A User's Guide to Proper Names, Their Pragmatics and Semantics
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Chapter 7
Final Review

At the outset we outlined a plan that included a division of this work in two basic parts, one devoted primarily to a critical analysis of a number of proposals dealing with the semantics of proper names, the other containing my own proposal. Each of these two parts was in turn subdivided into a part dealing with the descriptive, the modal, and the foundational semantics of proper names. It could seem that this rather strict division might have led to a fragmented view of the proposals we studied, as well as of my own contribution. In the end, I dare say, the opposite turned out to be the case: just as I hoped, the segmented approach helped us to emphasise the internal cohesion of the proposals we studied, and to justify a joint approach to descriptive and modal semantics in our own approach. One may thus wonder why, if I wanted to show the cohesion of each of the positions I analysed, did I choose such a segmented presentation? It was a part of the enterprise to compare various approaches to proper names, and the division into a descriptive modal, and foundational part has been helpful. It enabled us to put side to side the answers various semanticists offer regarding the same questions, which then helped us gather the desiderata for our own proposal. On the other hand, we have time and time emphasised the connection between the parts of each of the proposals we studied.

At the beginning we also expressed a view that while the analysis of modal statements containing proper names would be treated
separately, that might have been just a provisional measure. In the course of our work, we traced a close connection between the descriptive part of a proposal and its treatment of modals. It seems that an analysis of modal statements serves to motivate, illustrate, and clarify the descriptive part of a semantic proposal. That is also why in our own proposal, we treated the two – descriptive semantics and semantics of modals – together. In the background of this project has been a question that kept on surfacing in various forms: What is the relation between the semantics of proper names and the ontology of the bearers of proper names? To put it differently, what is the relation between a theory that attempts to capture the behaviour of proper names in natural language and the predictions or claims it makes about the identity criteria of the referents of proper names? Is it possible for a theory to be neutral on this issue? Answers to these questions emerged gradually. We saw that every one of the proposals we studied did, in the end, make claims or had direct consequences for a treatment of individuals. Even Lewis’s theory, which was designed to avoid making any claims regarding necessary properties of individuals, ends up having direct consequences in that area.

In the preface, I admitted that origins of the current project date back to my reading of Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity.* I had been dissatisfied with the way Kripke connects what is presented as descriptive semantics with substantive essentialist claims. In my treatment of Kripke’s semantics of modal statements I tried to get to the bottom of this issue. That proved to be rather difficult. It was relatively easy to show that the principles Kripke uses to derive essentialist claims (principles such as ‘it is an essential property of an object that it is composed of the material it is actually composed of’), being admittedly results of philosophical reflection, do not originate in the semantics of the terms involved, that is in the semantics of natural kind terms and proper names. It was less easy to show why the kind of essentialism Kripke proposes is undesirable: Kripke does not actually provide an argument for his position, and in absence of an argument that could be challenged, the danger is that we could do no better than saying that my opinion differs from
Kripke’s. That, however, would be unsatisfactory. That is why I tried to point out some counterintuitive consequences of Kripke’s view. While this was the second best option, it was probably the best kind of move one can make in such a similar situation.

Having rejected Kripke’s essentialism as not only unsupported but also undesirable, we had to face the fact that the problems we encountered in Lewis’s system were caused by a radical lack of any essentialist commitments. In Lewis’s proposal, the absence of essentialist commitments was the root of the problems. It led to the adoption of worldbound individuals related by a counterpart relation, which in turn resulted in a counterintuitive analysis of modal statements involving individuals. A further unpleasant consequence of this was the collapse of the notion of rigid designation in Lewis’s framework.

What we wanted was an approach that would allow for transworld individuals and make a good sense of rigid designation, while avoiding essentialist commitments of the kind we criticised Kripke for. This is the point where the insights we gathered from our analysis of Stalnaker’s work stood us in good stead. We had argued that Stalnaker’s possible worlds are inherently context-dependent and that what they model is the beliefs of conversation participants. We took this basic idea one step further and applied it to the issues of reference of proper names. Within a Stalnaker-style framework, we argued, one cannot make a good sense of the notion of an absolute domain of possible worlds in which a proper name would rigidly refer – reference of rigid designators is therefore always to some degree context-dependent. One should still think of names as rigidly designating, but the kind of domain in which they refer is very different from that which Kripke had in mind. Also, we had shown that rigid designation had to be underpinned by some sort of essentialism. The essentialist commitment in question could be purely formal, as in Kaplan’s case, or rather substantive, as in Kripke’s case. Neither of these options seemed very attractive because neither seems to

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1 Essentialism could be added to Lewis’s possible world framework, it is general enough. But even so it is unclear whether that would lead to an adoption of transworld individuals.
capture adequately speaker’s intuitions as what they refer to. However, once we started working with context-dependent domains of epistemic possible worlds, we could argue that the individuals have properties that are necessary of them in a given context. This is a sort of essentialism that does, indeed, seem to capture the way names are used in natural language. The sort of weak essentialism with which we underpin rigid designation seems to avoid both the counterintuitive consequences of Kripke’s essentialism and the purely formal character of Kaplan’s haecceitism.

In this way we progressed from an analysis of preconditions of the direct reference and rigid designation picture to an analysis of the various notions of possible worlds and the way they influence the descriptive semantics of proper names, and, finally, put the pieces together and formed our own proposal.

In the course of our work, we tried to avoid the problems connected with causal chains. In both Kripke’s and Putnam’s proposal, causal chains seem to play the role of truth-warrants. As long as we could account for the truth-conditions of sentences containing proper names, we could therefore avoid the issue of causal chains. Instead of analysing various proposals dealing with causal chains, we turned our attention to Stalnaker’s information theoretic account of intentionality, which is designed to explain the way in which the content of speaker’s statements is connected to the external world. We found Stalnaker’s approach plausible, though it may profit from further elaboration.

Finally, we addressed the issues of foundational semantics of proper names, in particular the problems connected with the resolution of names in context. With the exception of Kaplan’s work, none of the proposals we had analysed up to then dealt with this problem. That is why the last chapter seems to some degree disconnected from the rest of the work. We felt, however, that the issue of multiple bearers of proper names had to be addressed, if only because it had a bearing on the rigid designation of proper names and the ontology of names. The last chapter also connects with the rest of the work by asking and answering the questions like ‘What is a proper name?’ and ‘What is special about proper names?’.
ing Kaplan’s proposal as our starting point, we proposed a view of the ontology of proper names and reconciled the rigid designation claim with the problems surrounding multiple bearers of the same name. Using data from aphasia research, we argued against Burge and others that names are indeed a category of their own, and that they cannot be analysed in terms of other kinds of expressions.

There are issues that could have been addressed in the present work and we chose not to deal with them, e.g., the topic of causal chains. I hope, though, that the reasons behind the choice of topics we did address have become as apparent to the reader as they were to me when I made the choice. I hope, too, that this work presents not only an interesting analysis of connections between various issues present in a theory of reference of proper names, but also some refreshing and thoughtprovoking new perspectives.