

The *New* Theory of Reference

Problems and solutions concerning proper names

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The problems are solved, not by giving new information,
but by arranging what we have already known.

Wittgenstein

Introduction

Since *Naming and Necessity* was published, most philosophers are inclined to see it as a decisive refutation of the so-called “Frege-Russell’s account” on proper names and, consequently, to reject any such Fregean view which maintains that proper names have senses. In opposition to this line, our chief goal is to show that, in spite of this impressive assault, Frege’s view is still tenable and may offer us interesting suggestions with regard to the name-bearer relation. Even though Saul Kripke’s work is highly valuable and very important for the field, he misses the target. He rejects conclusively not Frege’s conception, but a view that maintains that proper names are concealed definite descriptions; we shall call this view *canonical*.² Kripke refers to this position as the “Frege-Russell” theory and characterizes it as comprising two main assumptions: that names are in fact disguised definite descriptions (or clusters of such descriptions) and that the reference is determined via such descriptions.

In order to show that Frege’s view on proper names is not the actual target of Kripke’s attacks, we should make clear at least three points: (i) what Frege’s conception of names is, (ii) what position is attacked by Kripke, and, generally, by The Theory of Direct Reference, and (iii) that Frege’s view and the canonical attacked position are different and separate accounts of proper names.³ To each point one of the following sections corresponds.

Besides trying to shed light on such a controversial point in contemporary philosophy of language, the paper may be also seen as an attempt to provide a

¹ I would like to express my thanks to Derek Brown and Richard Epstein for careful comments and useful suggestions on earlier versions of my paper. This work is a revised version of the talk given at the Advanced Reasoning Forum meeting, Bucharest, Romania, 2000. I am indebted to all the participants involved in the discussions concerning proper names.

² Nathan Salmon in the Introduction to Harnish, *Basic Topics in the Philosophy of Language*, p. 114, named this “The Orthodox Theory.”

³ In the course of presentation I shall also touch on some other points of view concerning proper names belonging to authors like John Stuart Mill, Bertrand Russell, Keith Donnellan and others, but the core of the analysis will remain the Frege-Kripke debate. At the end of the paper I shall sketch my own view with regard to Fregean senses, showing that we can draw an illuminating distinction among these.

satisfactory characterization of the relation between proper names and their bearers. Such a problem should be divided in two subsequent questions. Firstly, *Do proper names have semantic content or are they only linguistic labels for the designated objects?* Secondly, *Provided that proper names have “senses,” what are these and how can we express them?* Thus, we shall try to provide an adequate answer to the question: *Does a name refer to its bearer directly or indirectly?* Consequently, after investigating the two main competing positions concerning whether or not a name denotes an object via a sense, we intend to offer a new proposal concerning the contemporary positions in this debate, namely, that proper names are *rigid* but not *direct* designators.

Mill vs. Frege

Concerning whether or not proper names have (cognitive) content, we can choose between two main alternatives. One option is to say that there is a direct connection between proper names and their designations, whereas the second is to deny this and to endorse the opposite view, namely that the connection between a name and its bearer is mediated by something. On the former account, originated by John Stuart Mill, proper names have no other semantic function than being a linguistic label, simply attached to its bearer. On the latter approach, mainly due to Gottlob Frege, names have senses, and their chief role is exactly to secure the relation between names and objects.

For John Stuart Mill, *proper names*, such as “Dartmouth,” denote objects without connoting any properties.⁴ The Millian terms “connotation” and “denotation” correspond with what in contemporary discussions in philosophy of language is called sense and reference. One important consequence of Mill’s view is that propositions of identity, which contain only non-connotative names such as “Mark Twain is Samuel Langhorne Clemens,” do not have semantic content. This means that they are not “informative,” in the sense that someone might learn something new upon reading it. Further, in a similar manner, “descriptive” means that this information could be captured by a definite description.

