What's in a Name?: A thesis concerning the philosophical problems posed by proper names

Author: Ingrid Kestrel Bengtson

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Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2007

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What’s in a name?

A thesis concerning the philosophical problems posed by proper names

By

Ingrid K. Bengtson

Prof. Richard Cobb-Stevens, Advisor

May 2007
Juliet:

‘Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What’s Montague? it is nor hand, nor foot,
Nor arm, nor face, nor any other part
Belonging to a man. O, be some other name!
What’s in a name? that which we call a rose
By any other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call’d,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name;
And for that name, which is no part of thee,
Take all myself.

-William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, II.ii

To Shakespeare’s Juliet, it seemed that all that stood between her and her one true love was a name. Of course, it was not just the *name* of the unique entity that the name ‘Romeo Montague’ denoted that kept Romeo and Juliet from being together, you might say; it was the whole history of dispute between their two families, which would remain the same whatever they were named. Yet it is that name that signifies who Romeo is, and of what house, which connects him essentially to that conflict between families.

In elementary school, one is taught that a proper name is the name of a unique entity. Such a fact is easily taken for granted when one is ten years old—or twenty, or eighty for that matter!—but a puzzling situation arises when one re-examines this grammatical tidbit and asks oneself: what exactly determines what a proper name stands for? Is it completely arbitrary, as Juliet would have us believe, or is there some other
connection between a name and that which it names? How is it that I can say ‘Romeo Montague’ names the unique entity that is the man Romeo Montague?¹

When we speak ordinarily, we take it for granted that we succeed in referring to *that person* or *that event* simply by using its name. But upon reexamination, it is unclear exactly what connects a name to its reference (i.e. that which the name stands for), and how we know what one another means when someone utters a name. The issue of what a proper name stands for could seem trivial at first glance; however, the relation of a name to its reference serves as a model for how language in general relates to the world as it actually is. It is a vital epistemological question, with very interesting consequences.

Consider the following situation: in Nepal, Hindus and Nepalese Buddhists worship Kumari, who is a living Hindu deity. Kumari is a prepubescent girl who is the bodily incarnation of the goddess Taleju. Kumari is *literally* a deity to many Nepalese people until the day of her first menstruation, after which the goddess vacates her body and she is no longer Kumari. But who is she? This de-naming poses real psychological, and social and economic problems for the physical being (girl) who used to be the deity named ‘Kumari.’ So we are left with many questions: who is this ‘Kumari,’ what does her name mean, and how can its meaning change so abruptly?

In this essay I will explore the different views of proper names that have arisen over the years, and various problems posed by each of them. In light of all these arguments and criticisms, I have sought to create a picture of naming that stays true to our ordinary idea and use of naming. I will argue that names do not just denote; rather,

¹ Throughout this essay when a proper name is written in inverted commas, such as ‘Romeo Montague,’ I am talking about the name, and when a proper name is written without inverted commas, such as Romeo Montague, I am talking about the thing itself (this example assumes that Romeo is a real person, and not just a fictional character).
they have informational content that can be thought of as necessarily connected to a name, considering that the causal chain of communicative acts that associated that information with a certain name happened as they did.

i. A starting point

For many years, thinking about reference in the philosophy of language was dominated by John Stuart Mill’s theory that “there is no more to a name’s meaning than its role of designating something.” Mill wrote: “proper names are not connotative: they denote the individuals who are called by them; but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belonging to those individuals.” The problem with a view such as Mill’s is that it becomes difficult to determine what the reference of a name is. How is one to use a name to refer if it lacks descriptive content? It is useless to say ‘Stephen Hawking’ without having some sort of description (e.g. ‘the 17th Lucasian Professor of Mathematics’) to identify who one is talking about.

ii. Mill’s problems

This problem, however, was not the main reason that most philosophers of language eventually rejected Mill’s theory. Rather, it was the concerns of Frege (1893)

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4 Kripke’s question, Naming and Necessity, 28.
and Russell (1911) about identity statements that revealed the shortcomings of a denotative-but-not-connotative view. Consider the classic criticism of Mill’s theory:

When the ancient Greeks observed the planet Venus, they assumed it to be two different stars, one that rose in the morning, which they called ‘Phosphorus,’ and one that rose in the evening, which they called ‘Hesperus.’ Given that we now know that ‘Phosphorus’ and ‘Hesperus’ are the same planet, we can write the following true identity statements:

(1) Hesperus is Hesperus.

(2) Hesperus is Phosphorus.

What is the difference between the (1) and (2)? Philosophers have made several arguments about the difference between the two. Some say that (1) is analytic whereas (2) is synthetic. Some claim that (1) is known a priori while (2) is known empirically. And some claim that (1) is necessary while (2) is contingent. “However, probably the most influential reason for thinking that the statements differ in meaning has been Frege’s claim that they differ in ‘cognitive value,’” meaning that while (1) is a “trivial piece of logical knowledge,” (2) is “highly informative, revealing an important astronomical discovery.”

The point of agreement in all these opinions is that (1) and (2) differ in meaning. This difference can only be explained if one is to attribute different meanings to ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus.’ Mill’s theory takes both names to have the same meaning.

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5 Devitt
since both ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Phosphorus’ designate the planet Venus. Thus, Mill’s theory seems to be wrong, as simple denotation does not expend the meaning of the name.\textsuperscript{6}

A further problem with Mill’s theory arises when one is confronted with existence statements. Think about the statement ‘Vulcan\textsuperscript{7} does not exist.’ This statement is true. But since there is no Vulcan, the name ‘Vulcan’ does not designate anything. In keeping with Mill’s theory, ‘Vulcan does not exist’ should be partly meaningless. Obviously, ‘Vulcan does not exist’ is not meaningless; it could not be true otherwise! Again, Mill’s theory fails to give an appropriate view of proper names.\textsuperscript{8}

iii. Frege on identity, and names

I noted that Frege’s claim that (1) and (2) differ in ‘cognitive value’ was the most influential reason for thinking that the statements differ in meaning. To begin this inquiry, let us consider some of Frege’s thoughts regarding identity statements, which will serve as a background for his alternative theory of names.

Consider this: how is it that a true identity statement, such as ‘a = b’ can be informative? An expression is informative, at least loosely, if it gives ‘facts’ or communicates knowledge of something, usually with the assumption that the information given is new knowledge to the person receiving it. Frege thought that to express informative, proper knowledge through identity, as in ‘a = b’, the signs ‘a’ and ‘b’ have to designate the same thing. Frege considers ‘a’ and ‘b’ to be different modes of presentation of one designator. He distinguishes between what he calls the \textit{Sinn} (‘sense’)

\textsuperscript{6} Devitt
\textsuperscript{7} Vulcan is the mythical planet once believed to be between the Sun and Mercury.
\textsuperscript{8} Devitt
and the *Bedeutung* (‘reference’) of a sign; the *Sinn* is what contains the mode of presentation, and the *Bedeutung* is that to which the *Sinn* refers. Essentially, the *Sinn* is an objective way of thinking about a thing. Frege uses the example of the planet Venus. Venus is known both as the ‘morning star’ and as the ‘evening star.’ The *Bedeutung* of ‘morning star’ and ‘evening star’ is the same (Venus), but the *Sinn* is not.

Returning to our true identity statement ‘a = b,’ if we were to follow Frege’s line of thinking, ‘a’ and ‘b’ would be two different *Sinn* of a single *Bedeutung*, i.e. two different ways of expressing a single reference. Such a statement could be informative in that it reveals that two signs which differ in cognitive value are simply different ways of expressing the same thing.

The concept of proper names is inextricably linked with Frege’s idea of *Sinn* and *Bedeutung*. For Frege, a ‘Proper Name’ combines ordinary proper names like ‘Paris’ or ‘Stephen Hawking’ and definite descriptions, like ‘the capital city of France’ or ‘the 17th Lucasian Professor of Mathematics’ into one category of singular terms. These names are linguistic signs, simple (one word) or complex (a phrase), that express the sense of their reference.9

A name is the actual word(s), the *letters* and the *sound*, while a sense might be best understood as the thought that particular word(s) elicit when they are comprehended by the person reading or hearing them. For example, the name ‘Paris’ is a linguistic sign that expresses an objective way of thinking about a thing, in this case Paris10 itself. To

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9 What I have so far referred to as *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* I will now refer to as sense and reference, respectively, to universalize Frege’s concept.

