

# *Conclusion*

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

#### Proper Names: Some Considerations

We intend to divide this chapter into different sections. In the first section we shall primarily discuss John Stuart Mill's theory of proper names, in the second section we hope to discuss the theory of Bertrand Russell, and in the third section we propose to discuss that of Gottlob Frege's view about proper names. Throughout these sections we shall try to bring out the interconnection between the three theories.

#### Section I

In talking about proper names one naturally begins with the theory of John Stuart Mill for it is one of the earliest, and, perhaps, the best-known theory on the subject.

A proper name like 'Paul' or 'Caesar' is, according to Mill, a singular name which is devoid of all connotation. But, what is a *name*? What is it to be *singular*? And what is it to be devoid of all *connotation*?

Though the use of the word 'name' is somewhat extraordinary in Mill, as well as in much of traditional logic, it is not difficult to see what he means by it. To begin with, a name is a word or a group of words. But, of course, the more important thing is that not all words, or groups of words, can be regarded as names (even if they are significant). 'Paul', 'the first Emperor of Rome', 'man', and 'whiteness' are all names; but not so 'of', 'to', 'John's' or 'heavy'. The reason why the words of the second group are excluded from the class of names is not far to seek. Mill is

quite clear on this point: 'These words do not express things of which anything can be affirmed or denied'.<sup>1</sup> We can say significantly that Paul died young or that the first Emperor of Rome was a great warrior, but *not*, for example, that of is a relation or that heavy is difficult to carry. So what transpires is that, according to Mill, a word, or a collection of words, would be a name *only if* it could be used in the position of the subject of some assertion. (It seems possible to add also that a name, in Mill's view, is what many contemporary philosophers have called 'a referring expression'.)

Now, if this is what Mill calls 'name', what does he mean by a singular name? 'An individual or singular name', he explains, 'is a name which is only capable of being truly affirmed, in the same sense, of one thing'.<sup>2</sup> So 'John' and 'the king who succeeded William the Conqueror', as well as 'the king', under suitable circumstances, are individual or singular names. 'Man', on the other hand, is not an individual name. It is a *general* name for it can be truly affirmed of an indefinite number of individuals, and in the same sense.

There is something in this account of singular names which would appear awkward to a student of contemporary semantics. It is the use made of the concept of *being truly affirmed of* by Mill. A *name* is not said to be *true of* (i.e., something which can be truly affirmed of) the thing of which it is a name. We shall say nowadays that to be a name of is not to be true of, and that what can be true of (or false of) something is *not* a name but a *predicate*, the distinction between names and predicates being very widely accepted in contemporary semantics. Some expressions, however, may seem to be *both* names *and* predicates. Thus, one may say that 'man' in the statement 'All men are featherless bipeds' is a name of all the individuals of which 'featherless bipeds' is affirmed' (for it is used to refer to all of them), but 'man' in the

statement 'Socrates is a man' is precisely what is affirmed of Socrates. But it seems quite clear that the character of being a name cannot be combined with that of being a predicate, even in this way, in the case of many names. Typical examples of such names are, of course, 'John', 'Brown', and 'Smith'. Mill fails to see this because he takes statements like 'This is Brown', which are made, say, to introduce a person, to be instances of predication of a name.

But we can say that the 'is' in such a statement is not an 'is' of predication, it is an 'is' of *identity*; and if it is argued that there cannot be any statement without predication, i.e., without some predicate or other, then we can always reply that the predicate which is involved in 'This is (i.e., is identical with) Brown', and in all such statements, is the two place predicate '.... is identical with ...', and that the predicate is neither the name nor the demonstrative. It is also doubtful whether such expressions as 'the king who succeeded William the Conqueror' can be said to be true of or false of anything. For what is true or false of one thing must, at least in principle, be capable of being true of others (the well-known dictum being that the predicate is always *universal*), but the expression 'the king who succeeded William the Conqueror' can be 'true' of at *most* one individual.

Let us say that a singular name, according to him, is a name of a single thing or person. We can also recall that a name, in Mill's opinion, is that which can be used in the position of subject in a statement, and add further that the function of the subject in a statement is that of referring to obtain the result that a singular name, according to Mill, is that which can be used for the purpose of referring to a single thing or person.

Now let us see what Mill means by a non-connotative name. 'A

non-connotative term (name),' Mill explains, 'is one which signifies a subject only, or an attribute only.' 'A connotative term,' he adds, 'is one which denotes a subject, and implies an attribute.'<sup>3</sup>

The crucial idea here is indeed that of *connotation*. The connotation of a name consists of the properties which it implies. But what is the meaning of 'implies' ?

The meaning of 'implies' is fairly obvious in the case of a term in predicate position. So we can say that the term 'triangle' implies the property of being a three-sided figure in the sense that 'x is a triangle' implies 'x is a three-sided figure' (or, if we like to put it that way, 'x is possessed of the property of being a three-sided figure'). That is, about a term in predicate position we can say that it implies a number of properties in the sense that when we use it with regard to a thing we say that the thing is possessed of these properties. But it is difficult to see what 'implies' means in the case of a term in subject position. Since a term in subject position is *not* used for the purpose of predication, a term in this position *cannot* be said to imply a number of properties in the sense that when we use it with regard to a thing we say that the thing is possessed of these properties. In fact, as it has been pointed out by many, a term in subject position is not used to say anything about the thing for which it stands (or denotes); it is used to refer to the thing, and this is a *preparation* for saying something rather than actually saying anything about it. The difficulty is not so great in the case of terms in subject position which can be used in predicate position as well; e.g., the term 'star' in 'All stars are luminous bodies'. We can say that such a term implies a number of properties in the sense that they *could* be used to say of a thing that it was possessed of those properties. But the difficulty is very great indeed in the case of terms which cannot be used in predicate position at all, i.e., singular terms which apply to one

individual only. An example of this kind considered earlier is 'the king who succeeded William the Conqueror'.