⁴ Mill, *A System of Logic*, p. 20:

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. When we name a child by the name Paul or a dog by the name Caesar, these names are simply marks used to enable those individuals to be made subjects of discourse. It may be said, indeed, that we must have had some reason for giving them those names rather than any others, and this is true, but the name, once given, is independent of the reason. A man may have been named John because that was the name of his father; a town may have been named Dartmouth because it is situated at the mouth of the Dart. But it is not part of the signification of the word John that the father of the person so called bore the same name, nor even of the word Dartmouth to be situated at the mouth of the Dart. If sand should choke up the mouth of the river or an earthquake change its course and remove it to a distance from the town, the name of the town would not necessarily be changed. . . . Proper names are attached to the objects themselves and are not dependent on the continuance of any attribute of the object.

But this leads Mill's theory into serious troubles, namely in what is often called *Frege's Puzzle* (FP). The puzzle goes as follows. Let us consider two sentences:

- (1) Mark Twain is Mark Twain.
- (2) Mark Twain is Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

Although they are formally different (having distinct linguistic forms), they should express by Mill's account the same thing. But, as Frege pointed out, it is not the same to say or to think either of the two propositions. The identity of reference doesn't imply identity of meaning. They express different identities, and this is so because they have different semantic contents. The simple fact that such identity sentences like (2) are informative constitutes a strong objection against all (Millian) conceptions that endorse the idea of an unmediated relation between names and objects. There is a clear difference between sentence like:

- (3) John thinks that Mark Twain is Mark Twain.
- (4) John thinks that Mark Twain is Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

Such identity sentences have different cognitive contents, in the sense that they express different propositions or thoughts. Verbs like "to think," "to believe," "to know," "to consider" and such, are essential ingredients of what is called "propositional attitude contexts," where we cannot substitute *salve veritate* a name by another name. We cannot replace in a sentence like (3) or (4) the name "Mark Twain" with "Samuel Langhorne Clemens," or vice versa, in the virtue of an identity like (2), because the replacement will change the meaning of the whole sentence. For example, the following inference is not truth preserving:

- (5) John thinks that Samuel Langhorne Clemens had a pretty funny middle name.
- (2) Mark Twain is Samuel Langhorne Clemens.

Therefore

- (6) John thinks that Mark Twain had a pretty funny middle name.

There is a difference in meaning between sentences like (5) and (6). Sentence (5) is true and perfectly meaningful, whereas (6) is meaningless since Mark Twain doesn't have any middle name. Thus, we are not entitled in such contexts to make such substitutions in virtue of a sentence like (2), due to a difference in meaning.

In "Über Sinn und Bedeutung" Frege argues that our understanding of a proper name cannot consist in just knowing its reference, as in Mill's account. Frege's proposal is that besides possessing a reference, a proper name has a *sense*, the sense being a "mode of presentation" ("Art des Gegebenseins") of the reference. The proposition (thought) expressed by a sentence is determined by the senses of the words composing it, in the sense that the meaning of the whole is a function of the meaning of its components. Thus (1) and (2) are different because they express distinct propositional senses. That is because "Mark Twain" and "Samuel Langhorne Clemens" express different senses, senses which are different

“modes of presentation” of the same reference.

If sense is not reference, as in Mill’s case, then what is sense? To this Frege does not provide a very clear answer. He writes that the sense of an expression is “the mode of presentation of what is designated by this expression,” but he does not offer any clear elaboration regarding the nature of these modes, leaving the place for various interpretations. Frege does, however, say that the sense of an expression determines the identity of its reference, but not vice versa. For instance, though “Mark Twain” and “Samuel Clemens” designate the same person (they have the same reference), the two singular terms have distinct senses. Maybe because for Frege the problem of what sense is seems to be a clear and unproblematic point, he didn’t offer us an explicit account of the issue. He says that “the sense of a proper name is grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language or totality of designations to which it belongs.”⁵ However, a sort of hint may be found in following footnote Frege gave:

- (A) In the case of an actual proper name such as ‘Aristotle’ opinions as to the sense may differ. It might, for instance, be taken to be the following: the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. Anybody who does this will attach another sense to the sentence “Aristotle was born in Stagira” than will a man who takes as the sense of the name: the teacher of Alexander the Great who was born in Stagira. So long as the reference remains the same, such variations of sense may be tolerated, although they are to be avoided in the theoretical structure of a demonstrative science and ought not to occur in a perfect language.⁶

