

NO SENSE THEORY OF PROPER NAME: A PHILOSOPHICAL REFLECTION*

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Whether proper names do have sense or not is a debatable issue in the arena of linguistic philosophy. Frege for example holds that proper names do have sense. On the contrary, Kripke maintains that proper names do not have any sense. Thus, Kripke's theory of proper names is philosophically known as 'no sense theory of proper names'. This main objective of this paper is to examine and analyse with critical outlook whether proper names do have sense or not. If proper names do have sense, then in what sense they have sense and if proper names do not have sense, then again in what sense they do not have sense.

In the history of linguistic philosophy the concept of proper name has widely been pronounced. When linguistic philosophers were involved into a tug of war regarding the very nature of language and accordingly proposed linguistic revision for overcoming the unperceptiveness of ordinary language, they eventually proposed proper names as the minimum vocabulary of ideal language. Proper names have been chosen as the minimum vocabularies of ideal language because they are denotational in nature. It has been claimed that every name denotes an object or a name stands for an object.

But what is meant by 'stand for'? Do proper names 'stand for' in the same way that definite descriptions 'stand for'? Such questions can easily be answered by giving the answer of the question: "Do proper names have sense?" Searle raises the quip: Is there any similarity between the way a definite description picks out its referent and the way a proper name picks out its referent? Is proper name is a shorthand description? Again two diametrically opposite response can be witnessed. One response stands with

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the conviction that proper names do not have sense. They are meaningless marks. They have ‘denotation (direct referent) but do not have connotation’.¹ The concept of logically proper name of Russell, the concept of name as rigid designator of Kripke would belong to this camp. The other response stands with the conviction that proper names have sense. They are not meaningless marks. They have mode of presentation. Frege’s theory of proper name belongs to this camp. I think this distinction would be made clear if we sense properly Russellian distinction between logically proper names and ordinary proper names or Kripkian distinction between rigid and non-rigid or accidental designators. According to Russell a logically proper name is *known by acquaintance*, whereas an ordinary proper name is *known by descriptions*. An ordinary proper name is a disguised description, a surrogate description. Kripke, however, interprets a rigid designator in terms of actual and possible-worlds. For Kripke a rigid designator is one which designates the same objects in all possible worlds of an actual world. That means if a rigid designator designates a certain object in the actual world; it equally designates the same object in all other possible worlds. In the language of Modal Logic it can be said that a rigid designator is at par with the concept of necessarily true. The proposition P is necessarily true (Lp) in an actual world, namely, W1, if and only if it would be true in all other possible –worlds, such as, W2, W3, etc., of W1. On the other hand, a non-rigid designator is one which does not designate the same object in all possible-worlds of an actual world. In this sense, non-rigid designator may be called a relative, ad-hoc designator or accidental designator.

Let us make this distinction clear by citing a few examples. ‘The square root of 4’ is a rigid designator according to Kripke for it designates the same object in all possible-worlds of an actual world. Contrary to this, ‘The President of USA in 1970’ is non-rigid designator for it does not designate the

¹ Mill, J.S. *A System of Logic* London and Colchester, 1949, Book 1, Chapter 2, para- 5.

same individual in all possible-worlds. Even though it designates Richard Nixon in the actual world, but this is made possible due to the actual outcome of the relevant Presidential election. However, the result of this election might have been different and there underlies no apparent contradiction if the outcome of the result would be different from what actually happened. Thus, according to Kripke 'the President of USA in 1970' is a non-rigid designator because it would designate any man other than Richard Nixon who in fact incidentally won the election. Even though Russell did not mention the concept of possible-world and actual - world while introducing his concept of logical proper names like Kripke, but I think the philosophical implication of both Russell and Kripke remained the same as both would accept the *no sense theory of proper name*. According to Russell a logically proper name is known by acquaintance and in this sense a logically proper name does not describe the object at all. Thus in the case of a logically proper name one can acquaint with an object in every possible-world. That means there is no chance of denotational failure in case of a logically proper name. However, the only difference between Russell's logical proper name and Kripke's rigid designator is that for Kripke a rigid designator would designate the *same object* in all possible- world; whereas for Russell a logical proper name, proper name in short, denotes an object with which one must be acquainted. The philosophical implication of non-rigid designator of Kripke and definite description of Russell would remain the same. According to Russell an ordinary proper name even though looks like a proper name, but in true sense it would be a disguised description. Accordingly, it can be said after Russell that unlike a logical proper name, a description (an ordinary proper name in Russell sense and non-rigid designator in Kripke's sense) describes some aspect of that object. Thus it can be said that a logically proper name of Russell and the rigid designator of Kripke does not describe any object whatsoever; whereas an ordinary proper name of Russell and a non-designator of Kripke describes some aspect of the object. Searle says, " To know that a