10 In an extension of footnote 1, when I write ‘Paris’ in inverted commas, I am talking about the name and the sense, as opposed to the thing itself (that big sprawl of buildings on the Seine), which is written simply as Paris. The thing itself (Paris) is the *reference*. I will continue to use this method to distinguish between name/sense and reference.
clarify: ‘the capital city of France’ is also a sign which expresses an objective way of thinking about Paris. ‘Paris’ and ‘the capital city of France’ are two signs which express two senses of Paris. It might appear that there is not much difference between these two senses, and indeed they are not much different. But if one considers that ‘the big sprawl of buildings on the Seine’ and ‘the urban center often called “the city of love”’ are two more senses of Paris, one can see the difference a bit better. The two names elicit two slightly different ways of thinking about Paris.

iv. Problems with Frege’s theory

Frege wrote that “by… ‘name’ I have here understood any designation representing a proper name, which thus has as its reference a definite object.”\textsuperscript{11} The ‘Basic Problem’\textsuperscript{12} with Frege’s theory of \textit{Sinn} and \textit{Bedeutung} is that it relies on object-invoking proper names. Proper-name treatments are vulnerable ‘to the fact that the world may not oblige with the object they wish to invoke.’\textsuperscript{13} There of course might not be an object, or there might be an infinite number of objects for which it is impossible to assign proper names to all of them. Frege does recognize this problem, and he suggests that it can be solved by assigning some arbitrary object, like the number zero, to serve as the semantic value. For example, the planet Venus would serve as the semantic value of the name ‘Venus,’ but the semantic value of ‘Vulcan’ would be 0; the intuition is that in

\textsuperscript{11} Frege, Gottlob. ‘On Sense and Reference.’ Reprinted in \textit{Translations from the Writings of Gottlob Frege, 57}.
\textsuperscript{12} McCulloch, \textit{Game of the Name}, 44.
\textsuperscript{13} McCulloch, 44.
assigning an arbitrary object as a substitute for nothing, one can give names of non-existent things references.\textsuperscript{14}

Russell, however, was not satisfied by the artificiality of such a solution, which essentially ‘[loses] all contact with linguistic reality.’\textsuperscript{15} McCulloch writes that Russell’s theory of descriptions is ‘an alternative treatment of propositions containing descriptions which is explicitly designed to avoid the Basic Problem [that there might not be any or are too many objects corresponding to a proper name].’\textsuperscript{16} If one does not need to invoke an object in accounting for a description, there is no ‘Basic Problem.’

Before we look at how Russell goes about treating descriptions, however, it is important to note that he disagrees with Frege about the essential nature of names as they relate to that which they stand for. Russell claims that logicians are too often misled by grammar, and that they ‘[regard] grammatical form as a surer guide in analysis than, in fact, it is.’\textsuperscript{17} Because there is no ‘apparatus of propositional functions,’ he thinks, ‘many logicians have been driven to the conclusion that there are unreal objects.’\textsuperscript{18} For example, because we can speak about ‘the golden mountain,’ ‘the round square,’ or ‘Vulcan’ in a meaningful, and even true, way, it is argued that they must be some sort of logical being, or else the propositions would be meaningless.

Russell, however, thinks that logicians should be more mindful of reality, and the fact that there is nothing that is unreal. He argues that descriptions, either definite or indefinite, describe either something real (whether it be an object, a figment of the

\textsuperscript{14} McCulloch, 45.
\textsuperscript{15} McCulloch, 46.
\textsuperscript{16} McCulloch, 47.
\textsuperscript{17} Russell, ‘On Denoting,’ 47.
\textsuperscript{18} Russell, 47.
imagination, or something else) or nothing, but never something unreal. Because of the difficulties created by the need for sense and reference in a significant denoting phrase (which would include all those expressions which Frege would have categorized as names), he thinks we cannot always maintain the connection between sense and reference.

Russell notes that the common way of speaking about the sense of a denoting phrase, as opposed to its reference, is to use inverted commas, as in:

The Golden Rule is a maxim, not a denoting phrase.

‘The Golden Rule’ is a denoting phrase, not a maxim.

Once we see this, we can see that “the difficulty which confronts us is that we cannot succeed in both preserving the connexion of meaning and denotation and preventing them from being one and the same; [and] also that the meaning cannot be got at except by means of denoting phrases” in the following way:

Say I want to know what a denoting phrase, such as ‘the Golden rule,’ means (i.e. what its reference is). Let

‘G’ = ‘the Golden Rule’; this makes

\[ G = \text{do unto others what you would have others do unto you} \]

If I don’t know what the reference of ‘G’ is, presumably I want to know the meaning of the word(s), not the reference. But if I were to talk about ‘the meaning of G’ I am talking about the meaning of the reference, not of the denoting phrase. To talk about the meaning of the word(s), I would have to talk about ‘the meaning of “G”’. Talking about

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19 i.e. even if you are describing something we usually think of as unreal, it actually can be thought of as a real thing; e.g. a unicorn can be thought of as a figment of the imagination, which is a real thing.

20 Russell refers to ‘sense’ and ‘reference’ as ‘meaning’ and ‘denotation,’ respectively.

21 Russell, 49.
‘the meaning of the Golden Rule’ (the reference G) is not the same as talking about ‘the meaning of “the Golden Rule”’ (the denoting phrase, ‘G’). So if I want to know the meaning of the words, I have to ask about “the meaning of “G””, which is ‘G’ itself; in other words, the meaning (what the words ‘G’ denote) is the same as G, which does not give us any new information. If we do not know the meaning of the word(s) in the first place, we have not gotten anywhere!22

Russell’s aim in noting the problems with needing a sense and a reference to give meaning is to point out that the relation of sense to reference ‘remains wholly mysterious.’ He rejects Frege’s definite description paradigm of referring expressions in favor of the notion of a name in the ‘narrow logical sense,’ which takes ‘genuine’ names to refer in some ‘mysterious, unanalysable and absolutely direct way to their referents.’23 Yet this leaves us still in need of some sort of account of how ordinary names work. Russell considers a theory of description the best way to explain the use of names. From this judgment, Russell revises the theory of descriptions to remedy the ‘Basic Problem’ in a way that remains consistent with linguistic reality.

v. Another way of thinking about names

Russell’s most important claim is that to make a statement significant, it needs a concept (something like that which we are calling a sense), but not necessarily a constituent (reference). He does this rather simply by rewriting descriptive propositions using basic quantifiers (‘everything’ and ‘something’) and logical particles. In ‘On Denoting,’ he uses the proposition

22 Russell, 49.
23 Donnellan ‘Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions,’ 338.
The father of Charles II was beheaded

This proposition can be restated as

Not everything failed to beget Charles II; and any begetter of Charles II is the same as any other; and whatever begat Charles II was executed.24

The basis for this formulation is that a proposition ‘the $G$ is $H$’ is true if and only if

(i) at least one thing is $G$
(ii) at most one thing is $G$
(iii) whatever is $G$ is $H$

This formulation can be written symbolically as

$$\text{(RUS) } \text{‘the } G \text{ is } H \text{’ = } \exists x (\forall y (Gy \leftrightarrow x = y) \& Hx)$$

This sort of paraphrase is T if and only if conditions (i)-(iii) hold, which is to say that they are T if and only if ‘the $G$ is $H$’ is T. This formulation allows one to make significant propositions (that are T or F, not meaningless) without appealing to an object. For example:

The present King of France is bald

can now be written as

$$\exists x (\forall y (Ky \leftrightarrow x = y) \& Bx)$$

where $K = x$ is the present King of France, and $B = x$ is bald. This statement turns out to be F, since nothing is T for the function

$$\forall y (Ky \leftrightarrow \_ = y) \& B\_.$$

Thus, Russell’s quantificational formulation solves the ‘Basic Problem’ without having to appeal to an artificial reference.