This footnote was used intensively to show that we are entitled to understand the sense of a proper name as a definite description attached to that name. With regard to the footnote, two aspects should be stressed: (*) It is not clear what each individual using a proper name in a natural language understands as being the sense of the name; consequently, descriptions will vary from person to person, from context to context, (**) Due to pragmatic reasons (“so long as the reference remains the same”), such practices in the case of natural languages may be tolerated.⁷ “Tolerated” means here that in such determined cases we may understand the sense as being a definite description.⁸ But from that it is a long way to claim further with Kripke that:

(B) *The sense of a proper name is (determined by) a definite description.*

⁵ Frege, “On sense and reference”, p. 143.

⁶ Ibid., p. 159.

⁷ Michael Beaney in *Frege: Making sense*, p. 172, seems to agree with this interpretation:

[I]t might be suggested that Frege’s use of this example was not so much to illustrate a ‘description theory’ of proper names, as merely to highlight how far short ordinary language falls of the ideal logical language that Frege was primarily concerned to develop (...) The point of the footnote is to make clear that in the case of an ordinary proper name, there is typically no unique definite description that supplies the sense of the name. Only in an ideal language can the demand for uniqueness be satisfied.

⁸ Cases when the context is determined, namely when we know somehow the speaker and his or her intentions.

Kripke says explicitly in the beginning of *Naming and Necessity*:

Frege and Russell both thought, and seemed to arrive at these conclusions independently of each other, that Mill was wrong in a very strong sense: really a proper name, properly used, simply was a definite description abbreviated or disguised. Frege specifically said that such a description gave the sense of the name.⁹

The quoted passage is supplemented by a note:

Strictly speaking, of course, Russell says that the names don't abbreviate descriptions and don't have any sense; but then he also says that, just because the things that we call 'names' do abbreviate descriptions, they're not really names. . . . Though we won't put things the way Russell does, we could describe Russell as saying that names, as they are ordinarily called, do have sense. They have sense in a strong way, namely, we should be able to give a definite description such that the referent of the name, by definition is the object satisfying the description.¹⁰

But although Kripke agrees that he somehow misses the target with regard to Russell's view, he didn't say anything similar with regard to Frege's view, where in fact he totally misses the target. (B) is in fact "Russell's Name Claim,"¹¹ an idea that supplements his (well known) Theory of Descriptions. It may be worth noting that the two are different and separate issues, and should be treated as such. This theory of descriptions is more a theory of meaning,¹² and shows us how we should deal and analyze expressions like "The present King of France," whereas the "Name Claim," works in the line of a theory of reference, stating that what we call proper names are in fact concealed definite descriptions, and that they should be treated as such. Thus, for example, consider:

(7) Mark Twain is the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

From this true sentence we can also conclude that the following identity is true:

(8) Mark Twain = the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.

But even if (8) expresses a true proposition, it is a long way to maintain that (B) is true as well. Frege keeps saying, as in the case of (what are) numbers, that sense of a proper name is something objective and unique. "Objective" means here "that might be grasped and shared by many different people." This means that although we can attach occasionally different definite descriptions to a proper name, the sense of that name is not entirely revealed by a particular description,

⁹ p. 159.

¹⁰ Ibid., footnote 4.

¹¹ W. Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p. 37.

¹² David Kaplan in "What is Russell's theory of description?" says:

Russell's article 'On Denoting' is not about a theory of descriptions comparable to Frege-Carnap or Frege-Strawson. Russell's article is about logical form, and is in the tradition of those philosophers who have warned us of the dangers of confusing the grammatical form of a sentence in ordinary language with its logical form.

and moreover, it cannot be replaced by any means with this description. To attach something to a thing doesn't imply that you are entitled to replace the thing with this "something."