definite description fits an object is to know a fact about the object, but to know its name is not so far to know any facts about it. ...we can often turn a definite description (a referring expression) into an ordinary predicative expression by simply substituting an indefinite article for the definite.”²

What we sense from the above observation is that a logically proper name is not connected with any aspects of the object as descriptions are; rather a logically proper name is *tied to the object itself*. According to Searle descriptions stand for aspects or properties of an object, whereas logical proper names stand for the real thing. This actually leads us to the metaphysical cleavage between objects and properties or aspects of objects and it has been attached with the distinction between proper names and definite descriptions. Even Wittgenstein in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* says, “The name means the object. The object is its meaning.” (*TLP*: 3.203)

Arguments in favour of no sense theory of reference:

Those who adhere to the view that proper names do not have sense would defend themselves on the basis of the following arguments:

Firstly, if a proper name has a sense then it can be said that the reference of the proper name is determined by its sense. As sense is conceived in terms of *mode of presentation*, there, of course, will remain certain well defined conditions whatever the conditions may be and the object under consideration is designated by the name if and only if it would satisfy those conditions. Now the point is that if the reference of a proper name is determined in this way, then a proper name cannot be a rigid designator because in such a case ‘there is no guarantee that the object which satisfies the condition associated with the proper name in the actual world would also satisfy it in all other possible worlds’.³ It would even be the case some other objects would satisfy those conditions in another possible-worlds. Thus, it seems clear that that if the reference of a proper name is determined by its

² Searle, J.R. *Speech Acts*, University Press, 1997, p.163.

³ Sen, Pranab. *Logic, Induction and Ontology*, p.233.

sense or mode of presentation in Fregean term, then it would be a non-rigid designator as it may happen in the case of non-rigid designator like ‘the President of the USA in 1970’. But for Kripke, a proper name is a rigid designator. Therefore, a proper name does not bear any sense. But how do we know that a proper name is a rigid designator? We have already outlined in terms of actual-possible world concepts in what sense a proper name is held to be a rigid designator. Elsewhere Kripke gave us a straightforward answer of bearing in mind that a proper name is a rigid designator. Here Kripke claims that a proper name is a rigid designator because otherwise we could not make *counterfactual assertions* with their help. That means *counterfactual assertions* would indirectly ensure that proper names are rigid designators. For example, we can say that the man who was actually the President of the USA in 1970 might not have been the President. For it was just a contingent, an *ad hoc* matter of fact that he won the election and we can use the name of the person and accordingly make the counterfactual assertion by saying, ‘Nixon might not have been the President of the USA in 1970’. However, according to Kripke, this counterfactual assertion does not work unless the proper name ‘Nixon’ designated the same individual in both the actual world in which Nixon is a President and the possible world in which Nixon is not a President.

Secondly, from Russellian point of view it can be said that proper names (logical proper names) do not have sense. Russell, of course, has admitted that ordinary proper names do have sense because ordinary proper names are not genuine proper names. They are *disguised* descriptions. Therefore, for Russell only logical proper names are genuine proper names. Logical proper names do not have sense because they are known by acquaintance and there is no scope of descriptions or mode of presentation in the Fregean sense. In this regard, Russell conceived *demonstrative pronouns*, such as ‘this’, ‘that’, ‘it’, etc., as logically proper names. According to Russell any object that has been associated with the utterance of any one of the demonstrative pronouns must be acquainted with the person who utters it.

Here there is no scope for description or knowing the aspects or properties of an object under consideration.

