

# Philosophy of Language Seminar: Proper Names and Definite Descriptions

Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

## Course Information

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<b>Office Hours</b>	X & by appt
<b>Class Code</b>	AS.150.193
<b>Class Time</b>	TTh 1:30pm-2:45pm
<b>Class Location</b>	Gilman 313

## Course Description

In talking with each other, we often use *proper names* like ‘Juliet’ and *definite descriptions* like ‘The most beautiful fresco in Italy’ to pick out persons and objects in our world. But how do these expressions function exactly? What are we doing when we employ them? Moreover, what is the contribution of proper names and definite descriptions to the *meaning* of the sentences in which they embed? In our seminar, we will carefully work through some classic philosophical texts that address these questions. These texts will provide an introduction to the philosophy of language, and to analytic philosophy in general.

## Course-level Learning Goals

At the completion of this course, you will understand basic concepts in the philosophical study of language (compositionality, the type-token distinction, use vs. mention, etc.) and also have a more in-depth understanding of classic philosophical debates over the meaning of proper names and definite descriptions in the 20th century. Throughout the semester, you will hone your ability to critically engage with texts in analytic philosophy, identifying and assessing the arguments in these texts and developing an awareness of the complexity of issues and the importance of examining them from multiple perspectives. The writing exercises in this course will require you to present complex ideas in a clear and organized manner, and to reflect on the strengths and limitations of different philosophical positions.

## Readings

The official textbook for our course is this anthology:

- A. P. Martinich and David Sosa, editors. *The Philosophy of Language* (Sixth Edition). Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2013.

This book is often recommended for an advanced undergraduate or graduate level course. But do not fear. We will be reading only a small, but important, fragment of this collection. Moreover, I

will distribute a handout for each reading assignment that summarizes the paper, elaborates on its more difficult passages, and presents background material required to comprehend the text.

The core readings are the following:

- John Stuart Mill. *On Names*. 1881.
- Gottlob Frege. *On Sense and Reference*. 1892.
- John Searle. *Proper Names*. 1958.
- Saul Kripke. From *Naming and Necessity*. 1972.
- Hilary Putnam. *Meaning and Reference*. 1973.
- Gareth Evans. *The Causal Theory of Names*. 1973.
- Bertrand Russell. *Descriptions*. 1919.
- P. F. Strawson. *On Referring*. 1950.
- Keith Donnellan. *Reference and Definite Descriptions*. 1966.
- Saul Kripke. *Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference*. 1977.

At the very least, we will read these ten papers over the course of the semester. However, we will likely supplement this list with additional readings that address the issues that most capture our attention over the course of the semester. For instance, we might read some recent cross-cultural experimental work on reference.

### **Three imperatives for reading philosophy**

- (1) *Read slowly and carefully.* Philosophical texts are dense and difficult. Reading philosophy is not like reading a work of fiction. The details are tremendously important and a great deal of information can be packed into each sentence.
- (2) *Read actively.* When one reads something in print, it is tempting to think that an author's position is beyond dispute. However, you should attempt to identify and push the pressure points in philosophical arguments. While reading the above papers, ask yourself: Does the claim that the author is making follow from other claims that he made before? Is the author contradicting herself by saying this? Has the author overlooked some important cases?
- (3) *Read repeatedly.* Each pass at reading a philosophy paper can bring a deeper and more robust understanding of its often subtle ideas. In philosophy, the light slowly dawns.

## **Requirements**

The primary requirements for the course are three term papers.

After the first three readings, you will receive a set of short prompts based on this material. You will then have one week to write a three page double-spaced paper that addresses one of these prompts (worth 25% of your final grade). Before you begin writing, I will also distribute a grading rubric that indicates how I will evaluate your papers.

After the next three readings, you will receive another set of prompts, and you will then have one week to write another three page double-spaced paper that addresses one of them (worth 25% of your final grade).

The final term paper is more ambitious. By our last class you must craft and submit a short prompt that references at least one of the final four readings (or any additional material we cover at the end of the course). A five page double-spaced paper that addresses your prompt is due on Dec 15 (worth 30% of your final grade).

Participation in the course is also required (worth 20% of your final grade). It is important that you come to class prepared, having worked through the assigned readings and formulated questions for group discussion.

## Academic Integrity

The strength of the university depends on academic and personal integrity. In this course, you must be honest and truthful. Do not plagiarize—if you are unsure what counts as *plagiarism*, ask! Students caught cheating may receive an F in the course and can face more serious consequences in extreme cases.

For more information, see the Homewood Student Affairs site on academic ethics:

<https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/student-life/student-conduct/academic-ethics-undergraduates>.

See also the e-catalog entry on the undergraduate academic ethics board:

<http://e-catalog.jhu.edu/undergrad-students/student-life-policies/#UAEB>

## Disabilities

Any student with a disability who may need accommodations in this class must obtain a letter from Student Disability Services, 385 Garland, 410.516.4720, [studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu](mailto:studentdisabilityservices@jhu.edu). Accommodations recommended by SDS will be implemented.

## Mental Health

If you are struggling with anxiety, stress, depression or other mental health related concerns, please consider visiting the JHU Counseling Center. If you are concerned about a friend, please encourage that person to seek out their services. The Counseling Center is located at 3003 North Charles Street in Suite S-200 and can be reached at 410.516.8278 and online at <http://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/counselingcenter/>

## Enjoy the course!

## I. Background

AS.150.193: Names and Descriptions  
Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

### 1 Targets

In this course, our targets are *proper names* like

- (1) Juliet
- (2) Johns Hopkins University

and *definite descriptions* like

- (3) The most beautiful fresco in Italy
- (4) The first research university in America

How do these expressions function exactly? What are we doing when we employ them? It is tempting to say this: in using proper names and definite descriptions, we pick out or refer to individual persons, objects, places, events, processes, institutions, and so on; in using a full sentence involving either kind of expression, we say things about the individual picked out by the name or description. Consider:

- (5) Juliet admired the most beautiful fresco in Italy.
- (6) Johns Hopkins is the first research university in America.

By uttering (5), we seemingly say of a particular person, Juliet, that she admired a particular work of art, the most beautiful fresco in Italy. By uttering (6), we seemingly say of a particular academic institution, Johns Hopkins, that it is the first research university in America.

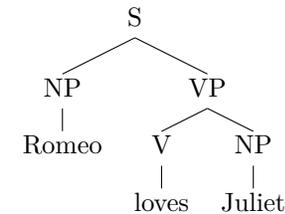
However, is this the right way to think about sentences like (5) and (6)? And what is the contribution of expressions like ‘Juliet’ and ‘the first research university in America’ to the *meaning* of the sentences in which they embed? Is the meaning of a proper name or definite description just the individual it refers to, or is the meaning something else altogether?

Note that other expressions in English seem to function in a similar way; for instance, *singular demonstrative pronouns* like ‘this’ and ‘that’, and *singular personal and impersonal pronouns* like ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’, ‘she’, and ‘it.’ To stay focused, though, we will focus almost exclusively on proper names and definite descriptions in this course.

## 2 Modules of Language

Let us further locate our subject in the wider enterprise of linguistics and the philosophy of language. This enterprise has several parts: syntax, semantics, speech act theory, and pragmatics.<sup>1</sup>

*Syntax* is concerned with the rules or principles by which well-formed or grammatical sentences are generated from the basic building blocks of a language—the *vocabulary* or *lexicon*. Inside the syntax module, a language  $\mathcal{L}$  can be thought of as just a collection of strings of symbols. The syntax of  $\mathcal{L}$  tells us which strings constitute its lexicon and how these strings can be combined to form more complex expressions of  $\mathcal{L}$ . For example, the simple transitive clause ‘Romeo loves Juliet’ has the following grammatical phrase structure:



where S: sentence, NP: noun phrase, VP: verb phrase, and V: verb.

*Semantics* is concerned with the meaning of the expressions in a language. Inside the semantics module, the expressions of a language are *interpreted*. A language  $\mathcal{L}$  can no longer be regarded as just a set of strings; these strings are now infused with meaning. It is widely thought that meaning is *compositional*—a theory of meaning for a language  $\mathcal{L}$  often takes the form of an assignment of *semantic values* to its lexicon, and a system of rules that specify how the meaning of a complex expression in  $\mathcal{L}$  is determined by the meaning of simpler embedded expressions together with phrase structure. On this model, a semantics for English must identify the semantic values of the names ‘Romeo’ and ‘Juliet’ and the transitive verb ‘loves’, and tell us how these values compose to determine the semantic value of the full sentence ‘Romeo loves Juliet’.

*Speech act theory* is concerned with the different things that we do with meaningful words (and meaningful gestures; this theory is not specifically linguistic). Suppose I say

- (7) Carlos is going to the store.

<sup>1</sup>My big-picture thinking about the study of language is heavily influenced by an unpublished note by MacFarlane (*ms.*).

