omniscience, i.e. a set of all true beliefs, on S, whereas she actually possesses some false beliefs. I would like to see more reasons as to why we cannot adopt this solution, via Darland's concept of belief, not belief<sub>r</sub>. By Darland's own lights, I think there is a better solution, one which avoids all the issues with idealism and loss of mathematical and philosophical analysis I hope to demonstrate below. He cannot accept it precisely because he is committed to idealism. I hope to have shown above that direct representation can, once made clear, not fall prey to opacity.

I will present a critique of Darland's actual solution as follows: 1) There are opaque propositions without propositional attitudes. 2) Even if we disregard that, Darland's solution to opacity must necessarily be an analysis of all propositional

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<sup>3</sup> Darland delineates several symbol<sub>r</sub> relations. I don't think they need to be addressed individually, and so our terminology will part ways briefly here.

<sup>4</sup> He claims that the psychological events which symbol<sub>r</sub> relations represent are too immaterial to be talked about. This is a general product of Darland's unwillingness to acknowledge non-symbolic mental representation. This is clear when he says that his belief (the conjunction of belief<sub>r</sub> and symbol<sub>r</sub>) is not a 1<sup>st</sup> person state. It is hard to see how we could talk about someone having a propositional attitude they can't be aware of though! Here, I'm briefly arguing that Darland could use his talk of 'belief,' not 'belief<sub>r</sub>' to dispose of opacity, if he was willing to acknowledge direct mental representation, which he isn't because of his generally idealistic program.

attitudes, for it would be inconsistent to restrict his analysis to only opaque propositional attitudes. 3) Once framed as an analysis of propositional attitudes, Darland's suggestions reveal a moderate idealism that may be unacceptable. 4) Also, Darland's solution is large price to pay, as the cases of effective substitutivity of identity constitute much of math and philosophy. 5) By conceptualizing the problem as primary a problem of omniscience, and secondarily a problem of words, we can arrive at a less extreme solution to opacity.

Darland and I have found it very natural so far to characterize opacity in terms of propositional attitudes. However, take the proposition: "H<sub>2</sub>O is a scientific concept." Substitutivity of identity fails, for "Water is a scientific concept," is false. Darland may reply that, though no longer about propositional attitudes (at least explicit ones), the problem is still the overdetermination of words. This may be correct, but I don't think it is entirely obvious: the propositions are explicitly about concepts<sup>5</sup>, and though they are identical, it seems the concept of water and H<sub>2</sub>O differ, not just the words 'water' and 'H<sub>2</sub>O.' Water may bring a picture of a bottle of drinking water, or a lake, whereas H<sub>2</sub>O is more likely to conjure the image of a molecule. It seems, at very least, the different words emphasize different levels along the macro-micro continuum of the whole package concept of water, and so cannot both possess all the accidental properties of the other. I will leave behind this criticism, and focus on the opacity of propositional attitudes, as I believe the opacity sketched above does not hinge on issues of omniscience so much as context given human methods of understanding the world. The above is to emphasize the tricky question of inexplicit propositional attitudes, and how we may analyze them as Darland would have us.

It seems an open question whether all propositions about propositional attitudes are opaque. Take something with only one name or whose names are all known by the bearer of the attitude. These propositions are not opaque because substitutivity holds. Is Darland enforcing his word-based restriction for all propositions about propositional attitudes or only opaque propositions? It seems that it cannot be restricted to only opaque propositions without being ad hoc, for the only relevant feature distinguishing the non-opaque propositions about propositional attitudes from the opaque ones is accidental: if someone were to coin a new word describing the subject of the non-opaque proposition, the proposition would immediately become opaque. It seems more natural to argue the case about generally what the objects of propositional attitudes consist in, with opacity as a centerpiece, than narrowly force this solution on opacity.

The most obvious criticism we could make of Darland is that his view entails some sort of idealism<sup>6</sup>. If propositional attitudes must act on words, or as Darland later clarifies, some sort of representation, not necessarily words, then it seems we cannot have propositional attitudes about 'reality,' or at least we are very wrong in presuming to have

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<sup>5</sup> Let us take a moment to discuss whether, when Darland talks about symbolic representation being even in terms of mental images, he can coherently uphold a distinction between symbol and thing represented. This point is critical, and I wish I could have found a place for it in the main text. The idea is when, without a pre-existing idealism via a Cartesian concept of mental representation, Darland would not be able to differentiate the identical mental picture from the real thing pictured, as they are the same.