Possible objections against the no-sense theory of proper names:

There are some possible objections that can be raised against the no-sense theory of proper names which are as follows:

- (a) According to Searle we can use proper names in existential propositions. As every proper name denotes an object, there is no point of making such assertion that the object as denoted by a proper name is null or void or empty. For example, 'There is such a place as Africa' is a straightforward existential statement. According to Searle, here the proper name cannot be said to refer, for no such subject of an existential statement can refer. If it does, then we have to admit that 'existence would be a real predicate'. But we come to know that 'existence cannot be a real predicate'. Every existential statement states that a certain predicate is instantiated. The same has been reflected in Frege's thought when Frege put it that 'existence is a second order concept'. What Searle insists here is that an existential sentence does not refer to an object, nor does it state that it exists; on the contrary, it expresses a concept and accordingly states that the concept can be instantiated. This would lead us to assume that a proper name must have some conceptual or descriptive content. Russell of course has attempted to overcome this charge by conceding such expressions as *disguised descriptions*. However, Seale thinks that there is something wrong in the Russellian assumption.
- (b) It would be a general perception that sentences containing proper names can be used to make identity statements which would convey factual information instead of linguistic information. For example, the sentence, 'Everest is Chomolungma' can be used to make an assertion having geographical import as an alternative of lexicographical import. The point here is that if it were to be the case that proper names do not

have senses, then the sentence under consideration did not convey no more information than does an assertion made with the sentence ‘Everest is Everest’. Unlike the sentence ‘Everest is Chomolungma’, the sentence ‘Everest is Everest’ is an obvious identity sentence and it gives no information whatsoever. The sentence ‘Everest is Chomolungma’ is an informative identity statement and the sentence ‘Everest is Everest’ is an obvious identity statement. To know that an informative statement can be regarded as an identity statement can lead us to assume that proper names must have descriptive content and they must have sense. The force of this argument is Fregean in nature. Unlike the no-sense theorists, Frege has anticipated that proper names do have sense or mode of presentation.

- (c) How do we know that a particular name denotes the same object in all possible worlds of an actual world? One can know it with the help of the *Principle of Identification*. According to Searle the principle of identification requires that an utterance of a proper name must convey a description just as the utterance of a definite description must if the reference is to be consummated. This would lead us to assume that at least a proper name is a kind of shorthand description. Russell, of course, anticipated *shorthand descriptivity* in the case of ordinary proper names, but the proponents of sense-theorists of proper names would like to say that the concept of shorthand descriptivity is very much present even in the case of rigid designators as anticipated by Kripke and logically proper names as expounded by Russell.

The above three objections against no-sense theory actually hinges on the solitary assertion that proper names are *shorthand description*. However, according to Searle such conclusion cannot be right apart from its bizarre implausibility. It is incoherent with so many other obvious truths. If it were suppose to be the case that proper names are shorthand descriptions then there would be some descriptions which would be treated as equivalent in definition

for proper names. Can we have the definitions of proper names? Certainly we do not have. Even if we go through dictionaries of proper names, we may find descriptions of the bearers of the names, but in most cases their descriptions are not definitional equivalents for the names since they are only contingently true of the bearers. Moreover, it can be said that if proper names are shorthand descriptions because of the fact that there are descriptions which are definitional equivalents for the names, then it may perhaps be the case that proper names can be substituted for descriptions. However, Searle claims that if we try to give a complete description of the object as the sense of the name, odd consequences would arise. For Searle any true statement about the object using the name as subject would be analytic and any false one is self-contradictory. More importantly, the meaning of the name would change every time there was any change at all in the object. Accordingly, the name would have different meanings for different people. Thus, we can say that proper names are a shorthand description is not tenable.