Depending on my tone of voice and other features of the context in which I utter (7), I might be making an assertion, asking a question, issuing a command, and so forth. The theory of speech acts classifies different speech acts in terms of their *content* and *force*, describing the practical significance of the acts in each class and explaining the systematic relations between speech acts of different kinds. What is a speaker doing in uttering (7) with *assertoric* force? What is a speaker doing in uttering (7) with *interrogative* force? How is the assertion that Sam is going to the store related to the question whether Sam is going to the store? Speech act theory answers these kinds of questions.

*Pragmatics* is concerned with how psychological and worldly knowledge contributes to meaningful communication. I mentioned how knowledge of the context in which an utterance takes place can help one ascertain the force of a speech act. Non-linguistic knowledge is often needed to ascertain the content of a speech act as well. Suppose I tell Hazel:

(8) You are the cream in my coffee.

Taking this literally, I have said that Hazel is the white fatty liquid in my drink made from coffee beans. But presumably I have not *asserted* this. If I have made an assertion in using (8) metaphorically, then I have asserted that Hazel is my pride and joy.

For another example where general knowledge is required to ascertain the content communicated by a speech act, suppose that Diana is applying to law school and she asks me to write her a letter of recommendation. My letter is one line:

(9) Diana has excellent handwriting.

While I have asserted only that Diana has excellent handwriting, I have clearly communicated some additional content, *viz.*, that Diana is ill-suited for law school. Grice (1975) famously explains how this phenomenon—which he calls “conversational implicature”—depends on the cooperative principles or maxims that govern conversation. By transparently flouting the maxim to be as informative as is required for the purposes of exchange, I *implicate* that Peter is ill-suited for law school.

Our investigation this semester will cut across semantics, the theory of speech acts, and pragmatics. Our guiding semantic question is this: what is the meaning or semantic values of proper names and definite descriptions? To get clearer about this, we will consider how sentences involving these expressions are used in assertion and implicature.

### 3 Odds and Ends

Before getting started in earnest, let me make a couple more distinctions to keep in mind throughout the course.

**Type-Token.** Consider the following sentences:

(10) Romeo is a lover.

(11) Romeo is a lover.

These are two sentence-*tokens* of the same sentence-*type*.

**Use-Mention.** Consider the following sentence:

(12) ‘Juliet’ picks out Juliet.

The two occurrences of ‘Juliet’ in (12) are different. In its first occurrence, this expression is *mentioned*. The string formed by enclosing ‘Juliet’ in quotation marks is a proper name of the enclosed seven-letter string. In the second occurrence, ‘Juliet’ is presumably *used* to refer to a particular woman in Verona.

Exercise: Which of the following sentences are true?

(13) Johns Hopkins is two words.

(14) ‘Johns Hopkins’ is two words.

(15) ‘Johns Hopkins’ is an academic institution.

(16) Johns Hopkins is an academic institution.

### References

Paul Grice. Logic and conversation. In Cole Peter and Jerry Morgan, editors, *Syntax and Semantics 3: Speech Acts*, pages 41–58. Academic Press, 1975.

John MacFarlane. Semantics, pragmatics, and all that. Unpublished note.

## II. Mill on Names

AS.150.193: Names and Descriptions  
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Philosophers love to make distinctions. John Stuart Mill is no exception. In Book I, Chapter II of *A System of Logic*, Mill divides up the class of names along several lines. In the midst of this classification project, Mill also provides an argument that proper names serve only to refer to particular individuals without conveying any information about them.

### 1 Names

Mill endorses the common position that names are names of things, not of our ideas about things. For instance, ‘Pluto’ names a celestial body out there in the universe, not the idea of this celestial body inside somebody’s head. To support this position, Mill appeals to ordinary intuitions about meaning and use:

When I say, “the sun is the cause of the day,” I do not mean that my idea of the sun causes or excites in me the idea of the day; or in other words, that thinking of the sun makes me think of day. I mean, that a certain physical fact, which is called the sun’s presence (and which, in the ultimate analysis, resolves itself into sensations, not ideas) causes another physical fact, which is called day. It seems proper to consider a word as the *name* of that which we intend to be understood by it when we use it; of that which any fact that we assert of it is to be understood of; that, in short, concerning which, when we employ the word, we intend to give information. (§1)

Mill applies the term ‘name’ in an *extremely* liberal manner to encompass *proper names*

- (1) Paul
- (2) Caesar
- (3) Dartmouth

*definite descriptions*

- (4) The sun

- (5) The murderer of Henri Quatre
- (6) The only son of John Stiles
- (7) The place which the wisdom and policy of antiquity had destined for the residence of the Abyssinian princes’

*indefinite descriptions*

- (8) a regiment
- (9) a round object

*count nouns*

- (10) man
- (11) stone

*mass nouns*

- (12) whiteness
- (13) milk-whiteness

*adjectives*

- (14) white
- (15) old

And much more. But for Mill not all words are names. An expression counts as a name just in case it can occur, or it can occur preceded by an indefinite article, as the grammatical subject of a sentence (importantly, Mill makes an exception for adjectives since he thinks that there is no difference in meaning between, say, ‘round’ and ‘a round object’). So words like ‘of’, ‘truly’, ‘me’, and ‘John’s’ are parts of names but are not names themselves. While the following sentences are grammatical

- (16) Li is tall.
- (17) The apple of Li’s eye is Ann.

these sentences are not

- (18) # Li’s is tall.
- (19) # Of is orange.

Of course, expressions that *mention* words like ‘of’ and ‘me’ still count as names (recall the use-mention distinction). Sentences like (20) are fine:

- (20) Both ‘of’ and ‘me’ are two letter words.

## 2 General and Singular Names

Mill's first "grand" division of names is into *general* and *singular* names:

A general name is familiarly defined, a name which is capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of each of an indefinite number of things. An individual or singular name is a name which is only capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of one thing. (§3)

For example, 'John', 'George', and 'The king who succeeded William the Conqueror' are singular names whereas 'man' and 'king' are general names. A name like 'John' cannot be applied in the same sense to more than one thing.<sup>1</sup> But a name like 'man' is a name for an indefinite number of things possessing corporeity, rationality, and so on.

General names are very useful. For one thing, these can be combined to form singular names of things that do not possess proper names. Suppose I point to a stone and say:

(21) This stone is flint.

The general name 'this' presumably names all of the things skewered by the ray extending from my elbow up my forearm and through my pointed finger. The general name 'stone' names all of the stones in the world. But their amalgamation 'this stone' is a singular name of the one object named both by 'this' and 'stone.'

Importantly, we can also use general names to make general claims about a class of things:

(22) Every natural number is either even or odd.

Equipped with the general name 'natural number', I can say of each of the infinitely many natural numbers that it is either even or odd. But I cannot say this using a finitely long sentence containing only numerals (singular names for numbers):

<sup>1</sup>Mill recognizes that many men bear the name 'John'. However, this does not make 'John' a general name. The qualification 'in the same sense' is crucial:

Though there are many persons who bear that name, it is not conferred upon them to indicate any qualities, or any thing which belongs to them in common; and cannot be said to be affirmed of them in any *sense* at all, consequently not in the same sense. (§3)

We will return to this last point that names like 'John' are *senseless* a bit later on.

(23) 1 is either even or odd *and* 2 is either even or odd *and* ...

Mill also introduces the notion of a *collective* name. Whereas a general name applies to each member of a multitude of things, a collective name like 'The 76th regiment of foot in the British army' or 'The three stooges' applies to a class itself but not to each of its members. This is not to say that all collective names are singular. 'A regiment' is general with respect to the class of regiments but collective with respect to the soldiers that constitute any particular regiment.

It isn't clear that Mill's notion of a collective name is all that helpful. After all, aren't most names collective with respect to *some* kind of entity? Isn't 'Caesar' collective with respect to the molecules that make him up? Isn't 'New York City' collective with respect to the five boroughs? Mill introduces the notion of a collective name in order to stress that names like 'The 76th regiment of foot in the British army' are singular. However, we do not really need the notion of a collective name to make this point.

## 3 Concrete and Abstract Names

Mill's second "general" division of names is into *concrete* and *abstract*:

A concrete name is a name which stands for a thing; an abstract name is a name which stands for an attribute of a thing. (§4)

For example, 'John', 'The sea', 'man', 'white', and 'old' are concrete names whereas 'whiteness' and 'old age' are abstract names. It is important to keep in mind here that, for Mill, a name names those things that it can be predicated of:

A name can only be said to stand for, or to be a name of, the things of which it can be predicated. (§4)

We can predicate 'white' of snow, milk, and the foam of the sea:

(24) (This) snow is white.

(25) (This) milk is white.

(26) The foam of the sea is white.

So 'white' is one of the concrete names of snow, milk, and the foam of the sea. However, these sentences sound terrible:

(27) # Snow is whiteness.

(28) # Milk is whiteness.

(29) # The foam of the sea is whiteness.

So ‘whiteness’ does not name these things. On the other hand, while this sentence is fine

(30) A feature of snow, milk, and the foam of the sea is whiteness.

this sentence is not

(31) # A feature of snow, milk, and the foam of the sea is white.

