

The notion of sense: presenting a non-fregean alternative

Rodrigo Jungmann*

Resumo: Há sérios problemas, contudo, no que concerne à caracterização da noção de sentido fregeano. Por vezes, Frege sugere que o sentido de um nome próprio é dado por uma descrição definida associada, cujo conteúdo individua a referência do nome em questão. Por sua vez, Bertrand Russell rejeita expressamente o sentido fregeano, e, ao mesmo tempo, afirma que nomes próprios comuns revelam-se, quando analisados, como descrições definidas disfarçadas. Essa posição, hoje conhecida como *descriptivismo*, foi atribuída, por Saul Kripke, entre outros, a Frege e Russell, a despeito de suas posturas teóricas diversas. Infelizmente, os paradoxos da referência também são espinhosos para as teorias de referência direta. Neste artigo, fazemos um sumário das dificuldades para ambos os lados da disputa e apresentamos uma defesa da interpretação não-fregeana do sentido de Michael Devitt, a qual evita os problemas do descriptivismo mas rejeita a referência direta. Faz-se um uso crucial da teoria histórico-causal, que não temos razão para abandonar.

Palavras-chave: Frege, Paradoxos referenciais, Teoria histórico-causal dos nomes próprios

Abstract: Problems abound in connection with the characterization of the Fregean notion of sense. Frege often implies that the sense of a proper name is given by an associated definite description, whose content uniquely picks out the reference of the name in question. For his part, Bertrand Russell explicitly rejects Fregean sense, while claiming that ordinary proper names turn out to be, upon analysis, disguised definite descriptions. This view, now known as *descriptivism*, was attributed by Saul Kripke among others, to both Frege and Russell, despite their divergent theoretical standpoints. Unfortunately, the puzzles of reference cause trouble for direct-reference theories. In this essay, I survey the main difficulties for both sides to the dispute and present a defense of Michael Devitt's non-Fregean construal of senses, which avoids the problems faced by descriptivism, while rejecting direct reference. Crucial use is made of the causal-historical theory, which we have no reason to reject.

Keywords: Causal-historical theory of proper names, Frege, Referential puzzles

* Professor adjunto do Departamento de Filosofia da Universidade Federal de Sergipe, UFS. *E-mail:* rodrigo_jungmann@yahoo.com.br. Artigo recebido em 20.05.2009, aprovado em 30.06.2009.

Some well-known puzzles in the philosophy of language have led a number of theorists to conclude that there is more to the meaning of a proper name than the referent, if any, which it stands for. In what follows, I shall start by looking into the puzzle concerning the informativeness of identity statements and the problem posed by the substitution of co-referring names in indirect contexts, and then turn to two other puzzles.

A statement of the form (1) “Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens” differs importantly from a statement like (2) “Mark Twain is Mark Twain”, in that the former, unlike the latter, is informative: any speaker may be aware of the fact that (2) is trivially true and yet fail to know that (1) is also the case. It seems obvious, then, that these two statements have different cognitive values. If it were indeed true that the meaning of a proper name is exhausted by its denotation, a view whose earliest modern proponent seems to have been John Stuart Mill, then (1) should be no more informative than (2), and would in fact follow directly from it, which does not seem to be right.

What’s more, in the view under consideration, the assertion, which we will take to be true for our purposes, that (3) “John believes that Mark Twain is Mark Twain” would entail the truth of (4) “John believes that Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens”, which clearly need not be the case, despite the fact that ‘Mark Twain’ and ‘Samuel Clemens’ refer to the same person.

Even more drastically, as far as the intentions of purely referential theories of the meaning of proper names are concerned, sentences like (5) “Vulcan is the hottest planet in the solar system” and (6) “Santa Claus does not exist” should be strictly meaningless, because the names used do not stand for anything in the real world; they fail to refer. And, yet, by intuitive standards, both sentences seem to be perfectly meaningful. While (5) exemplifies what Lycan (Lycan, 2000) has termed “The Problem of Apparent Reference to Nonexistents”, (6) is an instance of what he calls “The Problem of Negative Existentials.”