<sup>6</sup> He elsewhere also states that object and experience are separate and are often wrongly merged, and elsewhere that belief is properly in symbols, not what those symbols represent, among many other similar statements. It seems fair to characterize Darland's philosophical project as a divorce of symbol and what is symbolized to solve various philosophical problems. The scariest statement comes as: "There is not generally any way to know that **Symbol\_Or** relations hold for sure..."

propositional attitudes about ‘the things themselves.’ Given that ‘seeing,’ ‘believing,’ and ‘knowing,’ are all propositional attitudes vulnerable to opacity, and that these propositional attitudes are the very stuff by which we experience the real, idealism threatens. Darland is sensitive to the issue of idealism, and expresses the belief that words connect to real things via a general relationship between symbols and reality (this is his analysis of the symbol\_r relationship that complements the belief\_r relationship, i.e. his analysis of belief). Even if we grant this<sup>7</sup>, the problem then becomes whether this relationship is the right one. The symbol\_r relationship relates the bearer of a propositional attitude, at a time, from a symbol to what that bearer associates that symbol with. In the case of opacity, the problem is that the symbol\_r relation has gone awry, in that the bearer of the propositional attitude associates a symbol with something that is not its correct referent. My main problem with Darland’s philosophy at this juncture is that it must be ad hoc in determining which symbol\_r relations are correct, or correspond to facts. It seems that none are privileged in an intrinsic sense without the addition of some external ‘fact,’ which is too merely a conjunct of belief\_r and symbol\_r, or else completely outside the sphere of human knowledge (as he seems to claim). Also, what are we to do with symbols that don’t refer? S, perhaps, simply can think of nothing when confronted with the name ‘Tully,’ and errs on the side of caution. It seems there is no symbol\_r relation here. The upshot of this is that nobody can have a belief (though a belief\_r) about contingently (Tully) or necessarily (Pegasus) empty names.

Another untoward consequence of Darland’s solution via belief\_r is a general failure of substitutivity. Take someone who believes\_r that Cicero denounced Cataline, and believes\_r that Cicero = Tully, but has not yet explicitly believed\_r that Tully denounced Cataline. It seems she must come to belief\_r about Tully denouncing Cataline independently, as she cannot simply substitute Tully for Cicero to expand her beliefs. This makes sudden belief about say Superman, upon learning that he is Clark Kent, somewhat mysterious. Also, discoveries in math and philosophical analysis, which often purport to just uncover identity, seem perplexing. At very least, the process by which one revises belief\_r’s once it is uncovered that two symbols co-refer via the symbol\_r relationship is not clearly sketched unless we can make substitutions between symbol and referent at some point in the explanation.

Darland solves the problem of opacity, but I think a more elegant approach is possible. As I outlined previously, the problem has to do with the degree of omniscience involved in a given proposition, not with the fact that symbols are not identical and that we have beliefs about symbols. Instead of pointing the finger at the symbols used to describe something in an opaque proposition, though they may be part of the problem, it seems better to blame the bearer of the propositional attitudes’ ignorance. The overdetermined words have caused the problem in the same way air causes fire: the match is lack of omniscience. This becomes clear when we are able to realize that omniscient beings with an overdetermined language would not suffer from the problem of opacity.<sup>8</sup> As I outlined above, we have a lot to lose by making belief in terms of symbols: not only does idealism beckon, but we also lose all the good cases of

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<sup>7</sup> Which we shouldn’t, because Darland has earlier said that belief\_r is the first person state. As I claimed earlier, it is hard to see how belief makes sense, if it talks about states that nobody can have accessible to themselves. See footnotes 4 & 5 for more detailed argument on this point.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 5 for another argument.

substitutivity of identity. It seems that the bad apples, those who hold propositional attitudes while not being aware of all the relevant identity relations should not spoil the identity game for the rest of us. We can implement this suggestion by making explicit a closure requirement: someone can only deduce a new belief via an identity relation if they believe the identity relation itself. The corollary of this is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person 'ought-to-believe' deduction. For example: "S believes that Tully denounced Cataline" cannot be deduced from "S believes that Cicero denounced Cataline" unless "S believes that Tully = Cicero." All elements of the closure must have the same propositional attitude subject and prefix. Given only the non-propositional attitude "Tully = Cicero," all we can deduce is "S ought to believe that Tully denounced Cataline." I think these suggestions could easily be implemented clearly with a special logic.

I have here tried to show that Darland presumes a form of idealism that is inconsistent with some elements of his theory. Furthermore, when paired with this idealism, what exists of his theory has severe disadvantages. Finally, there exist cases of opacity that do not incorporate explicit propositional attitudes: it is unclear what Darland would say about these. I then ventured a new solution to the problem of opacity that I believe avoids these problems, based on my novel interpretation of opacity.