So ‘whiteness’, not ‘white’, is an abstract name of the attribute that all white things have in common.

Both concrete and abstract names can be both general and singular. ‘Man’ is concrete and general. ‘Paul’ is concrete and singular. ‘Color’ is abstract and general. ‘Milk-whiteness’ is abstract and singular.

## 4 Connotative and Non-Connotative Names

For our purposes, the most important division of names is Mill’s third “great” division into *connotative* and *non-connotative* names:

A non-connotative term is one which signifies a subject only, or an attribute only. A connotative term is one which denotes a subject, and implies an attribute. (§5)

[A connotative name] is said to signify the subjects *directly*, the attributes *indirectly*; it *denotes* the subjects, and implies, or involves, or indicates, or as we shall say henceforth *connotes*, the attributes. (§5)

For example, the general concrete name ‘white’ denotes white things such as snow, paper, my grandfather’s beard, and so on, but also implies or connotes their shared property of whiteness. The general concrete name ‘man’ denotes men such as Caesar, Alexander the Great, and so on, but also connotes such properties as corporeality and rationality. In fact, all general concrete names are connotative.

General abstract names can be connotative. ‘Fault’ denotes such attributes as slowness (in a horse) and connotes hurtfulness—an attribute of the attributes named.

As for singular concrete names, Mill claims that these can be connotative or non-connotative. Importantly, proper names like ‘Sherlock Holmes’, ‘London’, and ‘Baker Street’ are non-connotative. These names function like marks that bring to mind individuals in the world but do not imply any of their properties. The use of a proper name, in itself, does not convey any information about what is named. However, definite descriptions like ‘the father of Socrates’ and ‘the most dangerous street in London’ are connotative. These names do not simply bring to mind individuals in the world but do so by implying some of their properties.

One might object that at least some proper names connote an attribute of the individual named. Suppose that someone has a runny nose and gets nicknamed ‘Booger’. Doesn’t this name connote their runny-noseness? But Mill stresses that we must separate the genesis of a name from its function once it has entered our language:

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 no 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. That fact, therefore, can form no part of the signification of the word; for otherwise, when the fact confessedly ceased to be true, no one would any longer think of applying the name. Proper names are attached to the objects themselves, and are not dependent on the continuance of any attribute of the object. (§5)

Note that Mill is giving an *argument* here that proper names like ‘Dartmouth’ are non-connotative. If ‘Dartmouth’ connoted a property like being situated at the mouth of the river Dart, and the town Dartmouth lost this property, then we could no longer correctly use this name to refer to Dartmouth. But Dartmouth would still correctly be called ‘Dartmouth’ if this

town was no longer situated at the mouth of the Dart. So the proper name ‘Dartmouth’ is non-connotative.

According to Mill, the *meaning* of a name is what it connotes. So while connotative names like definite descriptions are meaningful, proper names are meaningless:

Whenever the names given to objects convey any information—that is, whenever they have properly any meaning—the meaning resides not in what they *denote*, but in what they *connote*. The only names of objects which connote nothing are *proper* names; and these have, strictly speaking, no signification. (§5)

When we impose a proper name, we perform an operation in some degree analogous to what the robber intended in chalking the house. We put a mark, not indeed upon the object itself, but, so to speak, upon the idea of the object. A proper name is but an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object. Not being attached to the thing itself, it does not, like the chalk, enable us to distinguish the object when we see it; but it enables us to distinguish it when it is spoken of, either in the records of our own experience, or in the discourse of others; to know that what we find asserted in any proposition of which it is the subject, is asserted of the individual thing with which we were previously acquainted.

When we predicate of any thing its proper name; when we say, pointing to a man, this is Brown or Smith, or pointing to a city, that it is York, we do not, merely by so doing, convey to the reader any information about them, except that those are their names. By enabling him to identify the individuals, we may connect them with information previously possessed by him; by saying, This is York, we may tell him that it contains the Minster. But this is in virtue of what he has previously heard concerning York; not by any thing implied in the name. It is otherwise when objects are spoken of by connotative names. When we say, The town is built of marble, we give the hearer what may be entirely new information, and this merely by the signification of the many-worded connotative name, “built of marble.” Such names are not signs of the mere objects, invented because we have occasion to think and speak of those objects individually; but signs which accompany an attribute; a kind of livery in which the attribute clothes all objects which are recognized as possessing it. They are not mere marks, but more, that is to

say, significant marks; and the connotation is what constitutes their significance. (§5)

When one hears a proper name or sees it in print, this will trigger various ideas about an individual. For example, when I see the expression ‘Sherlock Holmes’, I might think of a detective walking down Baker Street in London. However, no information about Sherlock Holmes is conveyed by the proper name (except, of course, that he has the name ‘Sherlock Holmes’). The name itself is meaningless.

### III. Frege on Sense and Reference

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Gottlob Frege's 'On Sense and Reference' is arguably the most influential paper in the philosophy of language. In the first part of this paper, Frege argues for a non-Millian *descriptivist* theory of names on which a proper name is a meaningful expression with the sense of a definite description.<sup>1</sup>

#### 1 Frege's Puzzle

The paper begins with a puzzle. Consider the following pairs of identity statements:

- (1) Mark Twain is Mark Twain.
- (2) Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens.
- (3) The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is the author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*.
- (4) The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is the author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.

The first and third identities are *uninformative*. To be told (1) or (3) is not to be told anything terribly exciting. By contrast, the second and fourth identities are *informative*. To be told (2) or (4) is to receive some non-trivial knowledge.

$a = a$  and  $a = b$  are obviously statements of differing cognitive value;  $a = a$  holds *a priori* and, according to Kant, is to be labelled analytic, while statements of the form  $a = b$  often contain very valuable extensions of our knowledge and cannot always be established *a priori*. The discovery that the rising sun is not new every morning, but always the same, was one of the most fertile astronomical discoveries. (p. 35)

How to account for this difference in informativeness? This is trickier than it seems. Consider a simplistic two-piece linguistic picture where we

<sup>1</sup>For Frege, any expression that designates a single object, be it a word or even a complete sentence, counts as a 'proper name'. But I use this term in the ordinary, less catholic fashion.

have, in addition to the identity 'is', only expressions like 'Samuel Clemens' and 'The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*' and the individuals that these linguistic expressions stand for or designate. Then we seem to have only two options for understanding identities like (1)-(4). On the one hand, we might say that an identity encodes a relation between the individual(s) picked out by the expressions on either side of the 'is'. However, (1)-(4) would then all encode the same relation between Mark Twain and himself. On the other hand, we might say that an identity encodes a relation between the bits of language on either side of the 'is'. For instance, (1) encodes that the first occurrence of 'Mark Twain' and the second occurrence of 'Mark Twain' designate the same entity in the world. However, (1)-(4) would then all encode similar arbitrary facts about our language. The main subject matter of these identities would not be a famous American author.

#### 2 Sense vs. Reference

To account for the difference in cognitive value between (1) and (3), on the one hand, and between (2) and (4), on the other, Frege adds a third piece to the linguistic picture: *sense*.

It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the reference of the sign, also what I should like to call the *sense* of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained. (p. 35-6)

'Mark Twain', 'Samuel Clemens', 'The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*', and 'The author of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*' all have the same reference—*viz.*, the man Mark Twain. But these expressions differ in the manner in which Mark Twain is presented. 'Mark Twain', for instance, presumably has the following descriptive sense: the famed American writer and humorist whose works include *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*.<sup>2</sup> But 'Samuel Clemens' has something like this descriptive sense: the sixth child of Jane and John Clemens, born in Florida, Missouri on November 30, 1835.

Now, (1) and (3) are uninformative identities because the expressions on either side of the 'is' have the same sense. But (2) and (4) are informative

<sup>2</sup>Frege acknowledges that in our imperfect language there can be variations in sense from speaker to speaker. In a perfect language, however, a proper name like 'Mark Twain' would have a unique sense.

because the expressions on either side of the ‘is’ have different sense. These identity claims encode a relation between Mark Twain under one mode of presentation and this same man under a different mode of presentation. To be told (2) is like being shown a picture of the front of a house, shown another picture of the rear of a house, and then told that this is one and the same house.<sup>3</sup>

It is worth comparing Frege’s theory with that of Mill. Regarding definite descriptions, there is general agreement. Both philosophers think that a definite description like ‘The author of *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*’ is meaningful. According to Frege, this expression has sense. According to Mill, this is a connotative name. Regarding proper names, however, there is substantial disagreement. According to Frege, proper names have descriptive sense. The identity (2) is synonymous with a sentence like this:

- (5) The famed American writer and humorist whose works include *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is the sixth child of Jane and John Clemens, born in Florida, Missouri on November 30, 1835.

Recall, though, that Mill holds that proper names are non-connotative. While reading the name ‘Mark Twain’ in print might bring to mind various features of Mark Twain, and reading ‘Samuel Clemens’ might bring to mind other features of this same man, none of these attributes that come to mind constitute the meaning of these proper names. The names themselves are meaningless.