Let us evaluate Kripke's position against the sense theory of proper names. If proper name has a sense, then there is associated with every proper name a certain condition such that a proper name designates an object *if and only if* the object under consideration satisfies the condition. It has further been presupposed that the condition *fixes the reference* of the name because the fulfillment of the condition is logically necessary and sufficient for the object's being designated by the name. For example, the condition involved in the description 'the length of the standard meter bar in Paris' is associated with the designator by 'One metre'. Now instead of 'one meter', we may use a different condition for fixing the reference of the designator, e.g., the length which is equal to 39.37 inches. Thus, it would be possible that the meter bar slightly changing its length and may still be designated by the same designator. Now if one holds that a proper name has sense would equally maintain that some condition or other is associated with every proper and such condition may be transparent or changing from time to time from situation to

situation as it may happen in the case of ‘ the length of the standard meter bar in Paris’. However, if the condition is to constitute the sense or meaning of the name, the relation between the condition and the name must be more intimate, coherent than a mere fixing of the reference as suggested by the sense theorists’ of proper names. According to Sen, there must be a *logical connection* between the two.⁴

Kripke elsewhere maintains that if the reference of a name is determined by its sense, it cannot be a rigid designator because in such a case a name designates an object if and only if it satisfies a certain condition. In this regard, Professor Sen expresses reservation regarding Kripke’s position. According to Kripke ‘the square root of 4’ is a rigid designator because it refers the same object, namely, the ‘square root of 4 is 2’ in all possible - worlds of an actual world. One may, however, argue by saying that ‘the square root of 4’ could still be a rigid designator even if its sense determines its reference because the sense consists of a property, what may be termed as the real essence of things, which is indispensable to the number it designates. In defense of Kripke what we can say here, of course following Locke, is that the real essences of things are not in general knowable and cannot be regarded as the identifying marks of proper names. What is necessary for the use of proper names, Sen opines, is to look for the means of identifying objects they are intended to refer to. In this way we would be in a position to assess which objects they are supposed to be a name of. This can even be done by the help of the accidental characteristics according to Sen. I think that Kripke’s position that ‘if the reference of a proper name is determined by its sense then it cannot be a rigid designator’ is too strong and it would be very difficult to sustain keeping the nature of the literature of the theme is concerned. The standard of proper name as rigid designator, which Kripke set forth is admirable and it would perhaps be regarded the primary or basic criterion of determining a proper name as rigid designator, but when we anticipate the

⁴ *Ibid.* p. 234.

view that ‘natural kind terms are rigid designators’, then one can take the advantage of descriptive contents at least secondarily.

Relating to the question: ‘Do proper names have sense?’ Searle finds a weaker and a stronger interpretation. The weaker interpretation states: “Are any such statements at all analytic?” and the stronger interpretation states: “Are any statements where the subject is a proper name and the predicate an identifying description analytic?”⁵ To say that statements containing proper names are analytic is to say that they refer to the same object in all possible situations or all possible-worlds of an actual world. This has been accepted by Kripke as he maintained that a proper name is such that it would refer to the same object in every possible-world. That means the object as referred to by a proper name in every possible-world would remain the same and this in turn presupposes the criterion of identity. In Searlian language it can be said that ‘the object at time t.1 is the same as *what* the object at time t.2.’⁶ Here Searle anticipates a gap that has been indicated by the word *what* and it has to be filled by a descriptive general term, like, it is the same mountain, the same person, the same river, etc. where each gives rise to a temporal criterion of identity. Searle claims that this would actually give an affirmative answer of the weaker interpretation of the question: Do proper names have sense? Here some general term is analytically tied to any proper name, e.g., Everest is mountain, the Mississippi is a river, etc. one may, however, raise an objection by saying that if we continue to call an object ‘Everest’ on the basis of the criterion that the property of being called ‘Everest’ is sufficient to guarantee that it is the same on the basis of the principle of identity then we involve into a circularity, because in such a case we call an object ‘Everest’ and to give as the reason that it is called ‘Everest’ would be circular. What I observe here is that the concept of analyticity involved in the weaker interpretation as cited above actually hinges on the principle of identity which would be informative

⁵ Searle, J.R. *Speech Acts*, op. cit. p.166.

⁶ *Ibid.* p.167

in nature. In this regard, at least we can say that proper names do have connotations.

