

MOORE'S PROPOSITION W

JAMES CARGILE

1. G. E. Moore in [3] referred to as 'W' the proposition expressed by the sentence: "The sentence 'At least one person is a King of France' means that at least one person is a King of France." I shall supplement this terminology by the addition of 'EW' to stand for the sentence said above to express the proposition W. Moore held that other sentences could also express W. One such, the French translation of EW, will be called 'FW'. FW is: "*Les mots 'At least one person is a King of France' veulent dire qu'une personne au moins est un roi de France.'*"

Moore holds that W is not a tautology. By this he means not just to deny that W is a substitution instance of a theorem of the propositional calculus, but also to deny that it is necessarily true. That is, unlike the propositions that all bachelors are unmarried or that two plus two is four, there could be a state of affairs in which W was false.

Moore has two arguments for this claim. The first is that EW and FW express the same proposition, and that the proposition expressed by FW being clearly contingent, the proposition expressed by EW, being the same proposition, must be contingent also. The second is rather less of an argument; Moore just says that it is obvious that the sentence "At least one person is a King of France" might have meant something other than what it does.

This would be hard to deny. It is easy to imagine a location where the language is exactly like that of present day America except that the speakers use "persona" for "person," "person" for "parson," "roy" for "king," and "king" for "citizen." Among these people the sentence "At least one person is a King of France" would not mean that at least one person is a King of France; it would mean that at least one parson is a citizen of France. And it isn't hard to imagine that this situation might have been the one that obtained in present day America and England. However, even among speakers in the imaginary location, EW would be a true sentence. In this situation, in which W is false, and saying EW would be saying something true, the right way to assert W would be to say: "The sentence 'At least one person is a King of France' means that at least one persona is a roy of France."