### 3 Sense vs. Ideas

Importantly, Frege and Mill agree that we should not regard the ideas that hearing or seeing a proper name conjures up in one’s mind as the meaning of this expression. Indeed, Frege gives us something of an argument to this effect:

The same sense is not always connected, even in the same man, with the same idea. The idea is subjective: one man’s idea is not that of another. There result, as a matter of course, a variety of differences in the ideas associated with the same sense. A painter, a horseman, and a zoologist will probably connect different ideas with the name ‘Bucephalus.’ This constitutes an essential distinction between

the idea and the sign’s sense, which may be the common property of many and therefore is not a part or a mode of the individual mind. For one can hardly deny that mankind has a common store of thoughts which is transmitted from one generation to another. (p. 36-7)

Since ideas are subjective, they cannot be shared. But the sense of an expression can be *grasped* by multiple parties. The informational content of a linguistic expression can be transmitted from speaker to hearer. So the ideas in our heads are not meanings.

<sup>3</sup>Of course, not all expressions with sense that purportedly designate a single object actually do—for example, ‘The largest natural number’.

## IV. Searle on Proper Names

AS.150.193: Names and Descriptions  
Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

In ‘Proper Names’, Searle follows Frege in endorsing the idea that proper names have sense (in some sense!). However, Searle’s *cluster theory* differs from the Fregean theory in important respects.

### 1 Arguments For Sense

Before presenting his own distinctive account of proper names, Searle presents a new line of argument for the thesis that names have sense. Sense, according to Searle, is needed to mediate between names and what is named:

How, for example, do we learn and teach the use of proper names? This seems quite simple—we identify the object, and, assuming that our student understands the general conventions governing proper names, we explain that this word is the name of that object. But unless our student already knows another proper name of the object, we can only *identify* the object (the necessary preliminary to teaching the name) by ostension or description; and, in both cases, we identify the object in virtue of certain of its characteristics. So now it seems as if the rules for a proper name must somehow be logically tied to particular characteristics of the object in such a way that the name has a sense as well as a reference; indeed, it seems it could not have a reference unless it did have a sense, for how, unless the name has a sense, is it to be correlated with the object? (p. 168)

In order to teach you the name ‘Barack Obama’, for example, I must either explicitly describe Barack Obama to you in some way—the first black president of the United States—or point him out—the man at the podium in front of the Lincoln Memorial. In either case, you learn the referent of ‘Barack Obama’ via some of Barack Obama’s characteristics. Searle suggests that such properties constitute or undergird the sense of a name which enables users of the name to pick out one individual rather than another.

Mill, recall, stresses that we must separate the genesis of a name from its function once it has entered our language. Similarly, a Millian might

respond here that we must separate the process of teaching a name from its linguistic function. Once ‘Barack Obama’ is synched up with Barack Obama, the use of the name to refer to the man by those who know how to use the name does not involve any of Barack Obama’s characteristics. Indeed, one might now give a variant of the Dartmouth argument. Though I might teach you the name ‘Aristotle’ by explaining that it refers to a Greek philosopher born in Stagira, you could still use this name correctly to refer to Aristotle if it were discovered that Aristotle was actually born in Thebes. So how can the description involved in teaching the name—a Greek philosopher born in Stagira—be part of the meaning of the name?

Searle has an interesting response to this. Though he admits that we could still felicitously use the name ‘Aristotle’ to refer to Aristotle if it were discovered that some of the characteristics typically associated with Aristotle did not in fact apply to him, Searle does not think that we could use this name to refer to anyone if it were discovered that *none* of the characteristics typically associated with Aristotle apply to any man. So at least *some* of Aristotle’s characteristics seem to be bound up in the use of the name.

Right after making this point, Searle gives another argument for sense. Consider the following non-existence claim:

- (1) Aristotle did not exist.

Supposing that (1) is true, what information has the speaker put forward? On a two-piece linguistic picture with only names and things named, it seems that the speaker must be saying that the term ‘Aristotle’ refers to no one. However, (1) does not seem to be about language. The speaker rather seems to be saying that there is no Greek philosopher born in Stagira who studied under Plato, taught Alexander, and so forth.<sup>1</sup>

But what is the sense of a name exactly? To understand Searle’s answer, we need some background on *presuppositions*.

### 2 Interlude: Presuppositions

The presuppositions of a sentence are, roughly, the sentences that must be mutually known or assumed to be true by a speaker and her audience

<sup>1</sup>One can make a similar point with the existence claim ‘Aristotle exists’. On the two-piece picture, the speaker must be saying that ‘Aristotle’ refers to someone, or perhaps that Aristotle has the property of existence. However, the speaker is arguably saying that there is a Greek philosopher born in Stagira who studied under Plato, taught Alexander, and so forth.

for the use of the original sentence to be appropriate in context. In lieu of sharpening this definition, let us just consider some examples.

- (2) Fido managed to find his way home.

*presupposition:*

- (3) Fido tried to find his way home.

- (4) Fido stopped begging for food.

*presupposition:*

- (5) Fido had been begging for food.

- (6) Fido ate our dinner again.

*presupposition:*

- (7) Fido ate our dinner before.<sup>2</sup>

### 3 The Cluster Theory

Back to Searle. To get clearer about the sense of proper names, he asks: what is the difference between proper names and other singularly referring expressions in our language like demonstratives and definite descriptions?

Unlike demonstratives like ‘this’ and ‘that’, a proper name does not require any contextual stage-setting—say, the speaker pointing at a person in the distance—to fix its reference.

Unlike definite descriptions—and this is one of Searle’s most interesting claims—a proper name does not *specify* any of the characteristics of the thing named:

‘Scott’ refers to the same object as does ‘the author of *Waverley*’, but ‘Scott’ specifies none of its characteristics, whereas ‘the author of *Waverley*’ refers only in virtue of the fact that it does specify a characteristic. (p. 170)

<sup>2</sup>Unlike logical implications, the presuppositions of a sentence are preserved under negation—for instance, ‘Fido did not manage to find his way home’ still presupposes ‘Fido tried to find his way home’ but does not imply ‘Someone managed to find his way home.’

Here Searle’s account differs markedly from Frege’s theory of names. For Frege, a proper name and its descriptive sense are synonymous—‘Scott was a Scottish historical novelist, playwright, and poet’ means something like ‘The author of *Waverley* was a Scottish historical novelist, playwright, and poet’. But for Searle, these two sentences do not mean the same thing.

How, then, do descriptions help fix the reference of a name? Here is Searle’s answer:

Though proper names do not normally assert or specify any characteristics, their referring uses nonetheless presuppose that the object to which they purport to refer has certain characteristics. But which ones? Suppose we ask the users of the name ‘Aristotle’ to state what they regard as certain essential and established facts about him. Their answers would be a set of uniquely referring descriptive statements. Now what I am arguing is that the descriptive force of ‘This is Aristotle’ is to assert that a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true of this object. Therefore, referring uses of ‘Aristotle’ presuppose the existence of an object of whom a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true. To use a proper name referringly is to presuppose the truth of certain uniquely referring descriptive statements, but it is not ordinarily to assert these statements or even to indicate which exactly are presupposed. And herein lies most of the difficulty. The question of what constitutes the criteria for ‘Aristotle’ is generally left open, indeed it seldom in fact arises, and when it does arise it is we, the users of the name, who decide more or less arbitrarily what these criteria shall be. (p. 170-1)

The presuppositional aspect of Searle’s view is not entirely clear. But his idea seems to be something like this. Any sentence involving the name ‘Aristotle’ presupposes the following:

- (8) There is one and only one referent of this use of ‘Aristotle’.

Moreover, this sentence presupposes a “sufficient but so far unspecified” number of sentences of this kind:

- (9) The referent of ‘Aristotle’ was a Greek philosopher.  
 (10) The referent of ‘Aristotle’ was a native of Stagira.  
 (11) The referent of ‘Aristotle’ was the student of Plato.  
 (12) The referent of ‘Aristotle’ was the teacher of Alexander.

An utterance like (1) above takes place against a background context in which a loose cluster of descriptions—a Greek philosopher, the student of Plato, and so on—are associated with the name ‘Aristotle’. As Searle later puts it:

[Proper names] function not as descriptions, but as pegs on which to hang descriptions. (p. 172)

Just as someone who says that (2) is true does not also say that (3) is true, someone who utters (1) does not thereby say that any of (8)-(12) are true. The users of the name ‘Aristotle’ needn’t have given much thought to, or reached consensus about, exactly what is presupposed by their referring uses of ‘Aristotle’. Nevertheless, the background cluster of definite and indefinite descriptions associated with ‘Aristotle’ fixes the reference of this name.

Searle’s theory seems to have a number of virtues.

First: because proper names are connected with many descriptions, we don’t have to posit a single definite description as the privileged Fregean sense of a proper name.

Second: because many descriptions are involved in fixing the reference of a name, Searle can handle the Dartmouth objection.