Confronted with problems of this sort, Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell came up with solutions, which, in their own time, they regarded as being fundamentally different, but which are frequently believed to have a great deal in common by their modern interpreters. In response to the

above-mentioned problems, Frege came to hold the view that a proper name has, in addition to its referent, if any – what he called its ‘sense’. For his part, Russell explicitly rejects the sense-reference distinction in his 1905 article “On Denoting” and in some other pieces, while maintaining that proper names are really disguised descriptions – denoting phrases of the form ‘the so-and-so’ – and also holding that, on further analysis, sentences containing such descriptions could be shown to be made up of components with which we are directly acquainted, which view, in addition to solving the logical puzzles already alluded to, has the further epistemological implication that the only genuine proper names are indexical expressions like *this* and *that*, which point to sense-data whose existence cannot be called into question.

In contrast to Russell’s position on proper names, the Fregean notion of sense is more difficult to come to terms with. Frege would have said that the informativeness of (1) derives from the fact that ‘Mark Twain’ and ‘Samuel Clemens’ share the same referent but have different senses. He would also have claimed that (4)’s failure to preserve the truth-value of (3) is to be accounted for by the fact that proper names do not have their customary referents in indirect contexts, but that, instead, their referents in such contexts are given by their customary senses in direct contexts. Moreover, (5) and (6) need not be meaningless: in these sentences, proper names have senses, which, in turn, account for the meaningfulness of the statements containing them, even though the names may lack referents.

However, it is still not quite clear what the sense of a proper name is supposed to be. We will have achieved very little if we merely go on to say that the sense of a proper name is whatever feature it possesses which we need to posit in order to be able to successfully deal with the logical puzzles we started with! Clearly, more has to be done in the way of providing a positive characterization of the notion of the sense of a proper name.

And, in this connection, problems abound. Frege, himself, in his classic 1892 article “On Sense and Reference”, does not provide a clear definition of what is meant by the sense of a proper name, although he does offer some tantalizing suggestions. Among those is the claim that the sense of a proper name contains its mode of presentation, by which he seems to have meant a certain way through which speakers are presented with or

think of the name's referent. Moreover, as the telescope metaphor in "On Sense and Reference" makes clear, senses are supposed to be objective in that they may be shared by the community of speakers of a given language.

This appears to be clear enough in the case of expressions like 'The Evening Star' and 'The Morning Star'.¹ It is now known that both expressions refer to the planet Venus. Now, it seems to make good sense to say that if reference is made to the planet via one of these expressions, the speaker is indeed thinking of the referent itself in either of two ways: roughly, as a celestial body which appears in the morning sky in the East before sunrise or as a celestial body which appears in the evening sky in the West after sunset. In this sort of case, it would seem that regarding sense as being related to the mode of presentation of a name's referent – the way the name bearer presents itself to different language users – could shed some light on the very notion of sense.

Another of Frege's examples in "On Sense and Reference" similarly stresses this view of sense: "Let a , b and c be the lines connecting the vertices of a triangle with the midpoints of the opposite sides. The point of intersection of a and b is then the same as that of b and c . So we have different designations for the same point and these names ('intersection of a and b ', 'intersection of b and c ') likewise indicate the mode of presentation; and hence the statement contains actual knowledge" (Frege, 1892, p. 24). This particular example is infelicitous in two ways. Firstly, it shows Frege's mistaken adherence to the thesis, later to be proven wrong by Russell, that definite descriptions belong to the class of proper names broadly construed. It is also infelicitous in that it again lends some support to the view that the sense of a proper name is in general to be thought of in connection with the notion of mode of presentation. That would seem like a plausible thing to say when the identity sign is flanked by definite descriptions on both sides, since non-synonymous co-referring descriptions, in virtue of being made up of independently meaningful parts, clearly do present their shared referent in different ways.