This difficulty with terms in subject position has prompted some philosophers, notably Bertrand Russell, to banish from subject position all connotative terms, i.e., terms which can be said to imply properties. We can however postpone a consideration of this move, and suggest, for the present, an alternative solution to this difficulty. Let us say that a term *applies* to a thing or a number of things *either* if it can be truly predicated of them *or* if it can be correctly used to refer to them. Now we can say that a (connotative) term implies some properties in the sense that from the fact that the term applies to a thing or a number of things we can infer that they are possessed of these properties.

It is clearer now what Mill means by a non-connotative term. A non-connotative term is such that from the fact that it (correctly) applies to a thing or things we cannot infer that the thing or things to which it applies are possessed of some properties. If we consider now what Mill calls 'singular term', we can see what he means by a singular non-connotative term. A singular non-connotative term, according to him, is a term which can be used to refer to some single thing, but from the fact that it can be (correctly) used to refer to a certain thing we cannot infer that the thing is possessed of any properties.

But why does Mill conclude that a proper name like 'Caesar' is non-connotative? His argument is very simple. From the fact that a proper name like 'Caesar' (correctly) applies to some individual we cannot infer that the individual is possessed of any properties. From the fact that the term 'man' (correctly) applies to an individual we can infer that he is possessed of the property of being an animal; from the fact that the term 'the highest mountain on Earth' (correctly) applies to an

individual we can infer that it is possessed of the property of being a mountain; but from the fact that the term 'Caesar' (correctly) applies to an individual we cannot infer that the individual is possessed of some properties. And the reason why we can make this inference in one case, but not in another, is as follows.

The term 'man' *correctly* applies to an individual, (as a predicate) *because* the individual is possessed of some properties, and, consequently, if the term is applied on any occasion to an individual which is not possessed of these properties, then the application of that term on that occasion would be *incorrect*. Similarly, the term 'the highest mountain on Earth' *correctly* applies to an individual (as a referring expression) *because* the individual is possessed of some properties, and, consequently, if the term is applied on any occasion to an individual which is not possessed of these properties, then the application of that term on that occasion would be *incorrect*. But we cannot say, Mill suggests, that the term 'Caesar' correctly applies to an individual *because* the individual is possessed of some properties, and, consequently, we cannot say also that if the term is applied on any occasion to an individual which is not possessed of these properties, then the application of the term on that occasion would be incorrect. In brief, there is *no* set of properties' which can be said to *determine* the *correct* use of a proper name.

So a proper name, according to Mill, is a singular name which is devoid of connotation. But there is a little inaccuracy in taking this to be the very definition of a proper name for Mill. For it seems that Mill recognizes *another* class of names which are both singular and non-connotative. These are singular abstract names like 'milkwhiteness', 'tangibleness', etc. Even though they are singular and non-connotative, they are not classified as proper names by Mill. So it seems that a more

accurate characterization of proper names, in Mill's theory, would be that they are singular, non-connotative and *concrete* names, i.e., names of *things* rather than their attributes. It must be pointed out, however, that it is not at all clear why abstract singular names are excluded by Mill from the class of proper names.) An important consequence which seems to follow from this restriction of the class of proper names to names which are concrete is that they are names of *particulars*. For what Mill calls a 'thing' he also calls an 'individual', and he apparently treats these two words as synonymous. But one cannot be certain, for Mill's view regarding abstract terms, like those of many others, are very little developed.

## **Section-II**

The best-known theory of proper names, besides the theories of Mill and Russell, is that of Frege. His theory, however, is opposed to the theories of Mill and Russell on a number of important points. A proper name, for Frege, is a name of an object. It is fairly obvious that by 'a name of an object' he means 'a name of a *single* object'. So, like Mill and Russell, he takes a proper name to be a singular name, and thus accepts with them the thesis (a). But what does he mean by 'object'?

Frege does not ever explain in explicit terms what he means by 'object'. But he does provide a clue to understanding what he means by it. An object is that which is not a *concept*. And a concept is that which corresponds to the predicate in a statement, or, in Frege's " own terminology, that which constitutes the *reference* of the predicate. Thus, in the statement 'Bucephalus is a horse', that which corresponds to the one-place predicate 'is a horse' is a concept (in plain words, the concept of being a horse), and that which corresponds to the expression 'Bucephalus' is an object. Now, it is reasonable to suppose that Frege

would maintain, in accordance with the age-old tradition in philosophy that a concept is universal; and if he does maintain it then it seems equally reasonable to suppose that he would maintain that an object is a particular. But there is one thing which appears to go, against this supposition. A concept, Frege says, can be 'converted' into an object.<sup>4</sup> In the statement, 'The concept *horse* is easily formed' the concept *horse* which takes the subject position does *not* occur as a *concept* but it occurs as an object. There is no doubt that the concept converted into an object is not the same as the concept itself, but this idea of conversion is obscure, and it is not clear whether it necessarily involves a transformation of a universal into a particular. If it does, then all objects are particulars according to Frege, but, if it does not, then all objects need not be particulars.