24 This is McCulloch’s restatement (47). It says what Russell wanted to say in his restatement, but with clearer language.
We have seen that Frege included both natural names and definite descriptions into the category of ‘Proper Names.’ We have also seen that according to Frege’s theory of Sinn and Bedeutung both natural names and definite descriptions fall victim to the ‘Basic Problem.’ To avoid this problem, Russell included natural names and definite descriptions in a single category of descriptions (as opposed to a category of singular terms)\textsuperscript{25}. He included natural names in the category of descriptions because he thought of them not just as simple signs for things, but as abbreviated descriptions. If a natural name can be treated quantificationally, then it, like a definite description, can avoid the ‘Basic Problem’ of reference.

So, how is it that one can treat natural names as descriptions? Russell writes:

The names that we commonly use, like ‘Socrates’, are really abbreviations for descriptions. …When we use the word ‘Socrates’ we are really using a description. Our thought may be rendered by some such phrase as ‘The master of Plato’, or ‘The philosopher who drank the hemlock’, or ‘The person whom logicians assert to be mortal’, but we certainly do not use the name as a name in the proper sense of the word\textsuperscript{26} (‘The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, p.201).

It is this rendering that can then be rewritten in quantificational language. For instance, the proposition ‘Socrates was mortal’ becomes ‘The philosopher who drank the hemlock was mortal,’ which can be restated as ‘One and only one thing is a philosopher who drank the hemlock, and whatever is a philosopher who drank the hemlock was mortal’ (and symbolized as $\exists x (\forall y (PwHy \leftrightarrow x = y) \& Mx))$.\textsuperscript{27}

The intuition in this statement of Russell’s seems to be that natural names are synonymous with quantificational descriptions, which is actually very similar to Frege’s view of proper names.

\textsuperscript{25} Russell also included indefinite descriptions in this category. Indefinite descriptions usually take the form ‘a something’, and can used to talk about a class of things, while definite descriptions, which usually take the form ‘the something’, are used to talk about unique things.

\textsuperscript{26} Which is the ‘narrow logical sense’ noted above.

\textsuperscript{27} McCulloch, 51.
vi. The descriptive theory of naming

What is particularly interesting about the question of what exactly determines what a proper name stands for is that it brings together “two classical but opposing paradigms for referring expressions.” Frege and Russell are representative of these two paradigms, which are definite description and names in the narrow, logical sense, respectively. As Donnellan notes, both paradigms lead to the same theory about proper names. Despite the fact that they differ in opinion about what names (as genuine referring expressions) are and how they refer, both Frege and Russell adhere to a widely accepted view that is usually called the ‘descriptivist’ theory of names, also known as the ‘principle of identifying descriptions.’

The basic idea behind the descriptivist theory is that a) the user(s) of a proper name must be able to supply a set of ‘non-question-begging’ descriptions that identify the who or the what the name refers to, and b) the referent of a proper name (if there is one) is the thing that uniquely fits that set of identifying descriptions. Thus one may know the reference of the name ‘Stephen Hawking’ by finding out that individual who is picked out by ‘the 17th Lucasian Professor of Mathematics,’ ‘the author of A Brief History of Time,’ etc. Basically, the fulfillment of the description(s) determines what the proper name stands for.

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28 Donnellan, 337.
29 Donnellan identifies these as ‘descriptions that a user of a name…could always provide and which always denote the referent of the name uniquely’ (344), e.g. ‘the entity I had in mind.’ This sort of question could always be followed up with another question, e.g. ‘what entity that you had in mind?’
It is important to note, however, that there is a ‘looseness’ in our language when determining the meaning of a name that causes people to think of names in different ways, and to associate different and even contradictory descriptions with them; in other words, it is practically impossible to compile a complete set of descriptions that everyone (or even one person!) would be willing to substitute for a name.

If we try to present a complete description for the object as the sense of a proper name, odd consequences would ensue, e.g. that any true statement about the object using the name as subject would be analytic, any false one self-contradictory, that the meaning of the name (and perhaps the identity of the object) would change every time there was any change at all in the object, that the name would have different meanings for different people, etc.\(^{30}\)

But perhaps this problem is not so difficult to remedy; no one said we had to substitute a particular description for a name; in real life we often associate a family of descriptions with a name. So with the name ‘Stephen Hawking’ we associate a whole family of descriptions, including ‘the author of *A Brief History of Time,*’ ‘the 17th Lucasian Professor of Mathematics,’ ‘the winner of the 1982 CBE,’ ‘the husband of Jane Wilde,’ etc. that make up the meaning of the name, which we draw upon, depending on our point of view, when talking about Stephen Hawking.

Not all of the descriptions users associate with a name are true, however. And as Strawson writes,

It would be too much to say that the success of term-introduction within the group by means of the name requires that there should exist just one person of whom all the propositions in the composite description are true. But it would not be too much to say that it requires that there should exist one and only one person of whom some reasonable proportion of these propositions is true.\(^{31}\)

The classic revision of the descriptive theory that takes this factor into account is put forth by Searle, who claims that the descriptive force of a statement like ‘This is

\(^{30}\) Searle, ‘Proper Names,’ 169.

Stephen Hawking’ is the assertion ‘that a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true of this object.’\textsuperscript{32} Although this view lacks the precision of the original formulation of the descriptive theory, Searle notes that the immense pragmatic convenience of proper names in our language lie precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to agreement on what descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the identity of the object. They function…as pegs on which to hang descriptions.\textsuperscript{33}

\textit{Prima facie} the principle of identifying descriptions, especially as revised by Searle, seems like a very realistic, practical way of thinking about what a proper name stands for. However, this does not mean that the descriptive theory is unproblematic. Despite the fact that Searle emphasizes the virtues of the looseness of proper names, having a solution that is so vague and indeterminate is decidedly unsatisfying (at least from a mathematical/logical point of view!). It lacks the certainty of reference that a ‘name in the strictly logical sense’ has. One can still ask: how do I know \textit{for certain} what I am talking about when I utter a name? Let us look at this problem more closely.

vii. Problems for the descriptive theory

To begin addressing the problems of the descriptive theory, it will be helpful to first understand a key idea in philosophical logic. In logic, types of phrases that are particularly suitable for referring to things are called designators.\textsuperscript{34} ‘Paris’ is a designator that refers to Paris. What Kripke dubbed a \textit{rigid} designator is a phrase that designates the same object in \textit{every possible world} one can imagine. The name ‘Stephen Hawking’

\textsuperscript{32} Searle, 171.
\textsuperscript{33} Searle 172.
\textsuperscript{34} Proper names, non-count nouns, singular personal pronouns and definite descriptions are all types of designators.; Hodges, 121.
designates Stephen Hawking, *the man*, in all possible worlds (in which he exists)\(^{35}\). A nonrigid, or ‘accidental’ designator designates something that is not the same in every possible world. ‘The 17\(^{th}\) Lucasian Professor of Mathematics’ designates Stephen Hawking in this world, but it is possible that Stephen Hawking might not have held the position at all, if, say, Cambridge had decided that the position should be awarded to Roger Penrose instead.

Kripke claims that proper names are rigid designators. The intuition is as follows: if a proper name names a unique entity, then that entity should be unique in every possible world. The descriptive theory of naming could be used either to give the meaning of the reference, or to determine (or ‘fix’) what the reference is. If the meaning of a name is *identical* to the family of descriptions associated with it, then the name would not be a rigid designator. This is evident in the preceding example; if ‘Stephen Hawking’ was identical to ‘the 17\(^{th}\) Lucasian Professor of Mathematics’ it could only be considered an accidental designator. But if the family is just used to help determine the reference of the name, as a rough guide to let us know who or what it is that the name is talking about, then that object of reference is still the reference in all possible worlds. In the case of Stephen Hawking, the intuition is that the name refers to *that man*, even though he might not have been the 17\(^{th}\) Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, or even called ‘Stephen Hawking.’ The rigid designation of names allows for identity across all possible worlds (or ‘transworld identity’).\(^{36}\)

\(^{35}\) The thought experiment goes like this: I can conceive of a world where the sky is yellow and the stars are green, and ‘Stephen Hawking’ still refers to Stephen Hawking. I can also conceive of a world where Frank and Isobel Hawking never met and thus Stephen was never born; in this case, the name ‘Stephen Hawking’ doesn’t refer to anything at all.