Harold Noonan in a new book on Frege interprets Frege's note in a similar way. I shall quote the entire passage, because we believe that it marks a step further in understanding Frege's view of proper names:

This way of identifying a sense - as a way of thinking of something as the satisfier of a certain condition - fits well with Frege's own infrequent specifications. Thus, in a footnote in "On Sense and Reference", in which he is illustrating the imperfections of ordinary language, he writes:

[Frege's footnote (A) above]

In this passage Frege specifies by description the different conditions corresponding to the different senses associated with the name 'Aristotle' by different users. However, as has been stressed by Dummett and Evans there is no need to assume that every way of thinking of an object must be via some descriptive condition, and there is not the slightest reason to think that Frege thought otherwise (as sometimes suggested, see Perry). It is obvious that if anything can be thought of descriptively some things must be thought of non-descriptively if we are to have any reason to believe that any of our descriptions are uniquely satisfied

Thus, despite the fact that when he attempts to specify a sense Frege invariably does so via a descriptively identified condition, we must not suppose that he thought that sense must be descriptive, and in so far as modern critics assume this they are attacking a straw man.¹³

It may be important to point out the particular significance of understanding Fregean senses as ways of thinking of different objects as being designated by the proper names. Noonan continues:

The easiest approach to the notion of sense (suggested and developed by Evans) is to think of it as a way of thinking of something, a way of thinking of something as something. Thus I can think of the Evening Star as the Evening Star, or as the Morning Star, or as the planet Venus, or as the heavenly body most often referred to by philosophers writing about Frege. All these are different ways of thinking of one and the same object. In each case it is a matter of thinking of the object as the unique one satisfying a certain condition.¹⁴

"Condition" seems to suggest here the existence of a definite description that needs to be fulfilled. If so, it seems that the assumption (B) again comes into the picture.

As we have already mentioned, Russell treats ordinary proper names as disguised or truncated descriptions. His *theory of descriptions* provides interesting solutions to the problems raised by the Millian theory of proper names. According to this "description theory" a name abbreviates the definite description

¹³ Noonan, *Frege: A critical introduction*, p. 179.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

that the speakers associate with the proper name, e.g., “Shakespeare” might abbreviate the definite description: “the greatest English playwright.” Thus, it is easy to understand why the above mentioned sentences (1) and (2) have different meanings: “Mark Twain” might be associated with the description “the author of the book *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*” and Samuel Clemens with “the American writer born in Florida, Missouri, on November 30, 1835.”

Russell’s thesis that proper names are ordinarily used as disguised definite descriptions provides an answer to the question whether or not proper names have meanings. A name designates a certain object because this object is denoted by the definite description associated with the name; “Shakespeare” designates Shakespeare because “the greatest English playwright” denotes him.¹⁵

Keith Donnellan holds the opposing view that ordinary proper names do not refer mediated by a sense or a definite description.¹⁶ He extends the thesis even to what is probably the most common use of definite descriptions, the so-called *referential*, in contrast with the *attributive* use of definite descriptions. Donnellan consider the following example: A detective discovers a mutilated corpse that he identifies as Smith. Though he does not know who the murderer is, he says “Smith’s murderer is insane.” (a) Later, when the killer is identified as Jones and testifies in court, Smith’s wife, who hears the testimony, says, “Smith’s murderer is insane.” (b). On Donnellan’s account, in the first circumstance (a) the description is being used attributively, while in the second case (b) it is being used referentially. Donnellan shows that in our daily life the most common way of using a description is generally referential, namely to pick out an object. On the other hand, Donnellan is pointing out that this usage of the descriptions could not be accommodated in Russell’s theory, which is designated to provide an account only for the attributive role of the descriptions.

Kripke and Direct Reference Theory

Donnellan’s idea is fully developed by a whole group of philosophers whose views are usually referred to by the term: “The Theory of Direct Reference.” They hold that proper names (and by extension natural kinds as well . . .) are direct rigid designators. “Direct” means here that the relation between a proper name and its bearer is unmediated, whereas “rigid” captures the idea that the

¹⁵ But along with solutions, arise new difficulties and problems. One difficulty of this ‘classical’ Russellian theory of descriptions is that speakers can differ in the description they associate with a name. This led some contemporary philosophers, especially John Searle, to modify the initial theory. In this new version of the theory the name is not tied to one description but to a ‘cluster’ of definite descriptions. A name can designate its bearer despite the failure of some descriptions in the cluster to denote that object. It designates the object most of the descriptions in the cluster denote. On the other hand, as Stephen Neale pointed out in “Descriptions”: “[I]t is true that Russell paid little attention to the distinction between the linguistic meaning of a sentence type and the proposition expressed by a particular dated utterance of that sentence type.” This is exactly why Peter Strawson in “On referring” criticizes Russell’s theory because the same sentence (“The present king of France is bald”) might be true or false, depending on the circumstances of its uttering.