Third: because the connection between a proper name and any particular description is not fixed, Searle can maintain that the following sentences are *not* necessary:

- (13) Aristotle was a Greek philosopher.
- (14) Aristotle was a native of Stagira.
- (15) Aristotle was the student of Plato.
- (16) Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander.

Fourth: Searle provides an interesting explanation of why we have proper names in our language in addition to definite descriptions.

If the criteria for proper names were in all cases quite rigid and specific then a proper name would be nothing more than a shorthand for these criteria, a proper name would function exactly like an elaborate definite description. But the uniqueness and 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. (p. 171-2)

Fifth: Searle provides a compelling account of non-existence claims.

The statement [‘Aristotle never existed’] asserts that a sufficient number of the conventional presuppositions, descriptive statements, of referring uses of ‘Aristotle’ are false. Precisely which statements are asserted to be false is not yet clear, for what precise conditions constitute the criteria for applying ‘Aristotle’ is not yet laid down by the language. (p. 173)

Sixth: Searle provides a compelling solution to Frege’s puzzle. The identity ‘Mark Twain is Mark Twain’ is uninformative because the same descriptive presuppositions are associated with each occurrence of ‘Mark Twain’ in this sentence. But the identity ‘Mark Twain is Samuel Clemens’ is informative because different descriptions are hung from the pegs on either side of the ‘is’.

## V. Kripke on Naming

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Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

In the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most philosophers subscribed to some version of the descriptivist theory of names—that is, they thought that a proper name is synonymous with a definite description or cluster of descriptions, or, at the very least, descriptions of the important properties of a thing determine how it is referred to by its name. Then along came Kripke. In a series of three lectures delivered at Princeton University in 1970, later published as *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke argued, *inter alia*, that we should replace the descriptivist theory with a causal account of names. The negative part of Lecture II is the demolition of a Searlean descriptivist theory of names. The positive part is a brief sketch of Kripke’s own causal picture.

### 1 Against Descriptivism

The particular theory that Kripke attacks consists of the following theses (p. 71):

- (I) To every name or designating expression ‘*X*,’ there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of those properties  $\varphi$  such that *A* believes ‘ $\varphi X$ .’
- (II) One of the properties, or some conjointly, are believed by *A* to pick out some individual uniquely.
- (III) If most, or a weighted most, of the  $\varphi$ ’s are satisfied by one unique object *y*, then *y* is the referent of ‘*X*.’
- (IV) If the vote yields no unique object, ‘*X*’ does not refer.
- (V) The statement, ‘If *X* exists, then *X* has most of the  $\varphi$ ’s’ is known *a priori* by the speaker.
- (VI) The statement, ‘If *X* exists, then *X* has most of the  $\varphi$ ’s’ expresses a necessary truth (in the idiolect of the speaker).
- (C) 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.

Note that this target is a very speaker-centric variant of Searle’s cluster

theory—Kripke focuses on the descriptions that an individual speaker has in mind—and it is not clear that Searle himself would accept it. Still, Kripke will put pressure on the general idea that we need to talk about descriptions when we talk about names.

The circularity condition (C) rules out accounts like the following: ‘Socrates’ means ‘the individual called ‘Socrates’’. This would get us nowhere. Who is called ‘Socrates’? The individual called ‘Socrates’. But *who* is called ‘Socrates’? And so on.

In fact, Kripke argues that (II)-(VI) all fail ((I) just states a trivial fact, so is immune from criticism).

Against (VI), Kripke provides what is effectively a strengthening of Mill’s Dartmouth argument. Though Searle’s cluster theory allows us to say that a name is still applicable were the thing named to lose one of its key properties, Kripke points out that we can *specify* counterfactual scenarios in which, say, Aristotle or Hitler has *none* of the key properties commonly taken to distinguish it from other particulars:

It would seem that it’s a contingent fact that Aristotle ever did *any* of the things commonly attributed to him today, *any* of these great achievements that we so much admire. I must say that there is *something* to this feeling of Searle’s. When I hear the name ‘Hitler,’ I do get an illusory ‘gut feeling’ that it’s sort of analytic that that man was evil. But really, probably not. Hitler might have spent all his days in quiet in Linz. In that case we would not say that then this man would not have been Hitler, for we use the name ‘Hitler’ just as the name of that man, even in describing other possible worlds.  
(p. 75)

Perhaps Aristotle and Hitler have some essential properties. There might be no coherent counterfactual situation in which Aristotle is a stone. But these essential properties—such as being a living organism—do not fully distinguish Aristotle or Hitler from others.

For Kripke, a proper name is a “rigid designator” that refers to the same object in every possible world in which this object exists. By contrast, most definite descriptions are “nonrigid”.<sup>1</sup> So the full blown descriptivist theory of names is suspect: a proper name cannot be synonymous with a nonrigid definite description or—supposing this is even possible—a cluster of nonrigid descriptions.

<sup>1</sup>Not all definite descriptions are nonrigid—for example, ‘the *actual* president of the United States in 2013’.

It might still be the case that descriptions are required to fix the reference of a name which can then be used rigidly to refer to the same object across counterfactual scenarios. Even if (VI) is false, (I)-(V) might still be jointly true:

What picture of naming do Theses [(1)-(V)] give you? The picture is this. I want to name an object. I think of some way of describing it uniquely and then I go through, so to speak, a sort of mental ceremony: By ‘Cicero’ I shall mean the man who denounced Catiline; and that’s what the reference of ‘Cicero’ will be. I will use ‘Cicero’ to designate rigidly the man who (in fact) denounced Catiline, so I can speak of possible worlds in which he did not. But still my intentions are given by first, giving some condition which uniquely determines an object, then using a certain word as a name for the object determined by this condition. (p. 79)

On this picture, the following sentence would be a *contingent a priori* truth:

- (1) Cicero is the man who denounced Catiline.

I can know automatically, without any empirical investigation, that (1) is true. This said, there are possible worlds in which (1) is false.

But does naming really work this way? Perhaps the reference of some proper names, like ‘Jack the Ripper’, are fixed through this kind of internal mental ceremony. Much naming, though, does not seem to fit this picture.

Against (II), Kripke points out that for many names, the average user of ‘ $X$ ’ does not believe that the cluster of properties  $\varphi$  such that she believes ‘ $\varphi X$ ’ suffices to pick out a unique individual. For example, most of us do not know enough about Richard Feynman’s theories to distinguish him from Gell-Mann. Yet we still use the name ‘Richard Feynman’ to refer to Feynman.

Against (III), Kripke gives the Gödel-Schmidt case. Suppose that Schmidt actually proved the incompleteness of arithmetic but Gödel killed him and stole the credit. When most of us use the name ‘Gödel’, the only  $\varphi$  in mind is ‘discoverer of the incompleteness theorem’. So who do we refer to when using this name? The prover or the killer? According to (III), ‘Gödel’ refers to the man who discovered the incompleteness theorem. But this seems to be the wrong result.

Against (IV), Kripke argues that a name can still refer even if the vote does not yield a unique object—recall Richard Feynman. Indeed, a name

can refer even if the vote does not yield *any* object. Kripke supposes that no-one proved the incompleteness theorem; the proof materialized out of thin air and Gödel just so happened to walk by and find it. Still, our uses of ‘Gödel’ refer to Gödel.

Against (V), Kripke points out that we do not know *a priori* that the Gödel-Schmidt story is fantasy.

At this point, one might try to save the descriptivist theory of names by appealing to different sorts of descriptions. However, Kripke claims that these maneuvers face similar counterexamples and difficulties. He concludes:

What I think the examples I’ve given show is not simply that there’s some technical error here or some mistake there, but that the whole picture given by this theory of how reference is determined seems to be wrong from the fundamentals. It seems to be wrong to think that we give ourselves some properties which somehow qualitatively uniquely pick out an object and determine our reference in that manner. (p. 93-4)

## 2 A Causal Picture

But what is the alternative? Here is what Kripke has to say:

Someone, let’s say, a baby, is born; his parents call him by a certain name. They talk about him to their friends. Other people meet him. Through various sorts of talk the name is spread from link to link as if by a chain. A speaker who is on the far end of this chain, who has heard about, say Richard Feynman, in the market place or elsewhere, may be referring to Richard Feynman even though he can’t remember from whom he first heard of Feynman or from whom he ever heard of Feynman. He knows that Feynman is a famous physicist. A certain passage of communication reaching ultimately to the man himself does reach the speaker. He then is referring to Feynman even though he can’t identify him uniquely. He doesn’t know what a Feynman diagram is, he doesn’t know what the Feynman theory of pair production and annihilation is. Not only that: he’d have trouble distinguishing between Gell-Mann and Feynman. So he doesn’t have to know these things, but, instead, a chain of communication going back to Feynman himself has been established, by virtue of his membership in a community which passed the name on

from link to link, not by a ceremony that he makes in private in his study: 'By 'Feynman' I shall mean the man who did such and such and such and such.' (p. 91-2)

A rough statement of a theory might be the following: An initial 'baptism' takes place. Here the object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by a description. When the name is 'passed from link to link,' the receiver of the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it. If I hear the name 'Napolean' and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition. (p. 96)

Though descriptions can still play a role in the initial 'baptism' where an object is given a name, there is a shift in emphasis from descriptions to *causality*. A speaker needn't have any descriptions in mind to refer to Feynman. He must only be situated in a community of 'Richard Feynman' users and stand at the end of a chain of communication that stretches back to the physicist. Of course, not just any causal chain stretching back to Feynman will do the job. At a minimum, Kripke requires that a speaker intend to use a name to refer to the same individual as the person she learned the name from.