Now we are faced with the problem: if I can only use this family of descriptions as a rough guide to what a proper name stands for, how am I to know for certain what it is I am talking about? Kripke writes:

Don’t ask: how can I identify this table in another possible world, except by its properties? I have the table in my hands, I can point to it, and when I ask whether it might have been in another room, I am talking, by definition, about it…. If I am talking about it, I am talking about it.\(^\text{37}\)

So, when talking about something we begin with the object we have and can identify in front of us in the actual world, and then go on to ask whether or not certain things might have been true of that thing in another place and time.\(^\text{38}\) This is all well and good when we have an object, to which we can point and say this is what I am talking about, but what if I cannot do this? The case for using descriptions to determine what a name stands for remains very strong. Let us take a closer look at why Kripke thinks the descriptive theory fails.

Here are the six theses that constitute the descriptive theory of naming\(^\text{39}\):

1. To every name or designating expression ‘\(\lambda\)’, there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of those properties \(\varphi\) such that \(A\) believes ‘\(\varphi\lambda\)’.
2. One of the properties, or some conjointly, are believed by \(A\) to pick out some individual uniquely.
3. If most, or a weighted most, of the \(\varphi\)’s are satisfied by one unique object \(y\), then \(y\) is the referent of ‘\(\lambda\)’.
4. If the vote yields no unique object, ‘\(\lambda\)’ does not refer.

\(^\text{37}\) Kripke, 52-3.
\(^\text{38}\) Kripke, 53.
\(^\text{39}\) At least these are the theses Kripke says defines the descriptive theory, which can probably be considered appropriate, for the present discussion in any case.
5) The statement, ‘If $X$ exists, then $X$ has most of the $\varphi$’s’ is known *a priori* by the speaker.

6) The statement, ‘If $X$ exists, then $X$ has most of the $\varphi$’s’ expresses a necessary truth (in the idiolect of the speaker).

Condition for satisfaction of the six theses: For any successful theory, the account must not be circular. The properties which are used in the vote must not themselves involve the notion of reference in such a way that it is ultimately impossible to eliminate.40

viii. Kripke’s objections, and some redeeming points

In this section, I have laid out Kripke’s point-by-point objections to the descriptive theory of naming that I have included just above. I have responded to each of his objections with some redeeming points.

1) is merely a definition.

2) *Kripke’s objection*: This thesis fails to be satisfied if all we know of the thing we are naming is not a unique property.41 Imagine that all I know of Maradona is that he was a footballer. I do not believe that ‘was a footballer’ is a property that picks out Maradona uniquely.

40 i.e. it must not be ‘question-begging’
41 Kripke, 82.
On the other hand: just because all I know of Maradona is that he was a footballer does not mean that I do not believe there are no properties, or combination of properties that pick out Maradona uniquely. I might simply assume that Maradona has a unique combination of properties, some of which I am not aware of.

3) Kripke’s objection: This can also be proved wrong by counterexample. There are individuals that uniquely satisfy properties \(\varphi\), which are not the reference of a name. For example, Columbus is commonly referred to as ‘the first man to discover that the Earth was round’, and ‘the person who discovered America’. Neither description is true, but people are not actually referring to the ancient Greek who discovered the Earth was round or the Norse explorer who discovered America when they use the name ‘Columbus.’ Someone who uses these descriptions is merely misinformed about Columbus.

On the other hand: Although the speaker \(A\) might be misinformed about Columbus, if \(A\) subscribes to the descriptive theory, especially as revised by Searle, \(A\) might be open to the fact that there are other descriptions about Columbus that are true, but that might not be known by or accessible to \(A\) at that time. Perhaps at the time of the \(A\)’s utterance, no one has studied the journals of the Norse explorers to discover that it was they who first came upon America. Although \(A\) might believe Columbus to have said properties, \(A\) might still be aware of the possibility that he or she is mistaken about those facts, in which case \(A\) would still believe that there is a body of properties \(\varphi\) of which all or most Columbus satisfies uniquely.

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42 Kripke, 85.
4) **Kripke’s objection**: This is vulnerable to counterexample, too. Perhaps the vote (as to whether the thing has all or most of the qualities) may not yield any *unique* object (as in 2), and then again it may yield *no* object. In this case of yielding no object, it is possible to have *false* beliefs about no one at all. Although Biblical scholars agree that historically no man was swallowed up by a large fish then spat back up to go to Nineveh to preach, most still think that Jonah existed, and ‘Jonah’ still has a reference.\(^{43}\) That someone was swallowed by a fish and then spat up to go to Nineveh to preach are beliefs true of no one (thus the ‘vote’ yields no \(X\)). Yet ‘Jonah’ most likely *does* refer to some historical figure.

**On the other hand**: Using ‘Jonah’ to refer to a rather obscure historical figure is not using the name in the same sense as using it to refer to a man who was swallowed up by a whale. It isn’t referring to anyone in the sense that \(A\) is thinking of ‘Jonah’.

5) **Kripke’s objection**: If one is to accept the statement ‘if \(X\) exists, then \(X\) has most of the \(\phi\)’s’, one must *believe* that ‘\(X\)’ has properties \(\phi\).\(^{44}\) However belief is not the same thing as *a priori* knowledge.\(^{45}\) Kripke’s reasoning on this point is unclear\(^{46}\), but I think this might be the sticking point of 5): there must be some *reason* for my thinking that ‘if \(X\) exists, then \(X\) has most of the \(\phi\)’s’. Why would I think this? Because my *experiences* have taught me that an \(X\) is known by its properties \(\phi\). If this is the case, then my knowledge that \(X\) has most of the \(\phi\)’s is *a posteriori*.

\(^{43}\) Kripke, 86-7.
\(^{44}\) Kripke, 87.
\(^{45}\) Ibid.
\(^{46}\) He merely asserts that ‘…even in a case where (3) and (4) *happen* to be true, a typical speaker hardly knows *a priori* that they are, as required by the theory. *I think* that my belief about \([X]\) *is* in fact correct…But belief hardly constitutes *a priori* knowledge.’ This simple statement is not enough to explain why point 5) might fail.
On the other hand: Perhaps this is a too-strict conception of \textit{a priori} knowledge for this situation. If we think about \textit{a priori} knowledge in this situation as a basic precept to which we can apply situations and then determine whether the statement yields a truth value T or F, then the formula ‘X has most of the φ’s’ is free from experience, while the statement with substituted constituents is subject to experience.

6) Kripke’s objection: Even though Stephen Hawking exists, it is not a \textit{necessary} truth that he is the 17\textsuperscript{th} Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, or that he studied at University College, Oxford, or that he married Jane Wilde. If some other circumstances had arisen, none of these things might have been true.

On the other hand: Some of the φ’s that pick out X uniquely can be thought of as necessary \textit{a posteriori}. \textit{A posteriori} necessity is a concept discussed at length by Kripke; he notes that there are truths which are necessary, but which we can only know from experience. Take for instance the statement ‘Water is H2O.’ Both ‘Water’ and ‘H2O’ are rigid designators that co-refer in the actual world. This means that they will co-refer in every possible world. However this truth is “knowable only \textit{a posteriori} because the co-reference of the terms is itself contingent.”\footnote{Gendler, Tamar Szabo and John Hawthorne, \textit{Conceivability and Possibility}, 31-2.}

Now consider the statement ‘Stephen Hawking is the firstborn son of Frank and Isobel Hawking.’ This statement is necessary, at least if we assume that one’s parentage is necessary, but it is only knowable if we have experience of the actual world.\footnote{Gendler and Hawthorne also use the example of parental origins, although in a slightly different way.} So, perhaps there \textit{are} a sufficient number of φ’s of this sort that necessarily pick out X uniquely.
Kripke seems to think that his objections rule out the descriptive theory of naming. I do not think that these problems are the end of the descriptive theory, though. As is evident from my revision of some of Kripke’s points, the descriptive theory is sufficient if one takes a more naturalistic approach to language.