A name may be singular without being a name of a particular. It will be possible only if we allow that universals can be bearers of names. In fact, this possibility was envisaged by Mill when he recognised a class of names which are singular *as well as* abstract. Further, if the singular abstract names are not called 'proper names' by Mill, that seems to be due to what is no more than an arbitrary decision; and if Russell defines a proper name as a name of a particular then he does so only in his later *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, and he allows the possibility of there being *proper names of universals* in his earlier *The Problems of Philosophy* where he maintains that universals are one of the kinds of entities with which we can be *acquainted*.

So far as the view that a proper name can occur only as the subject in a statement, there is complete agreement between Russell and Frege, and disagreement between both of them and Mill. Frege believes, as Russell does, that the subject and predicate are strictly irreversible, that a proper name which can figure as subject can never

figure as predicate and what can figure as predicate can never occur as subject.

The difference between Mill and Russell on the one hand and Frege on the other comes out sharply in connection with the view that a proper name is devoid of all descriptive content. For Frege maintains that a proper name has both a *sense* and a reference, and what he means by 'sense' comes so close to what is called 'connotation' by Mill, and to what is called 'descriptive meaning' by Russell, that we can take all these terms to stand, at least in the present context, for the same idea.

The sense of a proper name is the *mode of presentation* of the object of which it is a name (the object which constitutes, in Frege's language, the *reference* of the name). The mode of presentation is the aspect or aspects under which the object is presented to us when it is presented to us *as the reference of the name*. This aspect of the object presumably consists in a set of properties which determines the object for us, since the sense of a name, Frege says, is the *concept* of the object which the name is a name of, and concepts have been explicitly equated with properties by Frege.

But how does Frege arrive at the conclusion that proper names have sense or connotation? This he does, to an important extent, by stretching the use of the term 'proper name' beyond its ordinary limits. Thus 'the morning star' and 'the celestial body most distant from the Earth' are also called by him 'proper names'. Frege himself was aware that he was *stipulating* a new use of the term 'proper name'. So about these expressions he says, '*For brevity, let every such designation be called a proper name*)<sup>5</sup>. But if so, there is no *real* difference between Frege and Mill so far as *these* expressions, called 'definite descriptions'

by Russell, are concerned. For that these expressions have sense (or connotation) is part of Mill's own theory. The only difference between them would be this that, while one of them is (no doubt misleadingly) liberal in his use of the term 'proper name', the other is not. The real difference between the two philosophers lies over the nature of the expressions which are called 'proper names' by both, i.e., the ordinary proper names like 'John', 'Brown', and 'Odysseus'. But the difference between Russell and Frege, and, for that matter, between Russell and Mill, on the nature of the expressions which Russell calls 'definite descriptions' is however more radical. According to both Frege and Mill the expressions 'the morning star' and 'the celestial body most distant from the Earth' are *names*, at least in a legitimately extended sense, because both of them can be used to mention, or to refer to, an object, and, as such, can be used in the subject position. But according to Russell they cannot be so used. Being definite descriptions, these expressions cannot be used referringly in the position of the subject in a statement and, therefore, cannot be called 'names' even in a stretched sense of the term.

Before coming to the question why Frege holds that all proper names have sense, let us pause for a while and consider why Mill and Frege feels so assured that definite descriptions can have a referring use and that they can be used in the subject position. The reason is, to put it bluntly, they were not confused on a point on which Russell was confused. Russell confused the descriptive *function* of an expression with its descriptive *content* or *meaning*, and then argued as follows: because a term in subject position has a referring function, and because having a referring function is incompatible with having a descriptive function, and because expressions like 'the morning star' and 'the author of *Waverley*' have descriptive *content* or *meaning*, therefore they cannot have any referring *function*, and consequently they cannot be used in

the subject position either. But Frege and Mill saw clearly that having a descriptive content is not the same as having a descriptive function, and so from the fact that having a descriptive function is incompatible with having a referring function it does *not* follow that having a *descriptive content* is incompatible with having a *referring function*.

Let us now consider why Frege holds that all proper names have sense.

It is clear why the proper names, which are also definite descriptions, are held to have sense by Frege. If we consider the following identity statements:

- (1) The morning star = the morning star,  
and
- (2) The morning star = the evening star,

we find that the former is analytic and *a priori* (and, consequently, uninformative) but the latter is synthetic and empirical (and, consequently, informative). The only way in which we can possibly explain this difference between the two identity statements, according to Frege, is as follows: the expressions 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' not only refer to a particular planet but also have their respective senses. The two expressions have the same reference obviously, for they refer to the same planet, the Venus— but they do not have the same sense, because the mode of presentation corresponding to one of them is different from the mode of presentation corresponding to the other. So the difference between the two statements lies in that, while the terms of identity in the first statement have not only the same reference but also the same sense, the terms of identity in the second statement have only the same reference but different senses.