We think that partial fulfillment of the weaker interpretation of the very question do proper names have sense, does not entail the same answer to the stronger interpretation. Searle thinks that the stronger interpretation actually plays the all important role in determining whether a proper name has a sense in the Fregean sense. Frege conceives sense in terms of ‘mode of presentation’ and mode of presentation of an object actually determines the referent of the object. However, single descriptive predicate does not give rise to an identifying description. For Searle, the sentence ‘Socrates is a man’ may be analytically true because the name ‘Socrates’ has the same mode of presentation, but the predicate term ‘man’ is not an identifying description. Even though ‘Socrates’ belongs to the class ‘man’, but the term ‘man’ does not identify Socrates in isolation. As far as the principle of identification is concerned, it can be said that anyone who uses a proper name must be prepared to substitute an identifying description of the object referred to by a name. If anybody fails to fulfill the principle of identification just stated, then he would not be in a position to identify the object he is talking about. That is why; Frege has claimed that a proper name must have a sense or the mode of presentation and that the identifying description constitutes that sense. According to Frege, so long our descriptive backing for the name remained the same; we are not in a position even of speaking the same language. We think that the identifying descriptions of an object denoted by a name contain so many sub-informations. The identifying description of an object may vary from situation to situation not in terms as a whole, but in terms of its inner sub-informations. However this does not hamper the overall status of identifying description because the relationship of sub-information of identifying description is not conjunctive but disjunctive in nature. In Wittgenstein’s sense it can be said that there remains a *family resemblance* among identifying descriptions of an object as referred to by a name in every

possible situation. Accordingly, the identifying description of 'Aristotle' in one situation may be different from the identifying description of 'Aristotle' in another situation and it may continue. But this does not vitiate the principle of identification because there remains a similarity and dissimilarity, criss-cross and overlapping, something common and something uncommon within the sub-descriptive contents of identifying description. The mode of presentation would remain the same in every situation because of the application of *disjunctive rule* among the sub-descriptive contents of identifying description. Thus, it can be said that the disjunction of the descriptions of Aristotle is analytically tied to the name 'Aristotle' and the same will happen in every other object as well. It thus gives a quasi-affirmative answer to the stronger interpretation as mentioned above.

So far I have examined the arguments for and against of the very question: Do proper names have sense? I think it would be very difficult to affirm or deny the same without begging question. If it has been asked whether proper names are used to describe *specific characteristics* of objects, the answer of this question would be negative. However, instead of this, if it has been asked whether or not proper names are logically connected with characteristics of the object to which they refer, the answer would be affirmative, of course, in a very loose sense. There is nothing wrong to suggest that the identity statement using proper names, namely, 'Everest is Chomolungma' states that the descriptive backing of both names is true of the same object. If the descriptive backing of the two names as cited above is the same or one contains the other, the statement would be analytic, if not it would be synthetic. Frege perhaps was right when he claimed that we could make factually informative identity statements using proper names having sense. But at the same time he was wrong in supposing that this sense is as straightforward as in a definite description. For example, 'The morning star is the evening star' is a case in point. Searle comments that although the sense of these names 'morning star' and 'evening star' is straightforward, they are not

paradigm proper names; they stand in the periphery of definite descriptions and proper names. It would even be the case that the principle of identification works although different persons describe the same object differently. That means to say that different identifying description would refer to the same object if the descriptions are true with reference to the object. The sense may be different; the reference would be the same. Thus, what we observe here is that even if it has been presumed that proper names have sense, but the sense they possess would be imprecise one.

Why do we have the proper names at all? An obvious answer to such question is that we do require proper names in order to refer to individuals. Interestingly, we can do the same with the help of description as well. Mill, Russell and Kripke have identified proper names in order to refer to individuals without admitting the sense of proper names; whereas Frege takes the help of descriptive contents of proper names to do the same. One may refer 'Aristotle' either in terms of denotation or in terms of connotation, either in terms of *di-re* or in terms of *di-dicto*. The denotational aspect of reference is philosophically known as 'no sense theory of proper names', the connotational aspect of reference is philosophically known as 'sense theory of reference'. However, the literature of the theory of proper names is not strict and precise as it is supposed to be the case. From Mill onwards we have observed so many overlapping interpretations of the concept of proper names. Even though Mill actually gave the seeds of proper names, but his interpretation of the concept of proper names, I think, is far more grammatical than philosophical. Frege and Russell took the clue from Mill. But again there we notice overlapping among Mill, Russell and Frege. There are some similarities and dissimilarities among them as far as their interpretations of the concept of proper names are concerned. Russell classifies proper names into logically proper names and ordinary proper names and then claims that logically proper names are known by means of acquaintance and ordinary proper names are known by descriptions. Thus, if we understand Russell in terms of logically proper