Consider again that $A$ could take into account the fact that his or her belief that $X$ has properties $\varphi$ might not be true, but could still hold that there is some set of descriptions that would pick out $X$ uniquely, if only $A$ had access to the correct information. This sort of view is very reminiscent of Searle’s position on the principle of identifying descriptions. Also, if we take into account the fact that some of the $\varphi$’s are necessary $a$ $posteriori$, we have a possibility that there is a set of $\varphi$’s that necessarily pick out $X$ uniquely. Finally, I do not think it is always out of line to include the understanding and use of ‘$X$’ by $A$ as part of the reference $X$. I think that a reputation, composed of a set of properties $\varphi$, can be built up over time such that it becomes an essential part of understanding/picking out $X$, even if those $\varphi$’s are not true of $X$. This might lead to ‘question-begging’ descriptions, but such descriptions should be included alongside non-question-begging descriptions, to provide a complete picture of $X$, as $X$ is contextualized in this world.

\footnote{In this case I am thinking of naturalism in the artistic/literary sense, in which it denotes realism, i.e. I want to look at how language functions in the actual world, without the idealization inherent in the logical accounts of naming and reference.}
x. The causal ‘solution’

Kripke actually looks to naturalism to address the problem of how is one to determine the ‘it’ a name stands for. In describing the difficulties of the descriptive theory of naming, he hopes to point out that there is something fundamentally wrong with thinking that we can give ourselves ‘some properties which somehow qualitatively uniquely pick out an object and determine our reference in that matter.’

Kripke notes that some names do conform to the descriptive theory. For example, when a person asserts to him or herself that a name ‘X’ shall designate ‘a unique thing with certain identifying properties,’ as when I refer to the person (whoever he might be) who anonymously sent me a dozen roses as ‘Secret Admirer.’ Or even when one is meeting another person, the descriptive theory could work, says Kripke. Say that I am being introduced to ‘John’ for the first time. Although I might not usually think in these terms, my thoughts (which I might not really be aware of) might identify ‘John’ with the description ‘the person I am meeting just now.’

But in general, he argues, this picture does not fit. In most cases, we know who or what we are talking about ‘not just [based] on what we think ourselves, but on other people in the community, the history of how the name reached one, and things like that. It is by following such a history that one gets to the reference.’

Kripke describes the reference of a name as being determined at the ‘initial baptism’, when one can actually point to a thing, and say ‘this is called “X”.’ This moment of ostension would presumably create that unanalyzable bond between a genuine name and its reference, whatever that might be. From this point, others hear the word and intend to use it with

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50 Kripke, 95.
the same reference as the person he or she heard it from.\footnote{So if I decide that ‘Napoleon’ would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, this does not become a part of the general community’s understanding of ‘Napoleon’ (Kripke, 96).} As the name is used in the community over time, certain descriptions become associated with it, and these are the descriptions that would come to be used in a descriptive theory of naming.

This means that sometimes the description sketch of how we determine the reference is true, as in when one ‘[goes into the privacy of his own room and [says] that the referent is to be the unique thing with certain identifying properties,’ as one does when one names a new star, or the like, when one can point to a thing and say that is what I mean.\footnote{Kripke, 94.} But the fact we cannot always point to the thing that we mean, and the fact that we humans are most often incomplete and/or imprecise when we communicate both lead to the gaps in the precise descriptive theory of naming that Kripke outlines (e.g. how one can come to believe that Columbus first discovered the world was round, etc, etc).

xi. Donnellan offers a similar solution

Donnellan is also critical of the descriptive theory, for many of the same reasons Kripke is. He too notices that ‘in general our use of proper names…is parasitic on uses of the names by other people – in conversation, written records, etc. Insofar as we possess a set of identifying descriptions in these cases they come from things said about the presumed referent by other people.’\footnote{Donnellan, 352.} Through time, identifying descriptions go
through many levels of ‘parasitic derivation’ as a name is used by person after person, which can distort a person’s view of what they are naming. Additionally,

The history behind a name may not be known to the individual using it. I may have forgotten the sources from whence I got my descriptions…. Even a whole culture could lose its history. A people with an oral tradition in which names of past heroes figure would probably not be able to trace the history back to original sources.54

This does not mean, however, that they are not talking about real people and real exploits. Indeed, if one has access to conversations, books and written documents, they can offer a means of discovering a referent if one also has knowledge of other historical facts.55

At the same time, this lost history could be very problematic for the descriptive theory if we do not recognize that the lost history is there. It is this potentially distorting history that could account for the fact that a substantial amount of A’s beliefs about X are false, or the fact that the properties φ accidentally pick out someone or something else uniquely, or the fact that X was made up by some person and that the properties φ fail to uniquely describe anything at all, etc.

Donnellan ‘take[s] the principle of identifying descriptions to be a doctrine about how reference via proper names must take place.’56 In this he is correct; one really has no other way of connecting a name with its reference if one is not in the position of initially naming something, for oneself. His objection to the principle is the idea that it is solely a backing of fitting descriptions that connect a name with an object.

He suggests that we should shift the question we are asking from ‘What is the referent?’ to ‘What would the speaker be attributing that predicate to on this occasion?’ This shift in question takes into account the historical context of a word; it historically, or

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54 Donnellan, 352.
55 Donnellan, 352.
56 Donnellan, 355.
‘causally,’ connects the reference to the speech act. So, instead of asking ‘Who was the teacher of Alexander?’ I might instead acknowledge that on this occasion, thousands of years after the episode supposedly occurred, I have been lead by the statements of others to attribute the tutelage of Alexander to a man named Aristotle.

xii. Merits of the causal solution

The causal/historical ‘solution’ (Kripke, at least, is reluctant to call it a theory) offered by Kripke and Donnellan presents a rather nice picture of how names arise and how the references of names, the it or the he or the she, comes to be determined. It captures the rigidity of names; according to the historical/causal theory the reference of a name is determined by its actual causal relations, which cannot change across all possible worlds. Indeed, it hints at the idea of a posteriori necessity mentioned in my revision of thesis 6).

The historical/causal theory also seems to be quite useful in terms of understanding a proper name. At least in terms of people, as time progresses, more and more descriptions accumulate to describe an individual; one would think that these descriptions are very important in understanding what a name stands for. Maybe at first all there is is this new person, who has been named ‘Stephen Hawking.’ But as time goes on, more and more things happen that add to a person’s understanding of who he is. He attends Oxford. He marries Jane Wilde. He is then named Lucasian Professor of Mathematics, and after that he authors A Brief History of Time. Even though these properties are contingent, they seem to be an essential part of understanding the man to
which the proper name refers. Though not necessarily a part of the reference of the name, these qualities are very important in understanding who the person is in this world. I would argue that how people think of a thing is almost as much a part of the reference as the thing itself. This sort of argument gives rise to many questions: what is the role of reputation? Can we say that this is part of the reference itself? Does a reference extend outside of its physical self? If so, where is the division? I will return to these questions after considering some of the downsides of the causal/historical theory.

xiii. Criticisms

Of course, causal theories are not without disadvantages. For instance, perhaps we do intend to use the name in the same way we heard it. But I would still ask how are we to know what we are talking about, and how are we to know that we succeed in using a name in the same way that we heard it? These so-called causal theories are still vague as to the connection between name and reference, and as to the connection between persons that causes a name to be used in a certain situation. The person from whom we heard the name must have indicated to us in some way who or what they were referring to; in some cases they might have been able to do this by pointing to it and saying ‘that is what I mean,’ but in most cases they will indicate, implicitly, the way they are using the name by means of descriptions of properties that thing has in this world. Would not this place us back where we started, with the principle of identifying descriptions? And furthermore, what if mistakes in the chain of communication have made it such that the
descriptions associated with a name have no connection to the thing it originally named? What then are we talking about?