This is as good an argument as one could expect to have on such a matter. But why does Frege conclude that not only the proper names in his extended sense of the term but also the proper names in the ordinary sense have sense? The usual practice is to say that it is possible to construct with the help of ordinary proper names a pair of identity statements which would be related to one another in exactly the same way as (1) and (2) are related to one another. Thus the following pair is constructed by John R. Searle<sup>6</sup>:

(3) Tully = Tully,

and

(4) Tully = Cicero.

However, this example is *not* Frege's own, and, in point of fact, besides giving statement schemata like 'a=b' and 'a=a', Frege gives us only those identity statements which are constructed out of definite descriptions. This by itself is not an important objection to constructing identity statements like (3) and (4) to give completion to Frege's argument. Indeed, it is quite plausible to suppose that Frege did have something like this in his mind, for it does seem that he took 'The morning star = the evening star' as *typical* of all identity statements involving proper names. But *what* would be the sense of 'Tully', or of 'Cicero'? Frege never came to grip with *this* question, and so it is not possible to find an answer to this question from Frege himself; neither is it easy to imagine what his answer would be. It is not difficult to see what the sense of the expression 'the morning star' would be according to Frege. The sense of an expression, he tells us, is the concept of the object in so far as the object is designated by the name. So the sense of the expression 'the morning star' would presumably be *the concept of being the star (planet?) which appears in the morning*. But what is the sense of 'Tully'? What is the concept under or through which the person is presented to us when he is presented as Tully? It is really very difficult

to find satisfactory answers to these questions. It seems that in so far as a person is presented as Tully, he is not presented under or *through* any concept at all, he is presented, in a very important sense, *directly* to us. It is noteworthy that this idea of directness plays an important role in the development of Mill's and Russell's theory.

Alonzo Church, who is considered to be the most faithful and competent follower of Frege, was conscious of this difficulty. But his argument against Mill and Russell is this: 'We do not follow Mill in admitting names which have denotation without connotation, but rather hold that a name must always point to its denotation *in some way*, i.e., through some sense or connotation, though the sense may reduce in special cases just to the denotation's being called so and so (e.g., in the case of personal names), or to its being what appears here and now (as some times in the case of the demonstrative "this")',<sup>7</sup>. So it is clear that the *only* sense which the personal name 'Tully' can be said to have, consists in (the concept of) being called by the name 'Tully', and the *only* sense which 'Cicero' can be said to have consists in (the concept of) being called by the name 'Cicero'. Once again, one need not object to this interpretation of Frege's doctrine; this might well have been in his mind when he maintained that all names, without exception, have some sense. But this interpretation would raise, it seems, a serious question of *consistency* about Frege's theory. The question arises in the following way.

The sense of the expression 'the morning star' consists in the concept of being the star which appears in the morning, and, consequently, it admits of the expansion 'the star (planet) which appears in the morning'. The sense of the expression 'the author of *Waverley*' consists in the concept of being the person who wrote (authored) *Waverley*, and, consequently, it admits of the expansion 'the person who

wrote (authored) *Waverley*'. If the sense of the name 'Tully' similarly consists in the concept of being the person called by the name 'Tully' then it should admit of the expansion 'the person called by the name "Tully"'; and, for the same reason, the name 'Cicero' should admit of the expansion 'the person called by the name "Cicero"'. But if these two expansions are permitted then we should also permit the following expansion of the identity statement (4) 'Tully = Cicero'.

(5) The person called 'Tully'= the person called 'Cicero'.

Now, this expansion may in itself be all right, and (4) may mean the same as (5). But such an expansion of an identity statement has definitely been rejected by Frege in his 'On Sense and Reference', though, interestingly enough, it was upheld by him in his earlier *Begriffsschrift*. It has been rejected by him on the ground that the truth of (5) depends upon some linguistic conventions which are in the last analysis arbitrary, but the truth of (4) depends upon some facts of the world.

So it is difficult to decide what constitutes the sense of ordinary proper names for Frege, although there is hardly any doubt that he maintained that they too had sense. Also it is difficult to decide how he himself would try to prove that they did have it.

## **A New Development**

In the last fifty years or so discussion of reference has been focused on the relative merits of three alternative models. First, as we have seen, there is the *description* theory according to which  $x$  refers to  $y$  when  $x$  is associated with a description of  $y$ . This is the Frege-Russell view, championed these days by not many people. Second, there is the

*causal* theory according to which *x* refers to *y* when there exists a certain sort of causal chain linking *x* with *y*. This sort of view has been promoted in a variety of forms by Kripke, Evans, early Field, Devitt, and Loar. Perhaps it deserves to be called the mainstream. And third, there is a relatively recent arrival on the scene, the *deflationary* theory (also known as 'minimalism' or 'disquotationalism') according to which *x* referring to *y* is roughly a matter of *x* being the *singular term "n"* (in quotes) and *y* being the *thing 11* (out of quotes).

Of any candidate account of reference we should ask two distinct questions. Is it correct? And is it relevant---is it really an account of reference? It is important to keep this distinction in mind when assessing the description and causal theories: for in both of these cases it seems to me that, whatever may be the answer to the question of correctness, the answer to the question of relevance is pretty clearly No.