names, then there we notice a considerable debate between Russell and Frege because logical proper names are associated with ‘no sense theory of proper names’, but Frege admits ‘sense theory of proper names’. On the other hand, if we interpret Russell in terms of ordinary proper names, then he would be closer to Frege as far as naming theory is concerned. However, the discrepancy between Russell and Frege regarding proper names is well known in philosophy of language because Russell has been treated as a firm believer of logically proper names than ordinary proper names. His elsewhere remarks that logically proper names do not bear any sense and ordinary proper names even though apparently look like names but in real sense they are disguised descriptions.

If we take note on Kripke’s proper names, we again find that Kripke was very close to Russell than Frege. His understanding of name as rigid designator is a replica of Russell’s theory of logically proper names. However, at the same time there we sense a conceptual deflection between Kripke and Russell. Russell’s interpretation of logically proper names favours ‘no-sense theory of proper names’ in the absolute sense, but I do not think the same in Kripke’s case. Kripke has introduced the concept of possible-world, a modal notion, while interpreting his concept of proper names as rigid designators. But interestingly, Kripke’s vocabulary of proper names incorporates ‘natural kind terms’ where the relevance of descriptive concepts is prominent. Moreover, Russell’s criterion of principle of acquaintance as applied in logically proper names is a direct prescription; it is form of *one to one identification* and it deifies any form of conceptuality in this process. However, Kripke’s prescription of proper names as rigid designators incorporates different form of description or criterion of identification of natural kind terms. Thus, in a sense, Kripke’s natural terms are unlike Russellian logical proper names. Having said this, the only distinctive similarity between Kripke and Russell is that both of them ensured the referential foothold of proper names, logically proper names in Russell and

proper names as rigid designators in Kripke. The other similarity is that both of them believe ‘no-sense theory of proper names’.

We have already stated that Russell differs from Frege, because Russell believe the ‘no-sense theory of proper names’, whereas Frege does not. Russell ensures the referential foothold of reality, whereas Frege ensures ‘the sense theory of proper names’ and perhaps would be non-committal regarding the referential foothold of reality. Thus, in a sense the domain of proper names as conceived by Frege is larger than the domain of proper names as conceived by Russell and Kripke. Kripke differs from Frege because unlike Frege, Kripke acknowledges the ‘no-sense theory of proper names’. However, I think, Kripke’s interpretation of natural kinds terms has a simile with Fregean interpretation of mode of presentation. What I claim here is that Fregeian sense or mode of presentation is very much relevant in the natural kind terms of Kripke, but the only difference between them is that such mode of presentation does not ensure the sense aspect of proper names as rigid designators. There is no question of doubt that the concept of possible-world being a modal concept ensures *an entailment relationship* between a proper name and what it designates in all possible-worlds. Russell’s formulation of logically proper names ensures *an implicative relationship* between a name and what it denotes. Thus, both Russell and Kripke have ensured the referential aspect of proper names. Contrary to them, Frege insists on the sensual aspect of names and is non-committal about the referential aspect of names.

I think the concept of proper name as rigid designator actually hinges in Mill’s theory proper names. Mill at once tells us that a proper name is a name of the thing itself. It actually means that a proper name designates the object which it designates irrespective of the properties it may or may not have. Only in this respect one can say that a proper name stands for the thing itself. If we strict to this formulation, then there is no point of denying the view that a proper name is a rigid designator. Russell’s anticipation of the

demonstrative pronouns was an insightful reflection of Mill's theory of proper name. In recent time, Kripke and Kalpan's view of proper names are the reflection of Mill. Accordingly, it can be said that a proper name being a designator stands for the object itself if and only if it refers to it directly. To say that a proper name being a rigid designator stands for the object itself and it refers to the object directly equally means to say that a proper name does not bear any sense. From Kripkian perspective it can be said that a proper name being a rigid designator actually paves the way of nullifying its possibility of sense.