Evans in particular seems to think that causal theory ignores the context in which a speaker uses a name. The consequence of such a theory, he says, is a speaker S will denote one particular thing, no matter how far from that thing the information S associates with it in the future is. Say that at some point there is some confusion that leads someone to utter something like ‘Stephen Hawking was a basketball player.’ Say also that over time this confused utterance survives, while all true utterances like ‘Stephen Hawking was the 17th Lucasian Professor of Mathematics’ are lost or forgotten. Perhaps it is not the case that this situation it totally unacceptable, but as Evans states: ‘…notice how little point there is in saying that [S] denotes one [man] rather than any other…There is nothing that the speaker is prepared to say or do which relates him differentially to that one [man]…The notion of saying [in such a situation] has simply been severed from all the connections that made it of interest.’57

Evans is right to point this out, however it might be useful to qualify his argument. In some cases it seems that there is a point in saying something mistaken. Take, for example, the story of Jonah and the whale. While the events of the Biblical story are not true of the historical figure, these new connections are actually what make the story of interest. These new associations have become of great literary and theological importance. Furthermore, the author of the story probably knew they were twisting the story, using artistic license to better express the message of the story.

This might be the kind of situation Evans is trying to wrestle with when he asserts that we should say that given the context in which S finds himself, S’s ‘dispositions’ are

bent towards one particular thing, ‘whose states and doings alone he would count as serving to verify remarks made in that context using the name.’ That context could persist, or it could ‘disappear so that the speaker is simply not sensitive to the outcome of any investigations regarding the truth of what he is said to have said.’ Evans argues that to take the context of the speaker into account, one should ask: ‘who are they believing about?’ versus ‘who is the original bearer of the name?’ as the causal theory would. The aim in doing this, he says, is to restore the connection between strict truth conditions and the beliefs/interests of the user. It might be interesting to discover where a name we use in conversation today originated, but often we will find that this causal origin is not critical in a speaker’s familiarity with and use of a name. Consider the following example: two boys are born on the same day in the same hospital to different mothers. One is named ‘Stephen’ and one is named ‘Jack.’ Unwittingly, a nurse switches the babies. For the rest of their lives, Stephen is known as ‘Jack,’ and Jack as ‘Stephen.’ In such a situation ‘the intentions of the speakers to use the name to refer to something must be allowed to count in determination of what it denotes,’ i.e. that the mother of Jack intends to refer to her son. Thus since Stephen is raised as her son, ‘Jack’ should come to denote Stephen. However we are in need of some sort of solution that will enable reference change (like ‘Stephen’ and ‘Jack’) and yet not make ‘Stephen’ actually name Jack or ‘Goliath’ actually name the Philistine killed by David.

The real problem of naming, Evans reminds us, lies in a thing’s having to fit a family of descriptions (at least for strict descriptivists like Frege and Russell), and being

58 Evans, 317.
59 Evans, 317.
60 Evans, 319.
61 Historians believe David to have killed a Philistine, but not the one called ‘Goliath.’
causally isolated from the community of the user. But Evans thinks Kripke has
‘mislocated the causal relation’; he states that the important causal relation is ‘between
that item’s states and doings and the speaker’s body of information—not between the
item’s being dubbed with a name and the speaker’s contemporary use of it.’ Thus,
Evans proposes that ‘[a] speaker will have referred to a…only if he has succeeded in
 getting it across that Fa’ [emphasis added]…One may refer to x by using a description
that x does not satisfy; one that may not thus denote x’ In getting it across that Fa, the
audience will have formed some belief, although not necessarily the belief the speaker
intended to say. The actual item is not in general the satisfier of the body of information
possessed by the speaker (which makes it true that S knows of x); rather, x is causally, or
dominantly, responsible for speaker’s possession of the body of information.

‘A cluster or dossier [or family, as we have called it] of information can be
dominantly of an item though it contains elements whose source is different…persistent
misidentification can bring it about that a cluster is dominantly of some item other than
that it was dominantly of originally.’ Say I meet one of a pair of identical twins,
‘Thelma.’ I only know Thelma superficially when she and her twin ‘Louise’ decide to
play a prank and switch places. Being none the wiser, I get to be better friends with
Louise thinking she is called ‘Thelma.’ When they first make the switch, the ‘dossier’ of
information I associate with Louise is dominantly of the wrong person (since up to this
point I have only known Thelma), but gradually my dossier becomes dominantly of the
right person, as I get to know Louise (‘Thelma’) better. Evans states: ‘in the case of

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62 Evans, 319.
63 Fa is a description in the form of a function, in which a (the referent) is F (some predicate, e.g. x is a
Floridian).
64 Evans, 320.
65 Evans, 321.
persons…each man’s life presents a skeleton and the dominant source may be the man who contributed to covering most of it [emphasis added] rather than the man who contributed most of the covering…I think we can say that in general a speaker intends to refer to the item that is the dominant source of his associated body of information.”

Thus in the case of Stephen and Jack, when I say ‘Jack’ I will be referring to the person who was originally dubbed ‘Stephen,’ but who now after a lifetime of being referred to as ‘Jack’ is by no means essentially tied to the name ‘Stephen.’ That name can now be thought of as truly referring to the boy who was originally named ‘Jack.’

Tentatively, Evans summarizes his solution as “NN” is a name of x in a community C if 1) it is common knowledge that members of C have in their repertoire the procedure of using “NN” to refer to x (with the intention of referring to x); and 2) the success of reference in any particular case is intended to rely on common knowledge between speaker and hearer that “NN” has been used to refer to x by members of C and not upon common knowledge of the satisfaction by x of some predicate embedded in “NN.”

Basically we use a name because we know we use it, versus using a name based on some essential, unanalysable connection between name and reference that was made at a moment of ‘initial baptism.’

‘This distinction is just what is needed to distinguish dead from living metaphors’ writes Evans. In this case, acknowledgement of another’s intention among speakers in a community and recognition of the need for a mode of communication is what separates names from descriptions; compare this view with that of Kripke, for whom a name is a name just because someone says it is so (i.e. the act of dubbing). If we get rid of the idea

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66 Evans, 321.
67 Evans, 322.
that there is a standard way of naming, says Evans, ‘users will not in general use the
name under any view as to its origin, and therefore when there is a divergence between
the item involved in the name’s origin and the speakers’ intended reference there will be
no misapprehension, no bar to the name’s acquiring a new denotation…’\textsuperscript{68}

Also, we can use names with the ‘overriding intention to conform to the use made
of them by some other persons…we use the expression deferentially (with respect to
[some] other person or group of persons).’\textsuperscript{69} Such an intention displays recognition of a
community by a speaker as well; although a speaker might have her own opinion as to
whom or what is named by “NN,” she might recognize that she (or the community) could
be mistaken in some way about the referent of “NN” and thus simply intend to refer to
whomever/whatever the other participants in the conversation are intending to refer to,
simply to put herself on the same page as the rest of the community, to at least try to talk
about the same thing. Deferentially using a name highlights that there is a difference
between a) intending to refer to the $\phi$ and believing that $a = \phi$, and b) intending to
refer to $a$.\textsuperscript{70}

As Evans shows, referring can produce a lot of logical falsehood when we are tied
strictly to a descriptive or causal theory; $x$ might not be the referent of “NN” because it
does not fit the family of descriptions associated with it, or because the causal chain has
been so warped by miscommunication or other events (e.g. the unbeknownst switching of
persons) that a name is no longer associated with that $x$ on which it was originally
bestowed. Yet Evans concludes that his position, which says that the information

\textsuperscript{68} Evans, 323.
\textsuperscript{69} Evans, 323.
\textsuperscript{70} Evans, 324.
associated with a name is *dominantly of some* \(x\), and that the use of that name should be recognized as used in a community, could at least partially vindicate both theories.

It supports the theory or identifying descriptions by acknowledging that denotation is largely determined by description, but it determines the cluster of descriptions by causal origin. The idea of dominance replaces the idea of simple fulfillment of a ‘majority of descriptions’ or the ‘degree of fit.’ By so including the causal/historical nature in which a family of descriptions arises and the rigidity of names, it can also appease the causal theorists.\(^{71}\)

\[\text{* } \text{* } \text{*}\]

Sainsbury, another critic of the causal/historical position, further developed Evans’s intuition that the context and community in which a name is used is of the utmost importance in determining what one is talking about. Essentially, proper names are a social tool; they help in the sharing of information through use and interpretation. We must note that because of the human-use nature of names, ‘some but not all subsequent events which are uses of a name are related to the baptism\(^{72}\), and to each other, by a relation which ensures that they belong to the same practice.’\(^{73}\) In this ‘same-practice’ relation, a name is used by a community to refer to the same thing. But how is it that a name is initiated into such a practice?