¹⁶ See Donnellan, “Reference and definite descriptions”.

name-reference connection is secured by the fact that a name cannot fail to designate its reference. This Millian picture is supplemented by an additional claim that the name-bearer relation is ensured by the existence of a socio-historical chain which ties the name to its reference in the virtue of an initial ceremony of “baptizing” the new object or person.

Let us consider now the arguments of the Theory of Direct Reference against the canonical theory, as they appeared especially in Kripke’s work *Naming and Necessity*. The arguments can be seen as being of three main types: modal, epistemological and semantic.

(MA) The *modal* argument is directed against the view that proper names are disguised definite descriptions (B), and that they refer through these descriptions. For instance, the name “Mark Twain” is commonly used to refer to the well-known American writer. Take into account now the properties that someone might think of in association with this name. These could be seen as constituting its semantic content in a particular circumstance, e.g., “being the most popular American humorous writer of the 19th Century; the author of several classic books like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and so on.” Consider now that if the canonical theory were correct, then the association of the name with all the characteristics mentioned above, and possibly many others, would express a logical truth. In this case we would have an identity relation between the name and the description associated to it. The relation should be characterized as “analytical” in the traditional sense, and therefore should constitute a necessary truth, namely, a proposition true with regard to all possible worlds. But at this point it is clear that I could very well talk about ‘a’ Mark Twain, who in another possible situation/world did not write *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. But, even without writing this book, or generally, doing something different from what he actually did, he would remain the same Mark Twain. It follows that the name “Mark Twain” is not descriptive in terms of the properties mentioned above. Consequently, the name “Mark Twain” continues to refer to the same person even with respect to counterfactual situations in which this individual lacks all of the properties that we actually use to identify him. Thus, one important tenet of the new theory of reference is that such expressions as proper names are *rigid designators*.¹⁷

(EA) The *epistemological* argument is also due chiefly to Kripke. Assuming that the canonical theory is correct, the connections between names and their associated definite description(s) should express propositions that are knowable *a priori*, namely without making appeal to any experience or empirical judgments. But, it is not difficult to imagine (counterfactual) situations in which it could be discovered that, for instance, Mark Twain did not write *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* or *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. Kripke’s

¹⁷ This terminology comes from Kripke and means that the expression designates the same thing with respect to the every possible world in which that thing exist.

own version of this argument raises the following question: If any description like ‘the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic’ is associated with the name ‘Gödel,’ does this mean that Gödel refers to that person? What if the theorem was actually proved by an Austrian mathematician, say Schmidt, who died in strange circumstances, and Gödel stole Schmidt’s work and published it as his own?¹⁸ From this argument we conclude that the connection between a proper name and its associated description is *a posteriori* relation, and, again, it could not serve to secure the referential relation between the name and the designated person.

(SA) The *semantic* argument goes as follows. Let us assume that the meaning or conceptual content of the name ‘Leonardo da Vinci’ is determined by the description ‘the Italian painter who painted *Mona Lisa*.’ Suppose now that, due to some mistakes or ignorance, the painter referred to by writers such as Vasari, never painted *Mona Lisa*.¹⁹ We took the name from Vasari, and, consequently, we are using it to pick out a certain individual, even though he is not actually the creator of *Mona Lisa*. Suppose further that by a very bizarre coincidence there was indeed in the Renaissance an Italian solitary painter, who did in fact paint the picture, though he was unknown to people like Vasari and bears no historical connection to us. To which of these two painters would our name ‘Leonardo da Vinci’ refer? Obviously, to the first of the two painters. The way in which we are using the term excludes from the very beginning any mental association between the name and that other person. But, on the other hand, he is in fact the actual creator of *Mona Lisa*. However, this doesn’t play any role in determining the semantic relation between the name and its bearer.²⁰