Thus the description theory, as we have seen, in its pure form says that names are abbreviated definite descriptions. This claim may or may not be right; in light of Kripke's powerful objections, it probably is not. Right or wrong, however, it does not qualify as a theory of reference; for it does not so much as attempt to say what it is for a singular term to refer to an object, or even to specify which singular terms refer to which objects. Perhaps, in so far as it asserts the synonymy of each name with a definite description, we can draw the conclusion that the name refers to whatever the associated description refers to. But we are told nothing at all about the character of the relation between each of these two expressions and their common referent, and we are not even told what that referent is; so there is no theory of reference here. Nor is this problem remedied in more sophisticated versions of the description theory: e.g. the cluster theory, whereby a name is associated with a set of descriptions rather than a single one;

the metalinguistic theory, whereby the relevant description has the form 'the thing called "n" '; or the causal description theory whereby the relevant description has the form 'the origin of such-and-such causal chain leading to our use of "n" '. These varieties of description theory retain the fundamental defect of the pure version. They identify the referential properties of one type of singular term (names) with those of another type (descriptions), but say nothing about what we have in mind in supposing that a given singular term refers to (or is *about*, or *of*) a given object.

Similarly, what most people regard as the causal theory misses the main point. When we imagine the sort of causal chain Kripke gestured towards, we think of the process by which the use and reference of a name spreads in a linguistic community: the person I refer to by the name "Moses" is whoever was referred to by those who introduced me to the name, and the person they were referring to is whoever *their* teachers were talking about, and so on. Thus we have a causal chain whereby some people using a name cause others to use it, which causes others to use it, and so on. And Kripke's plausible thesis is that reference is preserved. It would be wrong, however, to think that this provides a causal theory of reference---even the crude outline of one. For in light of the subsequent anti-individualist work of Putnam and Burge we can see that what an individual means by *any* of his or her words---whether they be names, predicates, or even logical constants---is something inherited from members of the linguistic community, and not determined solely by what is going on in the speaker's mind. Therefore one should distinguish between the facts in virtue of which a word has the meaning it does in a given language, and the facts in virtue of which a given member of the linguistic community understands the word in that way. But then it becomes clear that Kripke's remarks about the inheritance of reference pertain to the second issue, and that they

have nothing specifically to do with singular terms. And as for the first issue---the issue of the facts that give a name its meaning and reference in the language---we haven't been given even so much as a first approximation of a causal theory. Indeed Kripke himself leaves it open that a name may enter a language by means of a description.

So the trouble with the description and causal theories is not so much that they are wrong, but that they are not what we are looking for; they are not really theories of reference. Properly understood, one of them gives a theory of the meanings of names, the other a theory of sociolinguistic deference; but neither makes any attempt to tell us about our conception of *x* referring to *y*.

In order to rectify this situation, an uncontroversial starting-point is to acknowledge that "Aristotle" refers to Aristotle, "*the capital of Sicily*" refers to the capital of Sicily, and so on. Anyone who has the concept of reference is able to recognize such facts. The question we must now address is whether these trivialities are not merely the start of the story, but the whole story. Does our conception of reference go beyond such beliefs, and does the nature of reference involve more than those trivial facts? Is there any reason to expect a theory which goes deeper than disquotation---a theory that provides some sort of reductive analysis of the reference relation, specifying what reference is?

The deflationist answer is No. Let us elaborate this position by sketching four interrelated aspects of it:

- (1) an account of the meaning of "refers";
- (2) an account of the utility of our concept of reference;
- (3) an account of the underlying nature of reference---or rather, an account of how we know that reference has *no*

- underlying nature;
- (4) an account of the meanings of names.

### The Meaning of "Refers"

The rough idea is that our meaning what we do by the word "refers" consists in our disposition to accept sentences such as

Tokens of \*London\* refer to London,

Tokens of \*the highest mountain\* refer to the highest mountain,

and so on. Since an *ambiguous* singular term, "*n*", when used as in these examples to designate a referent, must be understood in just one of its senses, it will not (in any sense of "*n*") be true to say that *every* token of "*n*" (individuated phonologically) refers to *n*. This is why the expression-types deployed in disquotational reference specifications are articulated using *star* quotation marks---indicating that they are individuated, not just phonologically, but also on the basis of meaning.

Thus our meaning what we do by "refers" consists in our inclination to accept instances of the disquotational schema

Tokens of \**n*\* refer to *n*.

where what are substituted for the *two* occurrences of "*n*" are understood in the same way. But this won't do as it stands. In the first place, not all singular terms refer. It is false that \*Atlantis\* and \*the largest prime number\* refer to Atlantis and the largest prime number, because there are no such things to be referred to. So a more accurate rendering of what we accept would be

Tokens of *\*n\** refer, if at all, to *n*

or, more formally,

$(x)(\text{Tokens of } *n* \text{ refer to } x \text{ iff } n = x).$

In the second place, even this improved schema cannot account for our attribution of reference to terms in foreign languages. But this deficiency can be dealt with by invoking a further principle, namely

$v$  is the correct translation of  $w \rightarrow (x)(w \text{ refers to } x \text{ iff } v \text{ refers to } x)$

which, combined with the home-language disquotation schema. Gives us *\*n\** is the correct translation of  $w \rightarrow (x)(w \text{ refers to } x \text{ iff } x = n).$