¹ Unlike Frege, present-day theorists prefer to use the names 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus'. Confusion is thus avoided, since 'The Evening Star' and 'The Morning Star', which are in fact names, look too much like definite descriptions in that they contain the definite article.

Yet, when it comes to proper names, it does not seem correct to say that every pair of co-referring names typically found in the literature on the puzzles of reference can be treated along similar lines: a name like 'Cicero' does not seem to be associated with a well-defined mode of presentation of its referent which could be contrasted with a similarly well-defined mode of presentation of 'Tully'. As against what is often implied by the literature on the puzzles involving proper names, I take it that which pair of co-referring names one chooses to use in one's examples is *not* a matter of indifference. A fairly straightforward association between a name and a *de re* mode of presentation, or way of thinking, of its referent, as is found in the 'Hesperus-Phosphorus' case, would seem to be the exception rather than the rule.

Our difficulties are further compounded by the fact that the one-to-one association between a name and its sense, suggested by Frege's 'Evening Star-Morning Star' example, would not apply to most names actually encountered in everyday use. As Frege himself concedes in the famous footnote 2 of "On Sense and Reference",

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. (Frege, 1892, p. 24).

This footnote is important in more than one way: in addition to suggesting that the sense of a proper name may vary for different speakers on different occasions of use, it does seem to indicate that for Frege the sense of a proper name is given by, or somehow related to, the meaning of a definite description. This implication, if correct, would bring Frege's take on proper names closer to Russell's than any of these authors would themselves have taken to be the case.

Thus, critics of descriptivist theories of proper names, such as Saul Kripke, aim their attacks at both Fregean sense and Russell's 'Name Claim', the view according to which proper names abbreviate definite descriptions. No less importantly, as we shall see below, Kripke's arguments in his 1970

lectures, published under the title *Naming and Necessity*, are also aimed at more sophisticated versions of descriptivism, such as the view which has been called Searle's "Cluster Theory" of proper names (v. Lycan, 2000).

Quite apart from any of Kripke's arguments, there seems to be something amiss in the suggestion that speakers, in their everyday use of proper names, associate names with a particular definite description. If a speaker is called upon to say which particular definite description he had in mind in an utterance of (7) "Aristotle was the last great philosopher of antiquity", he may be at a loss as to what description that was. Indeed, it seems intuitively clear that no particular description at all has to be present in his mind, if what is meant by that is a consciously entertained item of thought. But, of course, defenders of descriptivism might contend that there is no need for any such item to be consciously entertained: all that seems to be required is that a speaker be able, upon request, to come up with a definite description which for him gives the Fregean sense or Russellian meaning of Aristotle in (7). Yet, it does not seem at all clear that any reasonably well educated speaker needs to come up with a particular definite description that he associates with his use of the name 'Aristotle', say, 'the pupil of Plato', as opposed to 'the author of the *Nichomachean Ethics*'.

And even if it were the case that any speaker associates a particular definite description with a proper name in a given context of utterance, descriptivism would still face the problem that two speakers, in the course of a personal exchange, might associate a proper name with different definite descriptions and, thus, find themselves talking past each other, and "curiously unable to disagree" (Lycan, 2000, p. 41), since there is obviously no logical contradiction between, say, (8) "The pupil of Plato was the last great philosopher of antiquity" and (9) "The author of the *Nichomachean Ethics* was not the last great philosopher of antiquity".

A successful way to deal with problems of this sort was put forward by John Searle, in his 1958 article "Proper Names", in which he points out that the relation between proper names and definite descriptions is a matter of greater complexity than the above remarks suggest. One would be hard put to deny that proper names and definite descriptions are interestingly related. In fact, as noted by Searle, definite descriptions are typically the

linguistic devices by means of which speakers come to learn or teach the correct use of proper names. In fact, they are, apart from ostensive definition, the usual way to answer the question “Who is N?”, where N is a proper name. So, it would seem that, at the very least, a mastery of some of a proper name’s associated descriptions – descriptions which can be used to uniquely specify the object in question – is part of what it takes for one to really know the meaning of a proper name, even though the name itself, for Searle, has no descriptive content.