## VI. Putnam and Twin Earth

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Putnam's Twin Earth cases put pressure on the internalist idea that the meaning of a term depends solely on what is going on inside of an individual speaker's head or on the psychology of a community of language users. Though Putnam considers natural kind terms, the force of his thought experiments carries over to proper names.

### 1 Twin Earth Cases

**H<sub>2</sub>O-XYZ Case.** The Earthling Oscar<sub>1</sub> uses the word 'water' to talk about the liquid with chemical composition H<sub>2</sub>O. The Twin-Earthling Oscar<sub>2</sub> uses the word 'water' to talk about a different liquid that is largely indistinguishable from H<sub>2</sub>O but has a chemical composition abbreviated by XYZ. The extension of the term 'water' differs in their two idiolects. So far so good. But now suppose that it is 1750 and no-one is around on either Earth or Twin Earth who can distinguish between H<sub>2</sub>O and XYZ—for instance, Oscar<sub>1</sub> has exactly the same beliefs about H<sub>2</sub>O as Oscar<sub>2</sub> has about XYZ. Since 'water' on Earth still refers to H<sub>2</sub>O and 'water' on Twin Earth still refers to XYZ, the extension of this term cannot depend on anyone's psychological state.

**Aluminum-Molybdenum Case.** Oscar<sub>1</sub> uses the word 'aluminum' to talk about the common metal with atomic number 13 that most pots and pans are made from on Earth, and he uses the word 'molybdenum' to refer to the rare metal with atomic number 42. Oscar<sub>2</sub> uses the word 'aluminum' to talk about the common metal with atomic number 42 that most pots and pans are made from on Twin Earth, and he uses the word 'molybdenum' to refer to the rare metal with atomic number 13. Now, a metallurgist—a metals specialist—could easily tell that Earthlings and Twin-Earthlings use the word 'aluminum' to talk about different metals. But neither Oscar<sub>1</sub> nor Oscar<sub>2</sub> is a metallurgist. In fact, Oscar<sub>1</sub> has exactly the same beliefs about the metal that most pots and pans are made from on Earth as Oscar<sub>2</sub> has about the metal that most pots and pans are made from on Twin Earth. So the extension of 'aluminum' needn't depend on an individual speaker's psychological state (and similarly for 'molybdenum').<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Putnam's real-world Elm-Beech case has a similar structure.

## 2 Lesson From Aluminum-Molybdenum Case

Since the lesson from the Aluminum-Molybdenum case is less extreme, let us start with it. According to Putnam, this case demonstrates that there is a *division of linguistic labor* in fixing the extension of natural kind terms like 'aluminum' and 'gold':

Every one to whom gold is important for any reason has to *acquire* the word 'gold'; but he does not have to acquire the *method of recognizing* whether something is or is not gold. He can rely on a special subclass of speakers. The features that are generally thought to be present in connection with a general name—necessary and sufficient conditions for membership in the extension, ways of recognizing whether something is in the extension, etc.—are all present in the linguistic community *considered as a collective body*; but that collective body divides the “labor” of knowing and employing these various parts of the “meaning” of 'gold.' (p. 705)

In order for Oscar<sub>1</sub> to use the word 'aluminum' to talk about the metal with atomic number 13, he needn't be able to distinguish this metal from the metal with atomic number 42. It is enough that Oscar<sub>1</sub> is a member of a linguistic community containing experts who are able to distinguish aluminum from molybdenum. In general, when a speaker uses a natural kind term, the extension of this term needn't depend on what is going on inside of this particular speaker's head. It is enough that the collective psychology of the users of this natural kind term serves to fix its extension.

Note that Putnam's point about experts suggests that a community-level version of the descriptivist theory of proper names can dodge some of Kripke's objections in *Naming and Necessity*. For instance, recall Kripke's Feynman example. Since many of us are able to use the name 'Feynman' to refer to Feynman even though we cannot distinguish Feynman from Gell-Man, Kripke argues that the reference of 'Feynman' needn't be fixed by the descriptions that an individual speaker associates with this name. Kripke then proposes an alternative causal picture of reference, but we might instead appeal to a community-based descriptivist theory—indeed, this might be what Searle had in mind all along—where the reference of 'Feynman' is fixed by the cluster of descriptions that the community as a whole associates with this name. So long as there are Feynman 'experts' who can distinguish Feynman from Gell-man, the communal cluster of descriptions pegged to 'Feynman' will differ from the communal cluster pegged to 'Gell-Man'.

### 3 Lesson From H<sub>2</sub>O-XYZ Case

The lesson from the H<sub>2</sub>O-XYZ case is more dramatic. In this case, there is no division of linguistic labor; in 1750, there are no experts around on Earth or Twin Earth who can distinguish H<sub>2</sub>O from XYZ. So we cannot appeal to collective psychology to explain the differing extension of ‘water’ on these planets.

What explains this difference? Putnam claims that ‘water’ is *indexical*. If someone utters a sentence involving indexicals like ‘I’, ‘here’, and ‘now’, then external features of the environment in which this speech act occurs partly determine the extension of these terms—the identity of the speaker, the location of the act, the time of the act, and so forth. Similarly, the extension of ‘water’ is partly determined by external contextual features—specifically, the chemical composition of liquid in the area in which this term is used.

Roughly, Putnam’s semantics is this: an entity  $x$  is *water* if and only if it bears the relation  $same_L$  to a certain kind of stuff—the stuff typically called ‘water’ by fellow users of this term in one’s linguistic community—where  $same_L$  is a theoretical relation. As science progresses, of course, the Earthlings come to recognize that ‘is the  $same_L$  as the stuff called ‘water’ on Earth’ extensionally coincides with ‘has the chemical composition H<sub>2</sub>O’, and the Twin-Earthlings come to recognize that ‘is the  $same_L$  as the stuff called ‘water’ on Twin Earth’ coincides with ‘has the chemical composition XYZ’. It is partly the microscopic properties of a certain kind of liquid, and not just the internal psychological state of an individual speaker or a community of language users, that determines the extension of ‘water’ on Earth or Twin Earth.<sup>2</sup>

Importantly, we can construct a similar kind of Twin Earth case for proper names. On Earth, ‘Oscar’ picks out Oscar<sub>1</sub>. On Twin Earth, ‘Oscar’ picks out Oscar<sub>2</sub>. But if these worlds are qualitatively identical, then Earthlings will have the exact same beliefs about Oscar<sub>1</sub> as Twin-Earthlings have about Oscar<sub>2</sub>. So the extension of ‘Oscar’ on either planet is not fixed by

<sup>2</sup>Putnam also agrees with Kripke that ‘water’ is *rigid*—that is, this term picks out the same natural kind in all possible worlds:

It should be clear, however, that Kripke’s doctrine that natural-kind terms are rigid designators and our doctrine that they are indexical are but two ways of making the same point. (p. 710)

But this is not at all clear. Even if Putnam is right that water is both indexical and rigid, these notions are conceptually distinct. An argument is needed that term  $t$  is an indexical if and only if  $t$  is a rigid designator.

individual or joint psychology—*both* the speaker-based and community-based versions of the descriptivist theory seem to get things wrong. What explains the different extensions of ‘Oscar’ on Earth and Twin Earth? Recall Kripke’s answer: different passages of communication stretching back to Oscar<sub>1</sub> and Oscar<sub>2</sub> respectively.

### 4 Big Picture Question

The Twin Earth cases show that extension-fixers ain’t in the head:

We have now seen that the extension of a term is not fixed by a concept that the individual speaker has in his head, and this is true both because extension is, in general, determined *socially*—there is a division of linguistic labor as much as of ‘real’ labor—and because extension is, in part, determined *indexically*. The extension of our terms depends upon the actual nature of the particular things that serve as paradigms, and this actual nature is not, in general, fully known to the speaker. (p. 710-11)

The Aluminum-Molybdenum case shows that extension isn’t fixed by the internal psychology of an individual speaker. The H<sub>2</sub>O-XYZ case further shows that extension isn’t fixed by the internal psychology of the linguistic community as a whole.

Still, there is a lingering question. Putnam opens his paper by claiming that the following pair of theses do not jointly hold (p. 700):

- (1) That knowing the meaning of a term is just a matter of being in a certain psychological state.
- (2) That the meaning of a term determines its extension.