There is a further problem, however, which derives from context-sensitivity: *for example*, someone else's use of the word "me" does not refer to me. In order to handle this sort of phenomenon, we can invoke the concept of an *interpretation* mapping. *Int*, which, when applied to an expression token first translates it (if necessary) into the home language, and then adjusts for the difference in context between speaker and interpreter. Thus, if  $w$  is a token of "me" then  $\text{Int}(w) = *e*$ , where  $e$  = the speaker: if  $w$  is a token of "now" then  $\text{Int}(w) = *e*$ , where  $e$  = the time of utterance, etc. The schema constituting our concept of reference then becomes

$[\text{Int}(w) = *n*] \rightarrow (x)(w \text{ refers to } x \text{ iff } x = n).$

Finally, one might suppose that, just as the concept of 'expressing a truth' (which applies to utterances) derives from the more basic concept, truth (which applies to propositions), so the concept, reference (which applies to singular terms), is derived from a more basic concept of reference (let us call it "reference\*") which applies to the *de dicto* propositional constituents expressed by singular terms. And in that case

the fundamental principles will be: (1) an *equivalence schema*

$$(x)((n) \text{ refers}^* \text{ to } x \text{ iff } n = x)$$

(where  $(n)$  is the propositional constituent expressed using the term " $n$ "); and (2) a definition of "refers" in terms of "refers\*"

$$w \text{ refers to } x \text{ iff } (\exists k)(w \text{ expresses } k \ \& \ k \text{ refers}^* \text{ to } x).$$

The deflationary thesis is that our meaning what we do by "refers" is constituted by our basing its overall use on either this pair of principles or the final disquotational schema. Thus the concept of reference (for terms) may be explicitly defined in terms of reference\* (for propositional constituents); but reference\* is not grasped by our accepting anything of the form, 'x refers to y iff x bears  $r$  to y'; so it is not explicitly definable.

## The Utility of our Concept of Reference

The second aspect of the deflationary perspective is a story about the function and utility of the concept of reference, together with a demonstration that the theory we have just sketched is capable of explaining that function and utility. Here a little caution is in order. For in ordinary language the term most often employed in connection with the above reference concepts is "about", rather than "refers". We tend to speak of *people* as referring to things, and of their doing so in virtue of their words or thoughts being *about* those things. Consequently, in looking for the utility of the above characterized reference concepts it would be a mistake to focus on our ordinary use of the word "refers". The real issue is why we should need the notion of a certain thought being *about* (or *of*) a certain thing. Why, in other words, is it valuable for there to be a practice of characterizing the contents of thoughts and

statements *not* by alluding to how they are articulated by their subjects, but rather by alluding to the objects they are about? To put it in jargon terms. what is the point of *de re*, as opposed to *de dicto*, attributions of content?

The answer, that some suggest is that this practice enables the acquisition of useful beliefs from other people. To be more specific, when a speaker expresses a discovery about his environment by means of some utterance *u*, the belief state of other people---to whom that discovery is reported---need not be the one those people would express with the same utterance, *u*, or even with a translation of it. but rather one that is adjusted to take account of the difference in knowledge and/or context between the speaker and those who are informed of what he said. In such a case they believe 'the same thing'-but only in the *de re* sense. For example. someone who comes out with 'Those are poisonous' may be reported as having said that the mushrooms in such-and-such place are poisonous; someone who comes out with "Hesperus is red" may usefully be reported as having said that the evening star is red, etc.

Putting it schematically consider, first, a speaker S who asserts "*a* is *f*"; second, an ultimate recipient of information who does not understand the singular term "*a*" but who does understand "*b*"; and third, a reporter who knows all this and also knows that  $a = b$ . What can this reporter usefully communicate to the recipient about what S believes? Intuitively, what he wants to say is

S believes *that a is f*, and  $a = b$

--- but minus any information about S's singular term "*a*", since it does not mean anything to the recipient. But the proposition *that a is f is*

identical to the result of applying the predicative propositional constituent expressed by " $f( )$ "-namely  $(f)[ ]$ -to the singular propositional constituent expressed by " $a$ "-namely  $(a)$ . Thus, what the reporter would like to say (but minus any confusing information about S's singular term) is

S believes  $(f)(a)$ , and  $a = b$ .

where the term " $(a)$ " is in a referential, transparent position, open to objectual quantification. But now suppose the reporter accepts the equivalence schema

$(x)(( ) \text{ refers}^* \text{ to } x \leftrightarrow n = x)$ ,

and, in particular.

$(a) \text{ refers}^* \text{ to } b \leftrightarrow a = b$ .

In that case, what he more or less wants to say is equivalent to

S believes  $(f) [(a)]$ , and  $(a) \text{ refers}^* \text{ to } b$ .

And he is now in a position to leave out the useless and potentially confusing information about S's singular term by existentially generalizing into the position of " $(a)$ ", arriving at

$(\exists x) (S \text{ believes } (f)(x), \text{ and } x \text{ refers}^* \text{ to } b)$ ;

or, as he would phrase it colloquially,

S believes, about  $b$ , that it is  $f$ .

In this way, the notion of reference, simply in so far as it satisfies the equivalence schema, enables us to articulate *de re* attributions of content. Thus we have accounts of the concept of reference and of the utility of this concept that square well with one another, and thereby lend one another support. For it counts in favour of

our deflationary account of the concept that we see how a concept conforming to that account would be worth having. And it counts in favour of our theory about the function of the concept that an otherwise plausible account of the nature of the concept turns out to be necessary and sufficient for explaining how it is able to perform that function.