For Searle, speakers manage to successfully communicate by using a proper name in virtue of knowing a “sufficient” but “unspecifiable” number of definite descriptions which are true of the object denoted by the name. The sufficiency condition prevents speakers from talking past one another as might be the case if one took the meaning of a proper name to be given, for any speaker, by a single definite description. The unspecifiability condition explains why statements of the form (10) “Aristotle was the author of the *Eudemian Ethics*” need not be regarded as analytic, since, for Searle, the name ‘Aristotle’ is emphatically not a shorthand for all the descriptions that are true of Aristotle. In fact, Searle takes it that the very need for the use of definite descriptions is that they function as convenient “pegs on which to hang descriptions” (Searle, 1958, p. 95).

Insightful though it is, Searle’s position is also problematic, because he subscribes to the far stronger thesis that for an object *to be* Aristotle is for it to have the sufficient but unspecifiable number of correct descriptions presently associated with our use of its name. And, in holding that view, Searle becomes as vulnerable to Kripke’s criticisms as do Russell, with his view that names abbreviate definite descriptions, and Frege, if one assumes, if only provisionally, that his was a descriptivist view of proper names.

In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke offered a number of arguments which pose a formidable challenge to descriptivism. Among those is what we may call a modal argument, since it appeals to our intuitions concerning necessity and possibility. Kripke’s claim is that, unlike definite descriptions, which could denote different objects or people in possible worlds other than our own – by which he meant, roughly, alternative scenarios which might have been the case if things had turned out differently – a name is a *rigid*

designator, denoting the same object in every world in which the object exists. So, while Nixon might not have been the US president in 1970, had events followed a different course, it is inconceivable that Nixon might not have been Nixon. Clearly, Kripke's point is not that he might not have been named otherwise, but, rather, that once an object receives a name, in most cases at least,² the name sticks to the object as a label which will fixedly denote it, no matter what happens to the name's bearer. And, importantly, the argument seems to be no less valid as a rejoinder to Searle's thesis that names are necessarily correlated to a sufficient number of descriptions which are uniquely true of the name's bearer, but it seems clear that Nixon might as well not have done any of the things for which he became known in the actual world.

In the 1981 edition of his *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Michael Dummett resorts to technical considerations in an attempt to show that Kripke's argument is not valid. He notes that the modal behavior of names and the descriptions which could validly replace them need not differ as long as the descriptions are taken to have wide scope with regard to the possibility operator. It would seem, however, that Kripke's take on this issue accords better with most speakers' untutored outlook on the difference between proper names and definite descriptions. For one thing, it only takes an arbitrary act of naming for Nixon to be Nixon, while his being the US president in 1970 depends on what state of affairs actually obtains in American politics at that time.

And even if the validity of Kripke's modal argument might be disputed, he has other, no less powerful, nonmodal arguments against descriptivism. Here, we will look only into two such arguments. The Austrian mathematician Kurt Gödel is known to many people as "the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic". Now, if it should turn out to be the case that Gödel's proof was in reality the work of another man, named Schmidt, and that Gödel published it as if it were his own work, it seems clear that the name 'Gödel', as it is now used, stands for Gödel, not for the impostor, as it indeed would even if the proof were actually flawed, so that no one could be uniquely described as 'the man who

² Kripke insists that his views about proper names hold only for the most part: a few special uses of proper names *are* descriptive.

discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'. Thus, the claim that the description one associates with a proper name fixes the reference of the name in question does not appear to be a defensible one. This is certainly bad news for Russell's theory. And it will surely also count against Frege's, if his view of sense was a descriptivist one.

No less cutting against descriptivist theories is Kripke's contention that a speaker who uses the name of someone whom he is in no position to denote by means of some definite description which is uniquely true of the person may still be said to refer to the person in question by using his or her name. As Kripke notes, to the man in the street, Richard Feynman may be only "a famous physicist or something"; yet, intuitively, a speaker who, in a parrot-like fashion, goes on to repeat someone else's words, say, (11) "Feynman was a genius", can still be taken to be referring to Feynman.