The ‘da Vinci’ example raises the question that, if our names refer directly and rigidly to their bearers, what secures the connection between the name and the named object? The classical view concerning this mechanism of preserving the speaker reference is explained in the framework of The New Theory of Reference by the appeal to a historical chain of users. A name is introduced into the linguistic community by some ‘initial baptism’ in which an object gains a name, and then the name is passed on from link to link to an actual user of the name. Donnellan and Kripke have provided such accounts of securing reference of proper names by means of such causal chains of communication. Hilary Putnam has given a similar account of certain terms designating something by means of a ‘division of linguistic labor’ and a ‘structured co-operation between experts and nonexperts.’ Due to such characterizations the Theory of Direct Reference is often also called ‘The Causal Theory of Reference.’

In sum, it seems that with this battery of powerful arguments any attempt to

¹⁸ As Graeme Forbes pointed out in ‘Proper names’, the very fact that we can understand this ‘what if’ shows that the reference of the name ‘Gödel’ is not fixed as whoever discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic.

¹⁹ Giorgio Vasari (1511–1547), who is the chief source book for the history of Italian Renaissance artists.

²⁰ The argument reinforces in fact Donnellan’s criticism to Russellian point of view, stressing the more common referential role of descriptions versus their attributive usage in the most linguistic contexts.

claim that names have senses is destined to fail from the very beginning. But, in spite of these considerations, it seems to me that Kripke misses the target, in the sense in which the “Frege” of the intended “Frege-Russell canonical view” doesn’t really designate Frege’s theory.

What is the difference, where is the failure?

It seems that we are now confronted with a kind of dilemma: on one hand, we have to grant the existence of senses for proper names in order to explain the informative content of the identities, and, on another hand, due to Kripke, it seems clear that proper names have no senses, in the sense in which an identity such as (8) is *contingent* (it could have been otherwise). My claim is that Frege didn’t fall in this dilemmatic trap because his proper names have senses, so he can explain why identities like (2) are informative sentences, and these senses could not be replaced *salva veritate* with definite descriptions. We believe that it seems to be disingenuous to say that Frege admits that we cannot substitute the name “Mark Twain” with another name like “Samuel Langhorne Clemens” without changing the meaning, whereas he agrees that we can replace without problems “Mark Twain” by a description like “The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.” The misunderstanding is to interpret him (perhaps mostly in the light of his comments from the mentioned footnote (A) and other similar passages) in the sense that we can identify senses with definite descriptions. Frege is quite clear with regard to this point: proper names have senses, and the senses secure the link between names and the designated objects. But if for Frege senses are not to be understood as being descriptions, then what are they? As we saw, candidates for this job are: “modes of presentation,” “modes of determination,” “way of thinking,” . . .²¹

Whatever they might be, senses must fulfill two main roles: to be informative and to secure the reference. But, if senses secure the connection between names and objects, does this mean that always when we grasp a sense of a proper name we are ensured about the existence of its referent? Not necessarily. There are empty proper names, names that possess senses but lack references. The sense is our route to the designated object, and in such cases there is simply no

²¹ For the distinction between ‘modes of presentation’ and ‘modes of determination,’ see Michael Beaney, *Frege: Making sense*, p. 168:

If we want to make room for there being senses without referents, then we need to talk not of ‘modes of presentation’ but of ‘modes of determination’. On this more liberal conception, senses are routes to referents, and it may well turn out that there is nothing - or at least not what was expected - at the end of the journey. Travelling along the path set by ‘the greatest Being’, for example, may result in the realization that there can be no such thing; but (arguably) the term is not senseless. Modes of determination can then be regarded as the basic type of sense—modes of presentation being modes of determination plus something else—the object being appropriately present. Frege readily utilizes both conceptions, but does not distinguish them - just because of his assumption, which we have emphasized (and criticized) at various points, that names in a logical language presuppose the existence of objects.

object (waiting for us) at the destination. However, we are using such “mock” proper names as if they were standing for an actual object.

We should distinguish between two types of senses in the case of Frege’s account of proper names. One is the *general sense* (S1), namely the Fregean sense understood as the vectorial route from the sign to the object; the other one is a *particular sense* (S2), namely, the content attached by us to the name in various circumstances. This latter sense is determined by the linguistic context and our knowledge of the designated reference. S1 is the way, S2 is the vehicle.

