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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

Names and Name-Bearing: An essay on the predicate view of names

In my dissertation I develop and defend an unconventional view of proper names. I argue that proper names are predicates - *i.e.*, that, like common nouns, their semantic function is to express properties. More specifically, I argue that a proper name *N* expresses the property of *bearing the name N*. Developing this view centrally involves two components: some account of how names function in reference; and some account of the nature of name-bearing properties (*being named 'Alfred'*, *being named 'Helen'*), preferably one which dispels the air of circularity associated with the approach. I try to show that the these two components can complement each other. The function of names is to make reference, in a context, to an individual antecedently known to participants in that context. Name-bearing properties track the possibilities of this cross-discourse reference in a group of speakers.

This view goes against more than a century of philosophical orthodoxy. The orthodox approach holds that names are semantically-simple devices of reference. Put simply, it holds that, like individual constants in a formal language, the meaning of a name is simply a particular individual. It follows from this approach that a name like 'Alfred' is ambiguous as many different ways as there are Alfreds; there are indefinitely many expressions pronounced 'Alfred', each one referring to a different individual. This approach is thought well-suited to explaining the putative fact that any given occurrence of 'Alfred' is interpreted as making reference to some particular Alfred rather than, say, the class of Alfreds, or to different Alfreds relative to different circumstances of evaluation.

Part of the what needs to be done to see the advantages of the predicate view (henceforth 'PV'), is to break the hold that the history of analytic philosophy has over our thought about proper names.

Names have played a central role in the development of analytic philosophy and it is easy to see questions about names through the lens of this influential history. The goal of the first chapter is to distinguish the theoretical concerns of contemporary semantic theory from those of various important moments in the history of analytic philosophy. The dissertation involves appeal to sorts of evidence and forms of argument which are foreign to philosophical thought about names, so it is important to see how a new theoretical context makes these things relevant. The fundamental claim of the first chapter is that some of the most influential theories of names in the history of analytic philosophy were developed in a context in which *natural language* was not the primary explanatory focus. This involves explaining two things: what the theoretical motivations were in those influential moments, and what it is to be interested in natural language as such.

I give three brief examples from the history of analytic philosophy: Frege's claim that **Vienna** in

(1)   Trieste is no Vienna.

is not a proper name (*Frege*, 1951, 169). Quine's claim that **Pegasus** in

(2)   Pegasus does not exist.

ought to be treated as a predicate expressing the "unanalyzable and irreducible attribute of *being Pegasus*" (*Quine*, 2003, 8). And Kripke's (1980) claim that proper names in natural language are 'rigid designators' (expressions whose reference does not vary when evaluated with respect to different circumstances). I try to show in each that the motivations involved in making those claims are not an interest in natural language as such. In the case of Frege and Kripke, the interest is in establishing a logical distinction. In, Quine the interest is in developing a formal language which is suited for characterizing ontological disputes.

I then turn to a discussion of what an interest in natural language as such amounts to. This will characterize the methodology of the argument that follows. Broadly speaking an interest in natural language is an interest in a particular epistemological question: how are (human) speakers able to utter sounds (make marks, *etc*) which serve their communicative purposes, and how are

(human) audiences able to decode a speaker's purpose on the basis of the sounds she chooses to utter. The answer, at the broadest level, is that linguistic coordination centrally involves two different sorts of knowledge: rule-governed, deductive knowledge of the lexical items and rules of composition; and the general ability to interpret human behaviour - which presumably involves vast shared background knowledge, shared sensibilities, and general abductive reasoning abilities.

This simple, established picture has consequences for our approach to proper names. I'll mention two important ones here. First, as with any empirical investigation, fewer independent explanatory mechanisms are better. This gives us reason to avoid an approach which treats names as ambiguous, as well as a reason to seek a picture of names which can account for their properties across different natural languages. Second, we need to be careful to distinguish the different contributions to what is conveyed by an utterance of context-insensitive semantic rules, and context-bound pragmatic factors. I try to show that the failure to do so has led the orthodox approach to names to read some pragmatic features of names into their semantics.