In responding to arguments of this sort, modern neo-Fregeans, like Michael Dummett, John McDowell and Gareth Evans typically avail themselves of two strategies. They may fight nondescriptivism in its own domain, as it were, by holding that arguments such as those put forward by Kripke are not valid as a refutation of Frege, even if it were indeed the case that Frege subscribed to a descriptivist view of sense, as Dummett did in trying to refute Kripke's modal argument. More typically, though, they go on to deny that Frege ever meant to say that the sense of a proper name is given by a definite description. This contention is strongly voiced in an appendix to the second edition of Dummett's *Frege: Philosophy of Language*:

It is true that, in giving examples of possible senses that may be associated with a proper name, Frege expresses these by means of definite descriptions; but this should be considered as merely a device for a brief characterization of a sense, rather than as a means of conveying the thesis which Kripke ascribes to Frege. What is important about Frege's theory is that a proper name, if it is considered as having a determinate sense, must have associated with it a specific criterion for recognizing a given object as the referent of the name; the referent of the name, if any, is whatever object satisfies that criterion (Dummett, 1981, p. 110).

McDowell (1977) and Evans (1981) offer highly abstract nondescriptivist accounts of Fregean sense. Evans, in particular, while

downplaying the importance of Dummett's construal of sense as a way of determining the referent of a proper name, argues strongly for the view that sense is a way of thinking of the name's referent: "Frege's idea was that to understand an expression, one must not merely think of the reference that it is the reference, but that one must, in so thinking, think of the reference *in a particular way*". The way in which one must think of the expression in order to understand it is that expression's *sense*. In what follows, he goes on to say: "No *substantial*, or *positive* theory of the notion of a way of thinking of something is presupposed by this conception of sense" (Evans, 1981, p. 282).

Now, though one may grant on epistemic grounds that no one can be said to fully *understand* a proposition containing a proper name without being able to think of the name's referent in some particular, though not necessarily, descriptive way, it need not follow that such epistemic considerations suffice, in themselves, to establish Fregean sense as a *semantically* relevant notion.

As against the attempts to rescue Fregean sense from Kripke's attacks on descriptivism, by an appeal to a nondescriptivist construal of Fregean sense, I should like to maintain that while Kripke may be guilty of wrongly associating with Frege a view of sense that was not Frege's own, his arguments still cut deeply against the *spirit*, if not the actual content of Frege's position.

To my mind, Kripke's arguments appear to have shown quite conclusively that in order to successfully *refer* to a name's bearer in using its name, one need not be in a position to think of the bearer in any particular way, descriptive or otherwise, much less in way which uniquely determines the object in question. If a Latin instructor, knowing a number of things about Cicero, goes on to convey a great deal of information about Cicero in class, including the fact that he denounced Catiline, and the sentence (12) "Cicero denounced Catiline", having been written on the board, is repeated in class by some tardy student to whom, unlike his classmates, 'Cicero' is still only a name, this student may still be taken to be referring to Cicero, no less than his more knowledgeable friends would be in uttering (12). And that a quite determinate proposition could be communicated by his uttering (12) is shown to be the case if we envisage a situation in which this

student's utterance of (12) is overheard by a yet tardier student, who, having done some independent study on his own, knows a couple of things about Cicero, but not that he denounced Catiline. Thus, successful communication does not seem to presuppose a knowledge of a name's sense, some elusive objective entity, that needs to be available to all the parties of a communicative event.

It would then seem that Fregean sense is a problematic, perhaps, unacceptable, notion. However, it is important at this point to remind ourselves of what Frege's appeal to sense was supposed to accomplish in the first place, namely a solution to the puzzles of reference to which we have already alluded in the beginning of this essay.

If there is not such a thing as the Fregean sense of a proper name, one might have to accept Mill's suggestion that there is nothing to the meaning of a proper name over and above its referent. But if this is the case, the puzzles seem to have been left unresolved, because they seem to show that the Millian view that names are directly referential is fraught with insurmountable difficulties.