## **The Underlying Nature of Reference**

Let us now turn to the third component of the deflationary view of reference: namely, that the reference relation has no underlying nature. Not only is the meaning of the term not given by some explicit definition of the form

"x refers to y" means "x bears non-semantic relation *r* to y".

but, in addition, we should expect no substantive discovery of the form. The relation of *x* referring to *y* consists (roughly speaking) in *x* bearing relation *r* to *y*.

This is certainly not to deny that there really is such a relation as reference. For one might well employ a liberal notion of property (and of relation) according to which every logically normal predicate expresses a property (or a relation). However, the question of whether or not this relation of reference is constituted by some underlying causal relation---or by some other non-semantic relation---is an entirely separate issue. And part of the deflationary position, as we see it, is that the reference relation is very unlikely to have any such underlying nature. For it is plausible that the explanatory basis for all facts regarding reference is a theory whose axioms are instances of the disquotational or equivalence schemata. This is because, on the one hand, such axioms appear to suffice to explain all other facts about reference; and, on the other hand, it is not likely that these facts will themselves be explained in terms of something more fundamental. After all we are not here dealing with the

sort of case, familiar in science, where a general characteristic of some type of system might well be expected to be explained causally in terms of the properties of the parts of such systems and the way those parts are combined. Thus the normal reason for anticipating an explanation is absent. Moreover, it is hard to see how the conditions for a deeper account of the disquotational or equivalence facts could possibly be satisfied. For a decent explanation would have to involve some unification, some gain in simplicity. But the disquotational and equivalence axioms are already very simple. Granted, there is one glaring respect in which those theories are complex: they each have infinitely many axioms. But we can see that no candidate explanatory account of their axioms could possibly make do with fewer than infinitely many axioms. For there are infinitely many possible names (and even infinitely many primitive propositional constituents that a name might express); and an adequate theory would have to say something different about each one of them. Thus the infinite aspect of the disquotation and equivalence theories cannot be improved on. Therefore there is not going to be a body of principles, from which those theories can be derived, and which is sufficiently simple to qualify as an explanation. Therefore we can conclude that the reference relations are not constituted by some more fundamental nonsemantic relation.

## **The Meanings of Names**

Finally, let us switch focus from the character of the reference relation to the meanings of names. The first thing to be emphasized here is that the two issues are distinct. This needs emphasizing because proponents of the description theory and proponents of the causal theory tend to obscure the distinction. The description theorist does so by supposing that he gives an account of reference, when what he really offers is an account of the meanings of names. And the causal theorist

does so by imagining that his account entails that names do not have meaning. But from the deflationary perspective on reference the two issues are not so intimately related. From our perspective, having fully explained the meaning of "refers", it still remains to deal with the meanings of names.

To that end we should start by reviewing the reasons for supposing that names do have meaning. These include various sorts of consideration. First, there is intuitive, ordinary language support. For we speak of someone's *understanding*, or failing to understand, a name; and we speak of *translating* names from one language to another. Second, there is theoretical support. For the general role of a meaning property—namely, to explain the overall use of the words that possess it—will be no less required in the case of names than in the case of other types of word. Moreover, we have Frege's argument that the difference in 'cognitive value' between "*a* is *f*" and "*b* is *f*", which exists even when the names are co-referential, is best explained by attributing different meanings to them. And third, there is rhetorical support, which derives from seeing what is wrong with reasoning that has led people to infer that names *do not* have meaning. Specifically, no such conclusion follows from the fact that names are not synonymous with definite descriptions: they might well be unanalysable primitives. Nor, in that case, does it follow from the fact that they are rigid designators.

So let us take it that names *do* have meanings. The question then becomes: where do their meanings come from? Or more precisely: in virtue of which underlying non-semantic property of a name does it possess its particular meaning? In what does its meaning property consist?

Let us remember the difference between this and the question:

what is the meaning of a name? The latter question normally calls for an answer of the form

The name "*n*" has the same meaning as "so-and so",  
or in other words

The name "*n*" means SO-AND-SO.

which presupposes that the name is *not* a primitive. Our question, on the other hand, leaves this open. It may be, if the name "*n*" is indeed non-primitive, that the answer takes the form

"*n*"'s meaning what it does consists in the fact that it is used as an abbreviation for "so-and-so",

or

"*n*"'s meaning what it does consists in the fact that the basic feature of its use is the holding true of "*n* = the so-and-so".

But perhaps "*n*" is primitive. In which case, it may be that

"*n*"'s meaning what it does consists in the fact that the basic feature of its use is the holding *true* of "*#n*",

where "*#n*" is some collection of sentences formulated with the name "*n*"; or

"*n*" 's meaning what it does consists in the fact that the basic feature of its use is the holding *true* of "This is *n*" in circumstances C. And there could very well be other possibilities.

This leads to the question: given a specific name, how are we to

decide what sort of property constitutes its meaning? What are the adequacy conditions of a theory of the form:

The name "*n*" means what it does in virtue of possessing property,  $u(x)$ ?

To begin, it is worth noting some constraints one might be wrongly tempted to impose---constraints which would make the problem extremely hard, but which are in fact illegitimate.