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\(^{71}\) Evans, 325.

\(^{72}\) Sainsbury’s idea of baptism includes object-related baptisms (like Kripke’s), but also ‘empty baptisms’ in which the baptizer believes there to be some such object when there actually is not, or inadvertent baptisms, when a name comes to be used for something unintentionally (like a nickname, assuming it comes about spontaneously, without any forethought).

\(^{73}\) Sainsbury, *Reference without Referents*, 111-12; by ‘practice’ Sainsbury means a kind of use, or a use with a certain intention, in a community.
Sainsbury breaks the answer to the ‘how?’ question into two parts: the initiation relation (of the original, earlier use to a later use), and the continuing-participation relation (in which an earlier and a later use belong to same practice by virtue of being used by same user). ‘A use…can be either a production of the name or an understanding of a production.’ These ideas derive from Kripke, but a point of difference in Sainsbury’s picture is that he tries to address the connection between a practice and its referent. For all that has been said, a practice might have no referent, more than one, might change referent over time, or might change from empty to non-empty or conversely. For Kripke, by contrast, each practice has just one referent, and this fact is built into the very idea of a practice. He claims that a name-using practice retains its baptism’s referent, preserved by the same-practice relation. Thus, adhering to Kripke’s view would mean that we would have to reject Evans’s claim that a name-using practice can undergo reference change. However as we have seen it is entirely plausible that a speaker’s (or even a community’s) use of a name could have no meaningful connection to its original referent. Consequently, we should look more closely at this idea of a practice.

According to Sainsbury, a new user of a name enters a ‘practice’ by resolving to use that name in the same way as another, whose use of it belongs to that practice (whatever it may be). Whether or not an event (use) is ‘initiated’ into a practice P depends in part on the future events: if it causes a chain of uses in which the user’s referent coincides with the semantic referent of P, the event (a new user’s use) is a first

74 Sainsbury, 112.
participation in P.\textsuperscript{76} If it causes a chain of uses in which the speaker’s referent and the semantic referent of P diverge, the event is the initiation of a new practice, P’. \textsuperscript{77}

To see how a use can either become a part of a practice or initiate a new practice, reflect on the following illustration\textsuperscript{78}: I am standing on a point from which I can see two prominent mountains, $c$ and $d$. A local from the nearby village points to $c$, telling me it is called Pisgah. I take him to have pointed to $d$, above which floats the only cloud in the sky. If I then say, ‘there is a cloud above Pisgah,’ I manifestly intend to use the name ‘Pisgah’ as the locals use it (for $c$), but I intend to use ‘Pisgah’ for $d$. If the local then realizes my mistake and corrects my understanding of which mountain is referred to by ‘Pisgah,’ I can be initiated into the locals’ practice of the name ‘Pisgah,’ since my use now coincides with that semantic referent of ‘Pisgah.’ Say, though, that before the local can correct my mistake a freak avalanche sweeps through the village, killing everyone except for (miraculously) me. I then travel to another town, where I tell everyone that $d$ is named ‘Pisgah.’ My use catches on; the semantic referent of this new practice is $d$, whereas if the local had a chance to correct me, I would have initiated this new village into the practice of the other village and the semantic referent would be $c$.

Hence to be a part of a practice, a name need not have certain special information associated with it (like $X$ has to have all or most of the properties $\phi$). All that is required is that someone ‘acquire[s] the disposition to use the name with a speaker referent that aligns with its semantic referent.’\textsuperscript{79} If the speaker and semantic referent diverge, it is not

\textsuperscript{76} Even if there is actually a divergence between the speaker and semantic referent; this would just be an error.
\textsuperscript{77} Sainsbury, 114.
\textsuperscript{78} Used by Sainsbury, 114-15.
\textsuperscript{79} Sainsbury, 116.
too late to be initiated into a practice so long as the possibility remains for the speaker to be corrected by some member of the practice.80

Once one is part of a practice, one continues his or her participation in that practice by intending to ‘go on as before.’ Basically, Sainsbury says, ‘continuity of participation should deliver continuity of reference,’ in which speaker and semantic reference coincide. People usually distinguish practices by means of different sets of associated information. ‘In general a later use by a subject continues the subject’s participation in a certain practice only if it is sensitive to information from an earlier use in the same practice,’ he writes. Information is associated with a name at the initiation into a practice, and some of this information is also associated in the second, third, and later uses.81 All the information can be deleted from people’s associations over time, and the associated information can deviate somewhat, but ‘our verdict should not lead to a prolonged and robust divergence between speaker referent and semantic referent.’ Such persistent misidentification would lead to a new practice.82

At first blush it appears that Sainsbury would concur with Evans’s position that a practice can change referents over time, as a use is warped through communicative acts between speakers. However, Sainsbury thinks that in a case such as Evans presents (baby ‘Jack’ switched at birth) is not a case of reference change, but of an unwitting baptism; clearly that baby is not the original Jack, but after a significant amount of time people are clearly not mistaken in referring to that child as ‘Jack,’ as by that point the information people associate with that use of the name coincides with the ‘mistaken’ Jack. While Evans takes the reference to have changed, Sainsbury argues that it is the practice that

80 Assuming he or she is ‘in the know’!
81 Note that it is not essential that a referent fulfill a set of information.
82 Sainsbury, 117-18.
has changed; both agree that in the long run the speaker and the semantic referents will have to coincide, but they disagree on how this concurrence comes about. While both would agree that the mother of ‘Jack’ has failed to ‘go on as before,’ that fact, Sainsbury thinks, is reason to think that the first practice has been discontinued. In the case of Pisgah, if the other village had not been wiped out, there could have been two co-existing practices.

I agree with Sainsbury that intuitively his proposal makes more sense; it is more natural to say that the way in which we use a name has changed if the name comes to refer to something new. If we are to follow in his line of thinking, it would mean that each practice has at most one referent; thus different practices makes for different uses of a single (syntactic) name (i.e. one syntactic referent with two speaker referents). Sainsbury also points out that you cannot tell immediately if a new practice has originated in any given situation; rather it will depend on what happens regarding the semantic and speaker referents in the future (e.g. the changeling ‘Jack’ could be switched back the next day, as opposed to having the mix-up perpetuated for the lifetime of the baby, in which case there would not really have been time for a new practice to develop).\footnote{Sainsbury, 121.}

xiv. Conclusion

The context and use of a name are of the greatest importance in determining the ‘it’ that a proper name stands for. We have seen the inevitable problems caused by purely logical accounts of naming. When we adhere to strict descriptivist views like
Frege and Russell, or strict causal theories like Kripke, we are left with (respectively) either a situation where there are too many/no referents of a proper name, or (often times) a situation in which the referent of the name we are using is, for all meaningful purposes, disconnected from the way in which we are using it. Consequently, theories like those of Searle, Evans and Sainsbury that account for different understandings and uses of names by social human beings are better ways of thinking about proper names.

Some philosophers would consider solutions like those of Searle, Evans or Sainsbury as epistemologically inadequate in regards to their determinateness or truthfulness—or rather their “deficiencies” in those areas. Yet I believe that such positions demonstrate recognition of the simple fact that language is a human construction that is by no means a perfect representation of the construction of the natural world. Language is a useful tool, but as an artifice there are limits on its ability to provide information.

If we take this into account, it is appropriate that we should factor how we ordinarily figure out what a name stands for into our theory of proper names. Remember that if I want to identify for a friend who ‘Stephen Hawking’ is, I will ordinarily appeal to a dossier of information, a family of descriptions if you will, that I understand to pick out that being uniquely. Accordingly, I think that we should rely on a modified descriptive theory to best describe how we are to determine what a name names, in hope of remaining as true to our actual actions as possible.