It is incumbent upon present-day direct-reference theorists, who have convinced themselves that there is no such thing as the Fregean sense of a proper name, while also rejecting Russell's claim that names abbreviate definite descriptions, to come up with some account which succeeds in both doing justice to their intuitions to the effect that names refer directly to their bearers and in solving the puzzles of reference.

Some theorists, notably Nathan Salmon in his 1986 *Frege's Puzzle* have attempted to do just that. It is not my intention to go into any of the intricacies of the highly technical literature which advocates a Millian view of proper names. However, even at the risk of being unfair to their proponents, I venture to say that any radically Millian view of proper names is downright implausible. It suffices to note, in this connection, that one often fails to preserve the truth-value – a distinctly *semantic* notion – of attitude-ascription propositions, when a name in the subordinate clause is replaced with some other co-referring name. If we take it that (13) "Robert knows that the Netherlands lost the 1974 World Cup final match" is true, it need not follow that (14) "Robert knows that Holland lost the 1974 World Cup final match" is also true, even though 'Holland' and 'the

Netherlands' are co-referring names, since Robert may fail to know that this is the case.

Now, it is true to say that, in some contexts, when what matters is not to faithfully report what is the content of the subject's beliefs or knowledge in sentences like (13) and (14), but, instead, the standpoint of the person who is doing the reporting act, and who knows it for a fact that 'the Netherlands' and 'Holland' refer to the same country, (14) might in fact preserve the truth-value of (13). However, these so-called 'transparent', as opposed to 'opaque' readings, of the names in (13) and (14) are, more often than not, unnatural. Yet, if all there is to a name is its referent, transparent readings should be the norm. Strict direct-reference theorists are bound to have a hard time trying to explain why this is not the case.

What emerges from all of the preceding considerations is a picture in which none of the opposing theories considered so far seems to be quite right. On the one hand, names do not appear to have recognizably Fregean senses or to abbreviate definite descriptions; on the other hand, it is highly doubtful that the Millian or direct-reference theory of names can deal with the puzzles of reference. According to Lycan (Lycan, 2000), to whose treatment of the matter this essay owes a great deal, we are landed with a dilemma or maybe even a 'trilemma', if one takes Searle's Cluster theory into account.

In what follows, I will conduct a brief survey of an article by an author who has attempted to "find ways between the three horns" (Lycan, 2000, p. 59). I believe that there are some advantages to the account offered by Michael Devitt in his 1989 paper "Against Direct Reference". His is the best attempt with which I am acquainted to find some tenable middle ground between Fregean sense and the views held by people in the direct-reference camp.

As we will see, the proposal he comes up with is one in which it is both denied that the meaning of a proper name is exhausted by its bearer, if there is one, and that proper names have Fregean senses. It will turn out that for Devitt proper names do have senses of a particular sort, which make it possible for the puzzles of reference to be solved, but that such senses are quite non-Fregean in nature.

As he sees it, the direct-referentialists' somewhat stubborn adherence, against all intuition, to a strictly Millian view of proper names rests on the mistaken "semantic presupposition" that names are either Millian or else have a descriptive meaning. Since the arguments of Kripke and Donnellan, among others, appear to have decisively refuted the latter thesis, we would, on the account Devitt rejects, be bound to conclude that the meaning of a proper name is just its referent.

However, since this semantic presupposition has simply been taken for granted, not having been properly argued for, there is still a third possibility left, namely that a proper name might have, in addition to its referent, if it has one, some feature, which we might harmlessly call its sense, which could enable us to solve the puzzles, though, admittedly, sense, thus construed, would not be descriptive.

This being the case, one might mistakenly conclude that Devitt belongs to the neo-Fregean camp, since, as we have seen before, some eminent neo-Fregeans have attempted to offer nondescriptivist accounts of Fregean sense. In common with the neo-Fregeans, Devitt's notion of sense is not a descriptivist one. What distinguishes his position from those held by authors like Dummett, Evans and McDowell is that his view of sense is clearly non-Fregean. He does not think that names have modes of presentation in the Fregean sense, namely ways of consciously thinking of their referents, or grasping their objective *de re* modes of presentation, after a fashion which enables the speaker to uniquely pick them out.