If (1) is true, then ‘water’ must mean the same thing on Earth and Twin Earth. Any difference in meaning would show up as a difference in the psychological states of Oscar<sub>1</sub> and Oscar<sub>2</sub>, and these states are identical. If (2) is also true—if meaning determines extension—then ‘water’ must have the same extension on Earth and Twin Earth. But water does not have the same extension on these planets. Thus, either (1) or (2) is false.

Which thesis to give up? Putnam’s claim that ‘water’ is indexical suggests that we abandon (2). Though terms like ‘I’ and ‘here’ can pick out different people and locations at different contexts of use, these indexicals are still generally taken to have a fixed meaning across contexts.

However, Putnam takes the other fork. Meanings, he says, just ain't in the head. Putnam gives the following argument against (1) in a short footnote:

Suppose 'water' has the same meaning on Earth and on Twin Earth. Now, let the word 'water' become phonemically different on Twin Earth—say, it becomes 'quaxel.' Presumably, this is not a change in meaning per se, on any view. So 'water' and 'quaxel' have the same meaning (although they refer to different liquids). But this is highly counterintuitive. Why not say, then, that 'elm' in my idiolect has the same meaning as 'beech' in your idiolect, although they refer to different trees? (p. 710)

But this argument is not, I think, very convincing. Suppose that 'I' in the idiolect of Oscar<sub>2</sub> becomes 'Y.' It is not so counterintuitive that this term 'Y' has the same meaning as 'I' in the idiolect of Oscar<sub>1</sub> (although they pick out different people).

## VII. Evans on Names

AS.150.193: Names and Descriptions  
Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

After presenting some cases that favor the descriptivist theory of names and some cases that favor the causal-historical account, Evans develops a kind of hybrid position that draws on the strengths of the rival views while avoiding their weaknesses.

### 1 Data

Here are two important cases in ‘The Causal Theory of Names’:

**Goliath.** Biblical scholars suggest that David didn’t actually kill Goliath but killed some other Philistine. Goliath was rather killed by Elhannan the Bethlehemite and the killing was attributed to David (perhaps to boost his image). Now suppose that this is right but the only description associated with the name ‘Goliath’ in some linguistic community is ‘the Philistine that David killed’. In the dialect of this community, would the name ‘Goliath’ refer to the Philistine that David killed? No. ‘Goliath’ would refer to the Philistine that Elhannan killed. So the (community-level) descriptivist theory of names is wrong.<sup>1</sup>

**Madagascar.** ‘Madagascar’ was originally a name of a portion of the African mainland but a confused Marco Polo thought it was the name of the great African island. As a result, the denotation of the name shifted from mainland to island. But Kripke’s causal-historical account doesn’t predict this change in denotation. Because Marco Polo intended to use the name ‘Madagascar’ to refer to the same location as the sailors from whom he learned this name, there is a chain of reference-preserving links stretching back from the initial baptism of the mainland as ‘Madagascar’ to our contemporary use of the name. According to Kripke’s account, we are all still speaking (inaccurately) about the mainland. So this account is wrong.

If you share Evans’ intuitions about both of these cases, then neither the descriptivist nor the causal-historical account of proper names is correct.

<sup>1</sup>One could also make this point using Kripke’s Gödel-Schmidt case if ‘the prover of the incompleteness of arithmetic’ were the only description associated with the name ‘Gödel’ by an entire linguistic community.

The causal-historical account can deliver the right verdict in the Goliath case (why?) but delivers the wrong verdict in the Madagascar case. The descriptivist account can deliver the right verdict in the Madagascar case (why?) but delivers the wrong verdict in the Goliath case.

## 2 The Dossier Theory

According to Evans, the main problem with the descriptivist theory lies in the idea that the referent of a proper name is what *best fits* the cluster of descriptions or *dossier* associated with the name. The main problem with the causal-historical account is that it misidentifies the kind of causal relations that fix the reference of a name:

The real weakness [of the descriptivist account] lies...not so much in the idea that the intended referent is determined in a more or less complicated way by the associated information, but the specific form the determination was supposed to take: *fit*. There is something absurd in supposing that the intended referent of some perfectly ordinary use of a name by a speaker could be some item utterly isolated (causally) from the user’s community and culture simply in virtue of the fact that it fits better than anything else the cluster of descriptions he associates with the name. I would agree with Kripke in thinking that the absurdity resides in the absence of any causal relation between the item concerned and the speaker. But it seems to me that he has mislocated the causal relation; the important causal relation lies 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. (p. 197)

Evans wants to hold onto the descriptivist idea that the cluster of information associated with a name plays an important role in fixing its reference. He also wants to hold onto the Kripkean idea that causality plays a key role in fixing the reference of a name. The fusion of these ideas is this: a name will typically refer to the *dominant causal source* of the dossier associated with this name.

Of course, the terms ‘dominant’ and ‘causal source’ require elaboration. Evans has this to say about causal sources:

*X* is the source of the belief *S* expresses by uttering ‘*Fa*’ if there was an episode which caused *S*’s belief in which *X* and *S* were causally

related in a type of situation apt for producing knowledge that something  $F$ -s ( $\exists x(Fx)$ )—a type of situation in which the belief that something  $F$ -s would be caused by something's  $F$ -ing. That it is a way of producing knowledge does not mean that it cannot go wrong; that is why  $X$ , by smoking French cigarettes can be the source of the belief  $S$  expresses by 'a smokes Greek cigarettes.' (p. 200)

Evans has this to say about dominance:

Dominance is not simply a function of *amount* of information (if that is even intelligible). In the case of persons, for example, each man's life presents a skeleton and the dominant source may be the man who contributed to covering most of it rather than the man who contributed most of the covering. Detail in a particular area can be outweighed by spread. Also the believer's reasons for being interested in the item at all will weigh. (p. 201)

Importantly, Evans doesn't claim that all names refer to the dominant causal source. For one thing, he agrees with Kripke that names like 'Jack the Ripper' work according to the descriptivist model. Evans also claims that we sometimes use names *deferentially* with the overriding intention to refer to the same thing as some person or group of people.

### 3 Explaining the Data

The dossier theory delivers the correct verdicts for the opening two cases.

In the Goliath case, the Philistine killed by Elhannan is the causal source of the information in the community's Goliath-dossier. So 'Goliath' refers to the Philistine killed by Elhannan, and members of the community have inaccurate beliefs about Goliath.<sup>2</sup>

In the Madagascar case, the Madagascar-dossier initially includes information only about the mainland, so 'Madagascar' refers to the mainland. When Marco Polo first uses the name 'Madagascar' to talk about the island, he is using this name incorrectly. But over time, the Madagascar-dossier includes more and more information about the island. At a certain point, the island becomes the dominant causal source of the information in

<sup>2</sup>Similarly, the killer in the Gödel-Schmidt case is the dominant causal source of the information in the Gödel-dossier.

the Madagascar-dossier, upon which the denotation of 'Madagascar' shifts to the island.<sup>3</sup>

Evans' dossier theory, then, seems to give us the best of both worlds:

Espousers of both theories could reasonably claim to be vindicated by the position we have arrived at. We have secured for the Description Theorist much that he wanted. We have seen for at least the most fundamental case of the use of names (non-deferentially used names) the idea that their denotation is fixed in a more or less complicated way by the associated bodies of information that one could cull from the users of the name turns out not to be so wide of the mark. But of course that the fix is by causal origin and not by fit crucially affects the impact this idea has upon the statement of the truth conditions of existential or opaque sentences containing names...

The Causal Theorist can also look with satisfaction upon the result, incorporating as it does his insight about the importance of causality into a central position...

The only theorists who gain no comfort are those who, ignoring Kripke's explicit remarks to the contrary, supposed that the Causal Theory could provide them with a totally *non-intentional* answer to the problem posed by names. But I am not distressed by their distress. (p. 207)

<sup>3</sup>It is not entirely clear what to say about the transition phase where neither the mainland nor the island is dominant. Evans' Goldilocks case suggests that he thinks 'Madagascar' refers to neither location during this phase.

## VIII. Russell on Descriptions

AS.150.193: Names and Descriptions  
Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

If we compare the surface grammar of sentences like the following, it would appear that definite descriptions like ‘the old woman’ function like proper names:

- (1) The old woman harbors lots of cats.
- (2) Marge harbors lots of cats.

Just like the proper name ‘Marge’, the definite description ‘the old woman’ seems to refer to a certain individual, Marge, allowing us to say things about her.

However, Russell argues that surface grammar misleads. Despite their superficial similarity, definite descriptions and proper names function in very different ways.

### 1 Indefinite Descriptions

To get some traction on how definite descriptions like ‘the old woman’ work, Russell first considers sentences involving *indefinite* descriptions like ‘a man’ and ‘a unicorn’:

- (3) I met a man.
- (4) I met a unicorn.

Russell warns that we should not inquire into the meaning of an indefinite description in isolation from the sentence in which it occurs. If we do, then we might be led to ask what kind of thing ‘a unicorn’ refers to and end up admitting the existence of unreal objects:

In the proposition ‘I met a unicorn’, the whole four words together make a significant proposition, and the word ‘unicorn’ by itself is significant, in just the same sense as the word ‘man’. But the *two* words ‘a unicorn’ do not form a subordinate group having a meaning of its own. Thus if we falsely attribute meaning to these two words, we find ourselves saddled with ‘a unicorn’, and with the problem how there can be such a thing in a world where there are no unicorns.