The question for the dissertation, then, is how proper names fit into linguistic competence. And this methodology demands that we take a wider view than has been common in philosophy. Some opponents of the orthodox picture have noted the "lean diet of examples" involved in traditional philosophical thinking about names (*Bach*, 2002, 77). Philosophers have typically focused on constructions in which names appear as complete determiner phrases (call this a 'bare' occurrence of a name), as in

(3)   Alfred is in the kitchen baking pies.

Opponents of the orthodoxy have brought attention, first, to a range of cases in which proper names occur in the syntactic and semantic role usually reserved for a common noun. In (4), (5) and (6)

(4)   I've offended three different Simons today.

(5)   Did you meet the Allison from Australia or the Allison from New Zealand?

(6)   Every Eugene I've met has been mind-numbingly boring.

Simon, **Allison**, and **Eugene** occur in the syntactic place of a common noun and, intuitively, contribute a property-type meaning to the sentence as a whole (call these predicative occurrences of proper names). The property in question seems to be a metalinguistic property - in that a person's having the property consists in standing in some relation to a linguistic item. This can be brought out by noting that in each case the sentences can be closely paraphrased by substituting a complex metalinguistic relational property for the proper name (*e.g.* **person called 'Eugene'** for **Eugene**). So, on the face of it, this looks like a straightforward counterexample to the ambiguist hypothesis. Here we have a case in which a proper name is used not to make a claim about some particular bearer of that name but many different bearers.

It is easy to imagine various dismissive attitudes towards this sort of example - various reasons not take them into consideration in developing a semantics for names. One sometimes hears that the suggestion that these examples involve coercion, or are marked in some way. There surely is some sense in which they are marked: they are less common than other sorts of occurrence of names. But this, by itself, does not mean that the we ought not take them to be semantically relevant. I think there is no good reason to think that they involve any kind of coercion. This is difficult to show, but as an example, look back at the second paragraph of this abstract. In it, I used 'Alfred' as a predicate a number of times, was there anything strained about those uses? Predicative uses of names are easy to interpret, and they do not require any special effort on the part of the speaker. If a speaker sees "three different Johns", there is simply no difficulty in interpreting the expression.

Another difficulty in thinking of predicative occurrences of names as coerced is that, if the orthodox approach to names is correct, predicative occurrences of names are semantically unrelated to referential occurrences. According to the orthodox view of proper names, the semantic contribution of a bare occurrence of a proper name is an individual. The semantic contribution of a predicative occurrence of a proper name is a metalinguistic property. These meanings are unrelated. So the orthodox approach does not have the resources to see predicative occurrences of names as a semantic projection of their basic individual constant meaning.

With these simple reflections on the table, and with the goal of giving a comprehensive picture of the place of linguistic competence in mind, PV proposes a reorientation of our thinking about names. We cannot think of predicative occurrences of names as semantically derivative of bare occurrences. But we can think of bare occurrences as semantically derivative of predicative occurrences. Natural language contains various mechanisms for turning predicates into arguments, and if we can plausibly assimilate the predicative/bare duality to one of these, we will have achieved a desirable theoretical unification.

The first challenge in developing PV is to provide some determinate hypothesis about how proper names are turned into arguments in bare occurrences. The typical strategy on the part of proponents of PV is to point to languages in which proper names do not have bare occurrences. As it turns out, there are a variety of languages in which names cannot have bare occurrences. There are a few different cases here to consider. In some languages, in their typical uses in reference, names appear with the definite determiner - these include Catalan, European Portuguese, some dialects of German, and ancient Greek. In other languages, typical uses of names in reference involve a determiner, but instead of the regular definite determiner there is a unique *preproprial* article - these include Tagalog, Malagasy and Maori (Catalan is sometimes classed here because of the fact that the definite determiner takes a special form with masculine proper names which begin with a consonant) (see (*Elbourne*, 2005, 173), (*Matushansky*, 2006, Pg 286, and the references therein) and (*Ghomeshi and Massam*, 2009, 68 and the references there)). The dominant version of PV takes such languages as revelatory, and posits an unpronounced definite determiner in bare occurrences of names. PV claims that speakers interpret a bare occurrence of **Alfred** as a definite description of the form **the Alfred**. The thought is that the difference between languages which allow bare occurrences of names and languages which do not is simply in the availability of an unpronounced form of the definite determiner in certain constructions involving names.