Devitt's positive account of sense, in the last section of his article, is preceded by sections dealing with related matters, notably the section in which he mounts a vigorous attack on what he takes to be the failed attempts by direct-reference theorists to provide, within a Millian framework, solutions to the puzzles of reference. Unfortunately, I do not have space to go into any of this. More important for my purposes is Devitt's contention that direct-reference theorists have typically failed to appreciate the differences between what he calls 'the 'Fido'-Fido theory' – the strictly Millian theory of proper names – which he rejects, and 'the Nondescription theory', 'the Rigid Designation theory' and the 'Causal theory', all of which he accepts. In fact, Devitt is an enthusiastic supporter of the 'Causal theory', to whose development he has been one of the main

contributors. And it is by resorting to the latter theory that he hopes to solve the puzzles.

The Causal theory of reference is not, in its origins, a theory whose aim it was to establish in what ways a name contributes to the overall meaning of the sentences of which it is a constituent. In this sense, it is not a semantic theory at all. Rather, its main concern was to answer another, though possibly related question, namely: “How is it that a proper name succeeds in referring to its bearer?” A first and tentative way to deal with the question was suggested by Kripke in *Naming and Necessity*. A name, such as ‘Aristotle’, now refers to Aristotle, because our current utterances of his name are part of a causal and historical chain (referred to by Devitt as *d-chains*, where the *d* presumably stands for ‘denotation’ or ‘designation’) made up of innumerable links, in which the name ‘Aristotle’ was transmitted by speaker to speaker over the generations – a chain which ultimately leads back to a grounding event – the naming ceremony in which Aristotle got his name. Among the merits of this theory is the fact that, as shown by Kripke, in now using the name ‘Gödel’, we do, intuitively, refer to Gödel, regardless of whether or not he satisfies any of the descriptions currently associated with him and believed to pick him out uniquely.

It remains to be seen how Devitt brings these insights to bear on the puzzles of reference. Let us start with what Devitt calls the ‘Emptiness Problem’ and the ‘Existence Problem’. As seen above, Lycan refers to these, respectively, as ‘The Problem of Apparent Reference to Nonexistents’ found in sentences like (15) “Pegasus is a winged horse” and ‘The Problem of Negative Existentials’³, exemplified in a sentence like (6) “Santa Claus does not exist”. I take it that for Devitt statements of this sort are meaningful, even if the names lack referents, in virtue of the fact that our current use of such names is grounded in some historical event. In his words, “the meaningfulness of a name does not depend on it having a referent; it is meaningful if it has an appropriate network underlying it even if that network is not grounded in a referent” (Devitt, 1989, p. 211). As I see it,

³ As Devitt sees it, the ‘Existence Problem’ involves more than accounting for the meaningfulness of true negative existentials. One also has to explain the non-triviality of true affirmative existentials.

Devitt's solution is satisfactory in the sense that it neatly expresses one way in which a name like 'Santa Claus' is perfectly meaningful, namely in that its current employment is based on historically constituted practices. Devitt's account would be less well placed, or so it seems to me, to solve a problem that tormented Russell, in connection with both proper names and definite descriptions, namely the *logical* form of sentences containing bearerless names. In that regard, descriptivist theories might be thought to fare better, even if they are untenable for other reasons. It could hardly be the case that Devitt would regard a statement like (16) "Santa Claus is fat" as having the logical form $F(a)$, in which a stands for Santa Claus! Be that as it may, I shall not pursue this point further, although Donnellan, in his 1974 paper 'Speaking of Nothing', does offer an account which holds some promise in this regard.