‘A unicorn’ is an indefinite description which describes nothing. It is not an indefinite description which describes something unreal.  
(p. 170)

According to Russell, (3) and (4) rather make *existential* claims involving *propositional functions*.

Let  $\varphi$  designate the property expressed in the description ‘a so-and-so.

In (3),  $\varphi x : x$  is human.

In (4),  $\varphi x : x$  is one-horned and horsey.

Let  $\psi$  designate the property asserted of a so-and-so.

In both (3) and (4),  $\psi x : I$  met  $x$ .

Sentences like (3) and (4) mean that the respective  $\varphi x$  and  $\psi x$  are jointly satisfiable—that is, there exists some thing  $x$  such that both  $\varphi x$  and  $\psi x$ .<sup>1</sup> More specifically, (3) means that something is both human and something I met. (4) means that something is one-horned, horsey, and something I met. Note that (4) is meaningful (but false) even though there are no unicorns around.

### 2 Definite Descriptions

With this analysis of indefinite descriptions under his belt, Russell then turns to definite descriptions. The analysis is similar. Like (3) and (4), the following sentences make existential claims:

- (5) The author of *Waverly* was Scotch.
- (6) The present King of France is bald.

But sentences involving definites, unlike those involving indefinites, imply uniqueness. Sentences like (5) and (6) mean that there is some unique thing  $x$  such that  $\varphi x$ , and also  $\psi x$ .<sup>2</sup> More specifically, (5) is equivalent to the conjunction of these three sentences:

At least one person wrote *Waverly*.

At most one person wrote *Waverly*.

Whoever wrote *Waverly* was Scotch.

(6) is equivalent to the conjunction of these three sentences:

<sup>1</sup>In logical notation,  $\exists x(\varphi x \wedge \psi x)$ .

<sup>2</sup>In logical notation,  $\exists x(\varphi x \wedge \forall y(\varphi y \supset x = y) \wedge \psi x)$ .

At least one person is male and presently rules the French monarchy.  
 At most one person is male and presently rules the French monarchy.  
 Whoever is male and presently rules the French monarchy is bald.

Note that (6) is meaningful (but false, since the first conjunct is false) even though there is no present King of France.

One last point. Russell suggests that the following sentence is ambiguous:

(7) The present King of France isn't bald.

On one reading, (7) is equivalent to the conjunction of these sentences:

At least one person is male and presently rules the French monarchy.  
 At most one person is male and presently rules the French monarchy.  
 Whoever is male and presently rules the French monarchy isn't bald.

The sentence is then false.

But on another reading, (7) *negates* the conjunction of these sentences:

At least one person is male and presently rules the French monarchy.  
 At most one person is male and presently rules the French monarchy.  
 Whoever is male and presently rules the French monarchy is bald.

The sentence is then true.

Can you hear both readings?

## IX. Strawson on Descriptions

AS.150.193: Names and Descriptions  
Johns Hopkins University, Fall 2017

In ‘On Referring’, Strawson rejects Russell’s theory of descriptions. Unlike Russell, he argues that definite descriptions, like proper names, can be used to uniquely refer to particular entities in the world.

### 1 Background Distinctions

Though Strawson is primarily interested in how definite descriptions work, he draws some useful distinctions for thinking about language in general.

At the level of sentences, he distinguishes between

- (A1) a sentence
- (A2) a use of a sentence
- (A3) an utterance of a sentence

An example will make this clear:

- (1) The present king of France is wise.

Suppose that A and B both utter (1) during the reign of Louis XIV and C and D both utter (1) during the reign of Louis XV. All four speakers utter one and the same sentence. Moreover, A and B make the same use of (1), and C and D make the same use of (1), but A and B make a different use of this sentence than C and D. Finally, all four speakers make different utterances of (1).

Strawson stresses that whereas *meaning* is a characteristic of sentences, *truth/falsity* and *aboutness* are characteristics of the uses of sentences. In uttering (1), A and B talk about Louis XIV. Since this king was wise, they say something true. In uttering (1), C and D talk about Louis XV. Since this king was unwise, they say something false. But these speakers all utter the same sentence that has a fixed meaning across the different contexts of use.

At the level of expressions (for our purposes, think definite descriptions), Strawson distinguishes between

- (B1) an expression
- (B2) a use of an expression

- (B3) an utterance of an expression

Whereas meaning is a characteristic of definite descriptions like ‘The present king of France’, *mentioning* or *referring* is a characteristic of the uses of such descriptions. In using the description ‘The present king of France’, A and B refer to Louis XIV. In using this description, C and D refer to Louis XV.

What is the meaning of a sentence or subsentential expression? Strawson gives this Wittgensteinian answer:

To give the meaning of an expression (in the sense in which I am using the word) is to give *general directions* for its use to refer to or mention particular objects or persons; to give the meaning of a sentence is to give *general directions* for its use in making true or false assertions. It is not to talk about any particular occasion of the use of the sentence or expression. The meaning of an expression cannot be identified with the object it is used, on a particular occasion, to refer to. The meaning of a sentence cannot be identified with the assertion it is used, on a particular occasion, to make. For to talk about the meaning of an expression or sentence is not to talk about its use on a particular occasion, but about the rules, habits, conventions governing its correct use, on all occasions, to refer or to assert. So the question of whether a sentence or expression is *significant or not* has nothing whatever to do with the question of whether the sentence, *uttered on a particular occasion*, is, on that occasion, being used to make a true-or-falsity assertion or not, or of whether the expression is, on that occasion, being used to refer to, or mention, anything at all. (p. 327-8)

The meaning of a sentence or expression tells us how it functions in *any* context in which it is used. To know the meaning of (1) and certain facts about context is to know that A and B use this sentence to speak truthfully about Louis XIV whereas C and D use this sentence to speak falsely about Louis XV. To know the meaning of ‘The present king of France’ and certain facts about context is to know that A and B use this description to refer to Louis XIV whereas C and D use this description to refer to Louis XV.

### 2 Theory of Descriptions

For Strawson, then, definite descriptions refer. In uttering (1), our four speakers do not, as Russell argues, make existential claims. These speakers

do not assert that there is a unique male leader of the current French monarchy and anyone who is a male leader of the current French monarchy is wise. Instead, the use of (1) by A and B is like the use of the following sentence where the description has been replaced by a proper name:

(2) Louis XIV is wise.

The use of (1) by C and D is like the use of this sentence:

(3) Louis XV is wise.

The four speakers just refer to some individual and say something about him.

But what if someone utters (1) in a context where there is *no* present king of France? On the Russellian analysis, this use of (1) would be false. According to Strawson, however, this use of (1) would be neither true nor false. In a context where there is no present king of France, the expression ‘The present king of France’ fails to mention or refer to anyone, and sentence (1) is not about anyone—the use of this sentence is “spurious”.

Strawson appeals to ordinary linguistic intuitions to support his position:

Now suppose that some one were in fact to say to you with a perfectly serious air: ‘The king of France is wise.’ Would you say, ‘That’s untrue?’ I think it’s quite certain that you wouldn’t. But suppose he went on to *ask* you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; whether you agreed or disagreed with what he had just said. I think you would be inclined, with some hesitation, to say that you didn’t do either; that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply *didn’t arise*, because there was no such person as the king of France. You might, if he were obviously serious (had a dazed astray-in-the-centuries look), say something like: ‘I’m afraid you must be under a misapprehension. France is not a monarchy. There is no king of France.’ (p. 330)

Importantly, Strawson agrees with Russell that someone who utters (1) will always put forward a significant meaningful sentence. Moreover, he agrees with Russell that a use of (1) is true only if there actually exists a present king of France. But whereas Russell claims that someone who utters (1) asserts that there there is a present king of France, Strawson claims that a speaker only *presupposes* this:<sup>1</sup>

When, in response to his statement, we say (as we should) ‘There is no king of France,’ we should certainly *not* say we were *contradicting* the statement that the king of France is wise. We are certainly not saying that it’s false. We are, rather, giving a reason for saying that the question of whether it’s true or false simply doesn’t arise. (p. 330)

To use such an expression as ‘The king of France’ at the beginning of a sentence was, in some sense of ‘imply,’ to imply that there was a king of France. When a man uses such an expression, he does not *assert*, nor does what he says *entail*, a uniquely existential proposition. But one of the conventional functions of the definite article is to act as a *signal* that a unique reference is being made—a signal, not a disguised assertion. When we begin a sentence with ‘the such-and-such’ the use of ‘the’ shows, but does not state, that we are, or intend to be, referring to one particular individual of the species ‘such-and-such.’ (p. 331)

It is a precondition for a particular use of (1) to even take a truth value that there exists a unique present king of France at the world and time of the context of use.

<sup>1</sup>Recall Searle’s theory of proper names.