Of course, we cannot adhere to a strict theory of definite descriptions. A descriptive theory such as Searle’s, however, works very well. If we allow ‘that a
sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true of [some] object, we account for the possibility that some of the information we possess is wrong, and for the possibility that new information could come to be true of that object. As I stated earlier, such a view recognizes that a reasonable speaker A would take into consideration the fact that his or her belief that X has properties φ might not be true, but could still hold that there is some set of descriptions that would pick out X uniquely, if only A had access to the correct information.

We must also take include the context in which a name is used in our picture of proper names. If we are to claim that there is some family of descriptions of which a sufficient yet so far unspecified number are true of the referent, we need a picture of how this family came to be associated with a name. A causal picture like that of Kripke or Sainsbury serves this purpose nicely; upon reflection, it appears that there must be some reason for associating a description with a name. Ostension and subsequent causal relationships (including misunderstanding) would be a sufficient explanation of how we come to associate certain descriptions with a name. A family of descriptions can only be built through direct experience with a thing, or through communication of experiences among people.

If we accept this sketch of how a family of descriptions comes to be associated with a name, we have to think about what we are actually referring to: is it the original object of ostension or ‘baptism,’ as it is for Kripke? Evans was right to argue that in many cases this would make using a name pointless; if I am talking about ‘Jonah’ or

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84 Searle, 171.
85 Of some unique entity, be it visible or not.
‘Jack’ or ‘Pisgah’ (in the second village) or any other thing in which we know\(^{86}\) that the current understanding of the name is not in line with the original bearer of the name, there is no point in saying that I am \textit{actually} talking about the historical Jonah or original ‘Jack’ or mountain \(c\) or whatever.

If we are not talking about the original object of baptism, what is it that we are referring to? Intuitively it makes sense to take a position like Evans or Sainsbury, who would argue that it is that thing which the majority of the descriptions are actually of in the context of a certain use. Again, such a view would allow for the evolution of names, which is a key part of their usefulness in communication. Furthermore, it could still capture the rigidity of names if we consider the fact that some of the \(\varphi\)’s are necessary \textit{a posteriori}, which leaves us with the possibility that there is a set of \(\varphi\)’s that necessarily pick out \(X\) uniquely, all things being such that they happened as they did, such that those descriptions came to be associated with that object\(^{87}\), which ties that name necessarily to that object.

This picture is very appealing to one’s ordinary sensibilities. Yet it leaves a major problem that will not be easy to remedy: fulfillment. Maybe a name names a physical thing that fulfills a sufficient number of propositions. But it does not seem to me that a name must be purely object-related. I would agree with Russell that we describe things that are \textit{real}, whether it is an object, a figment of the imagination, or something else that is not concrete (just because an object is not concrete does not make it any less real!). It is just as probable that a name names an \textit{idea} or an \textit{imagination} or a \textit{concept} that people hold in common. This kind of referent can also fulfill a set of descriptions.

\(^{86}\) Either from historical investigation or as an omniscient third party

\(^{87}\) I am thinking of an object in Russell’s sense, i.e. it can be a physical thing, a figment of the imagination or something else that is not concrete.
Whatever the nature of a name’s referent, my initial feeling is that a unique entity does not need to *necessarily fulfill* that set of descriptions for it to be the referent of a name. I mentioned earlier that I think that *how people think of a thing can be as much a part of the reference as the physical thing itself*. This feeling leads me to think that it might not be out of line to include the understanding and use of ‘\(X\)’ by \(A\) as *part of the reference \(X\)*. A reputation, composed of a set of properties \(\varphi\), can be built up over time such that it becomes an essential part of understanding/picking out \(X\) by members of a community, even if those \(\varphi\)’s are not true of \(X\). Such descriptions should be included in the family of descriptions, to provide a comprehensive picture of \(X\), as \(X\) is contextualized in this world.

For instance, say some famous politician has the reputation of being a particularly upstanding citizen. In fact, he takes bribes, cheats on his taxes, and indulges in various sensual pleasures. However, he is careful to conceal such actions from his constituents with the help of his public relations team; he goes around shaking hands, kissing babies, and expounding various family values (which of course he supports with carefully crafted ‘personal’ anecdotes). Indeed he does not fulfill the description ‘an upstanding citizen’ (and all of the descriptions associated with this statement), yet this reputation is an essential part of identifying who politician \(X\) is, and those descriptions should be included in the family of identifying properties. Perhaps we could qualify such descriptions in the manner of ‘the \(X\) that most users believe/associate with the property \(\varphi\)’. Such descriptions are ‘question-begging,’ but then again they are needed to provide the most comprehensive mode of identifying an \(X\) as possible.
This example is rather extreme, but its purpose is to show that a reference and its "reputation" as I have called it work together to pick out \( X \) uniquely. But this sort of picture gives rise to many questions: what is the role of reputation (i.e. how a community thinks about a thing)? Can we say that this is part of the reference itself? Does a reference extend outside of its physical self, and if so, where is the division? When is an untrue proposition part of a reference, and when is it not?

Reflection on these questions lead me to reverse my earlier intuition, that perhaps we should include the understanding and use of ‘\( X \)’ by \( A \) as part of the reference \( X \). Rather, I think it better to think of a reputation as a non-concrete reference in itself. The beliefs of the using community should fulfill the descriptions associated with it (the ‘object’ of reference is composed of descriptions, which are fulfilled by people’s believing them\(^{88}\)). This non-concrete reference, this reputation (e.g. politician \( X \)’s reputation), is better thought of as a supplement to the reference (e.g. a supplement to ‘politician \( X \)’) that has been created by the causal chains of communication associated with that reference. To maintain as much strictness as possible in our picture of what a name names, we should not say that properties \( \varphi \) are fulfilled by \( X \) if those properties are untrue of \( X \). In other words, we should not think of a (concrete) reference as extending outside of its physical self.\(^{89}\) It would be very useful for explaining our understanding, though, if we allowed that for each name there is one or more ideas (which would include reputations) of that name, created by causal chains of communication, that are themselves

\(^{88}\) Admittedly, this idea seems to be self-fulfilling

\(^{89}\) At least for concrete references; in the case of abstract references (e.g. ideas, figments of the imagination) the idea of a reputation is not as relevant. Such abstract objects of reference do not run into the problem of fulfillment in the same way as concrete ones, as the uses/practices of such names are much more particularized and individual. Essentially the descriptions associated with such objects are fulfilled by a person’s believing them, since descriptions are what constitute such objects. I feel that uses/practices of such names might be unique to each person, in light of the fact that our knowledge of what is in other people’s minds is limited.
objects that could be picked out by a name in the form of ‘community C’s view of that thing that is named “X”.’

xv. A final note

Where are we left now? What of Romeo, or Kumari and the girl whom the goddess has abandoned, whom I mentioned in the introduction?

An essential part of Kumari is that she shifts physical bodies: when she abandons one girl, she inhabits another. Whoever the girl is seems to be of minor importance; since Kumari’s physical body changes from time to time, the descriptions associated with her will primarily be of the deity, and never dominantly of any of the girls she inhabits.

And as for Juliet’s question, ‘What’s “Montague?”’: it may be nor hand, nor foot, nor any other part belonging to a man, but it is a sign of his self in context; it is an expression of his relation to other people in a community. Had things been otherwise, Romeo could have been called by a different name. But that name would still be necessarily connected with all those factors that prevent him and Juliet from being together. A posteriori, things being such as they are, Romeo is essentially connected to that name. If he were of some other name suddenly, and somehow magically not historically connected to how his name came about, then perchance Romeo could, free from consequence, take Juliet, all herself.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my advisor, Prof. Richard Cobb-Stevens, for supporting this thesis. I would also like to thank Dr. S.R. Blamey (St Edmund Hall) and Dr. R.P.L. Teichmann (St Hilda’s) of Oxford University for introducing me to this subject in the first place. Thank you to Mom, Dad, Anna and Grace, and to Sascha Rubin, Elizabeth Klaczynski and Benjamin Beck, for listening to me gripe and for being interested in what I was writing. Finally, thank you to the Boston College Ski Team, and our coach Peter Endres, for supporting me throughout the year and “keepin’ it real.”
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