In the practice of language we need first to identify an expression as being a proper name, namely as directing us to the object, and after taking this way we are going to make the trip to the reference with the help of a particular vehicle, namely with a particular cognitive content. The implicit conventions of a natural language ensure the existence of a S1 in the cases of proper names. This S1 entitled Frege to maintain that senses are objective (non-mind-dependent) and communicable (between speakers of the same language). On the other hand, with the help of the constraints of a particular context, we can identify (and express) S2. This is the “meaning” of an object, naming its conventional significance in a determined linguistic context. S2 could be seen as a definite description or as a cluster of such descriptions.

S1 and S2 reveal different semantic roles of proper name in a language. S1 ensures the link between name and object, whereas S2 displays the descriptive content attached to a particular name. S1 belongs primarily to a theory of reference, while S2 is central for a theory of meaning. Thus, we agree with Noonan that: “We can conclude that despite his mistaken assumption that Frege had to hold the sense of proper names to be descriptive, Kripke’s arguments against the “Frege-Russell” theory of names cannot be dismissed from the outset as merely irrelevant to Frege’s position.”²² Kripke is relevant in the way that he implicitly pointed out very clearly that we should not mix up S1 with S2, namely, that we should not try to secure the reference of a proper name through a definite description. In the light of the previous distinction it should be clear now that Kripke makes a confusion between S1 and S2. Thus, he is mixing up the way to something with the vehicle itself, which is taking us to the destination. But the road and the car should remain distinct traffic means, if we want to end well the journey. Therefore, the general moral of the story would be that we should keep distinct two interconnected functions of proper names: to refer to something and to mean something.

The theory rejected by Kripke’s may be called “The Descriptivist Theory of Proper Names,” and can be characterized as comprising two main claims: that proper names are concealed definite descriptions and that these descriptions constitute their senses. “Sense” here is taken to be the Fregean *Sinn*, namely the conceptual content which makes the semantic connection between a sign and its reference (*Bedeutung*). But, as we have already presented, none of these claims are in fact endorsed by Frege, and therefore Kripke’s enterprise, even highly

²² Noonan, *Frege: A critical introduction*, p. 216.

valuable and ingenious, does not concern Frege's view on proper names.²³

Concluding remarks

Summing up the discussion, the main tenet of The New Theory of Reference (the Theory of Direct Reference) is that proper names are directly referential rigid operators. The strict connection between a name and its bearer is preserved in the virtue of a causal-historical chain mechanism. Even though this rigidity is a questionable issue which deserves further investigation, the problem that concerns us now is the characterization of names as directly referential devices. We have to direct our attention to Mill's view, and to face again the puzzling problem of identity sentences. This clearly offers us a good basis for the refutation of the directness conception of proper names. In this case we are urged to eliminate this Millian directness from our conception and to preserve exclusively the idea of proper names as rigid designators. In fact there is nothing preventing us from introducing a name by a description, but using it to refer via something else. Thus, the result of the previous critical investigation is that *a name is a "rigid" but not a "direct" linguistic device*. Being Millian inevitably implies being rigid, but the reverse is not necessarily true. Lycan pointed out explicitly

Being Millian certainly implies being rigid. But the reverse does not hold. Although Kripke cites Mill and argues that names are rigid, rigidity does not imply being Millian.²⁴

There are definite descriptions which are rigid, the obvious cases being the descriptions of mathematical truths.²⁵ Therefore, the conclusion of the is that a name is a *rigid indirect operator*, and that Frege's view on proper names is still a gold mine that should be successfully exploited further.

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²³ The attacks do not concern entirely Russell's view. As we saw, even Kripke acknowledges that, but only his claim that names abbreviate definite descriptions (B). But this may be seen as a separate and independent position from his theory of descriptions, so it may be the case that Russell's view is valid as well.

²⁴ Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p. 55.

²⁵ Lycan, *Philosophy of Language*, p. 55:

Arithmetical truths (which are necessary truths . . .) such as "the positive square root of nine" are rigid, because they designate the same number in every possible world, but are certainly not Millian because in order to secure their reference they exploit their conceptual content.

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