His solutions to the two remaining puzzles are both more interesting and more convincing. For Devitt, the informativeness of an identity statement like (17) "Hesperus = Phosphorus" is explained by an appeal to the fact that the names used had different groundings, by which he means to say that the name using practices involving each of them arose in different ways. In an appropriate context, that of celestial occurrences which are expected to take place in the morning, an object, which is often seen shortly before sunrise, is named 'Phosphorus', which naming event, in due course, prompts the coming into being of a d-chain of reference borrowings containing the relevant sound or inscription, until 'Phosphorus' becomes conventionally associated with the object in question among the members of a speech community. Similarly, in the context of celestial occurrences taking place in the evening, an object often seen shortly after sunset is named 'Hesperus', which naming event, given enough time, gives rise to the community-wide practice of referring to it as 'Hesperus'. In coming to realize that, as a matter of empirical fact, Hesperus is Phosphorus, the members of a speech community acquire a relevant piece of information, namely that their two seemingly unrelated name using practices were ultimately grounded in the same object. A difference in sense for two coreferring names is, in Devitt's account, a difference in the causally and historically constituted name using practices which had their beginnings in a single object.

Importantly, such an account could be extended to cover cases in which the postulation of different *de re* modes of presentation of a given object is out of the question. That this is the case is evident once the following scenario is envisaged. Suppose that I, being in the habit of looking out of my living-room window, see a certain man furtively come out of his car and walk into a house on the other side of the street, at around 11 p.m., every Friday. On one such occasion, I am accompanied by a friend who, being vaguely acquainted with the man in question, utters (18) “That is Harold Brown”. It turns out that ‘Harold Brown’ is the man’s given name. Unbeknownst to me, my next-door neighbor has also noticed that man’s strange behavior. Her husband, who is one of Harold Brown’s closest buddies and is well aware of his womanizing, utters (19) “That is Hugh Heffner”, since it had become established practice in Harold’s intimate circle to refer to him in this way, on account of his fine taste for women. Not having the least idea as to who the real Hugh Heffner is, and not having come to learn anything else from her husband, my neighbor eventually comes to realize, after talking to me, the truth of (20) “Harold Brown is Hugh Heffner”. Clearly, this is an informative statement, notwithstanding the fact that both she and I were presented to the referent in the exact same way, namely as a man who did such and such things at such and such times.

In treating the informativeness of identity statements, Devitt goes on to introduce certain refinements which show that even a normally trivial statement like (21) “George is George” can, on occasion, be informative, provided that two separate d-chains, grounded in the same person, belong to different networks in which the names are, for different members of a speech community, associated with distinct “files”, by which he means, roughly, what is believed to be true of the person called ‘George’.

Finally, according to Devitt, the puzzle involving failures of substitutivity of co-referring proper names in attitude-ascription contexts can be solved, even when the names have their usual opaque readings, by means of a similar appeal to the history of a name-using practice. Before I tell my neighbor that Hugh Heffner is Harold Brown, I might assent to (22) “My neighbor knows that Hugh Heffner has a Porsche” – disregarding what the conventional referent of ‘Hugh Heffner’ is for me and being solely

concerned with the content of *her* thought – and not assent to (23) “My neighbor knows that Harold Brown has a Porsche” – similarly disregarding *my* knowledge that the person she has in mind *is* Harold Brown – since the truth of (23) lies in the fact that she got to acquire correct information about a certain man by becoming a link in a d-chain in which the reference borrowings, involving the man’s nickname, though ultimately grounded in the same person as the d-chain of which I became a link when my friend pointed to the man in the street and uttered (18), is clearly different in type from a d-chain in which the reference borrowing involves Harold Brown’s real name.

To summarize: we have seen that we are landed with seemingly insuperable difficulties whether we choose to accept Frege’s construal of sense or to adopt a strict Millian or direct-reference view of proper names, according to which names simply stand for their bearers. Devitt’s account appears to have shown that there is a possible way to get us out of this quandary. For what he proposes is a plausible, non-Fregean view of sense, that seems to be able to accommodate most of the relevant data known to both sides of the dispute – a view on which the nature of our name-using practices is of paramount importance.

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