First, it need not be assumed that all names have the very same kind of meaning-constituting property. For look at the great variety of kinds of name: of countries ("Italy"), numbers ("one"), historical figures ("Aristotle"), theoretical entities ("spacetime"), fictional characters ("Superman"), works of art ("La Boheme"), theories ("deflationism"), mistaken postulates ("Vulcan"), universals ("redness"), supernatural beings ("Zeus"), etc. These names have such different functions in our language that it would not be at all surprising for them to have very different types of meaning-constituting property.

Second, the meaning of a name determines its referent. Therefore, a name's meaning-constituting property also determines its referent. But this implies merely that two names with the same meaning-constituting property must have the same referent. It does not imply that the referent of a name is *explained* by its meaning-constituting property independently of what particular names possess the property. In other words, it does not imply that from premises specifying

- (1) the meaning-constituting property of a given name
- and
- (2) the character of reference

one can deduce which object, if any, is the referent of the name. This form of 'strong determination' of referent by meaning would obtain if and only if we had an *inflationary* (e.g. causal) theory of reference of the form

$x$  refers to  $y$  iff  $x$  bears  $r$  to  $y$ .

For in that case, given that

$x$  means what " $n$ " means  $\rightarrow$   $x$  refers (if at all) to " $n$ ",

or, in other words, given that

$x$  means  $N \rightarrow (y)(x$  refers to  $y$  iff  $n = y$ ),

we could infer that the property constituting the antecedent, ' $x$  means  $N$ ', would have to entail whatever is the property that constitutes the consequent, ' $(y)(x$  refers to  $y$  iff  $n = y$ )', and would therefore have to have the form

$s(x)$  and  $(y)[x$  bears  $r$  to  $y$  iff  $n = y]$ .

And, given the inflationary theory of reference, any name with this meaning-constituting property would plainly refer (if at all) to the object  $n$ . Thus the referent of a name would be *explained* by its meaning-constituting property, independently of which names possess the property. However, there is no good reason to suppose that the meaning of a name must determine its referent in this strong, explanatory sense (rather than merely in the weak sense whereby 'same meaning' implies 'same referent'). Hence there is no reason to think that the meaning-constituting property of names should take the above form. These suppositions are motivated by an inflationary picture of reference. So, from our deflationary perspective they are not to be respected.

Let us turn now from these tempting but illegitimate constraints to the real basis for specifying the meaning-constituting properties of names. For any type of word, our way of using it---the utterances in which it appears---is explained by a combination of various factors including, centrally, what we mean by the word. On this basis it can be argued that the meaning-constituting property of a word is that property which, in combination with other factors, explains our overall use of the word. And from here it is a natural step to the conclusion that a word's meaning is constituted by the fact that a certain acceptance property governs its use. For example, arguably, the meaning-constituting property of the word "and" is that the fundamental feature of its use is our (conditional) disposition to accept "p and q" given "p" and "q", and vice versa for an English speaker's overall deployment of "and" is best explained on the basis of that assumption.

It seems reasonable to apply the same considerations to names. Given any name, there will exist a huge body *of* facts regarding its use; these facts will call for explanation by appeal to some *fundamental* fact about its deployment; and this fact--its possession of a certain basic acceptance property---will constitute its having the meaning it does.

There is no reason to expect that all names will have meaning-constituting properties of the very same type. For, in the first place, there is no need for a meaning-constituting property to *strongly* determine a referent; and in the second place, the various names mentioned above are used in very different ways and so we can anticipate a considerable variation in the kinds of basic acceptance property that explain these usages.

More specifically, the following hypotheses seem to be not wildly

implausible—at least as crude, first approximations:

"Vulcan"'s meaning what it does consists in the fact that the basic feature of its use is the (conditional) holding *true* of "Vulcan = the planet (*if any*) causing such-and-such perturbations in the orbit of Mercury"; "one's" meaning what it does consists in the fact that the basic feature of its use is the (conditional) holding *true* of the Peano axioms of arithmetic;

"Aristotle"'s meaning what it does consists in the fact that the basic feature of its use is the (conditional) holding *true* of "This is Aristotle" when pointing at Aristotle.

It might be objected to the last of these proposals that one can understand the word "Aristotle" perfectly well without having the disposition to say "That is Aristotle" in the presence of the right guy. In response, we can appeal to what is known variously as 'deference to experts', 'the causal transmission of reference', 'the division of linguistic labour', and 'semantic antiindividualism'-which has been characterized by Kripke, Putnam, and Burge. In light of this phenomenon, we have seen that we must distinguish between the fact in virtue of which a word has a certain meaning in the language, and the fact in virtue of which a given individual uses the word with that meaning. From the use-theoretic point of view, the former fact is to be located by focusing on so-called 'experts' in the use of the word and finding the regularity that best explains their overall deployment of it. And the latter fact will then be the fact of standing in something like a Kripkean 'causal relation' to experts who conform to that regularity.

In the case of the name of a person, the 'experts', to whom the rest of us defer, are those who are (or were) acquainted with the person,

and who are (or were) in a position to say "This is n" when n is present. That is the fact about the name's use that gives it its meaning in the language, and the rest of us inherit this meaning via the Kripkean causal chain even though we do not exhibit expert usage of the name.

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