My dissertation develops this proposal in two directions. First of all, I respond to the claim that bare names do not have the same range of interpretive possibilities as definite descriptions. The hypothesis that bare names are definite descriptions seems well-suited to explain the use of names

to refer to particular individuals. One can use a bare occurrence of **Alfred** to make reference to a contextually salient individual who bears the name 'Alfred' just as one can use **the dean** to refer to a contextually salient dean. But one can use **the dean** for other purposes too. For example, one can interpret **the dean** relative to the contribution of other operators in a sentence. There is a reading of

(7)   The dean might have been Canadian.

on which **the dean** in not interpreted as making reference to any particular individual (on that reading, the sentence merely asserts that it might have been there was a Canadian dean). Similarly, there is a reading on which

(8)   In every university, the dean is well-respected.

on which **the dean** is not referential (on that reading, the sentence makes claims about different dean-university pairs, rather than a claim about the relation between one particular dean and different universities). The orthodox approach to names in philosophy holds that bare names do not admit readings of this sort (this is an essential component of Kripke's argument that names are rigid designators).

There is, of course, much to recommend itself to the orthodox position. After all, it certainly seems like bare names do not admit of such readings. A sentence like

(9)   Alfred might have been Canadian.

seems to only have a reading in which some particular individual named 'Alfred' is under discussion. Much of the second chapter of the dissertation is devoted to questioning this accepted generalization. Some proponents of PV have asserted that bare names can receive non-referential interpretations. In a sentence like

(10)   Every time I meet a group of children named after the Osmunds, Donnie is the real
         trouble-maker.

The natural interpretation is one on which the bare occurrence of **Donnie** is not interpreted as referring to some particular Donnie, rather the sentence is naturally understood as making a claim about different pairs of families and children named 'Donnie'. The existence of such sentences does not settle the issue. It is possible that such sentences involve a coerced or somehow non-literal interpretation of bare names. The acknowledged difficulty in finding non-referential interpretations of names suggests that such an approach might have promise. I argue, following work done by Daniel Rothschild (2007), that both sides of the debate are operating with an impoverished understanding of the way that a non-referential interpretation of a definite description depends on shared information in a context of utterance. Roughly speaking, a non-referential interpretation depends on the contextual availability of a salient explanatory generalization linking the property associated with a definite description to the domain of another operator in the sentence. Bare names resist non-referential interpretations because such explanatory generalizations are rare with names. Thus the resistance of bare names to relativized readings does not show that they are not interpreted as definite descriptions, rather it is a pragmatic artifact.

The second way I develop the core idea behind PV - that bare names are interpreted as definite descriptions - is by offering a more thorough discussion of the relevance of cross-linguistic data to theorising about names. In addition to providing an expanded discussion of the syntactic role of names in other languages, I argue that our theory of names should take into account a broader range of cross-linguistic data. An important challenge for the predicate view is to give a principled motivation for the idea that some occurrences of names involve an unpronounced term-forming operator. The challenge, in general, is to justify positing any unpronounced term-forming operator and, specifically, to justify positing some particular term-forming operator over the possible alternatives. Tyler Burge *Burge* (1973) holds that bare occurrences of **Alfred** are interpreted as demonstratives (i.e. as **that Alfred**). Recent work has held, instead, that superficially simple occurrences of 'Alfred' are interpreted as definite descriptions (i.e. as **the Alfred**). By drawing on a wider range of cross- linguistic evidence than has been brought to bear on the issue thus far, I argue that neither hypothesis is correct. Bare names are interpreted as non-anaphoric lexical determiners.

To develop PV's morphological component, I introduce two important cross-linguistic comparisons. The first is to the availability of both an article form, and a suffixal form of definite description in Danish. The suffix is used in constructions without restrictive modification, as in (11 a); the article form is used with restrictive modification, as in (11 b) where we have a restrictive prenominal adjective (*Hankamer and Mikkelsen*, 2002, Pg 138).

(11)   (a) *hest***en**
              horse.DEF
              'the horse'

        (b) **den**   *røde   hest*
              DEF   red   horse
              'the red horse'

This mirrors the availability of the bare form of proper names. Bare names are not available with restrictive modification in languages which allow them - note the mandatory non-restrictive interpretation of the relative clause in (12) and the adjective in (13)

(12)   Alfred who we met last week is a professional golfer.

(13)   Poor Alfred wasn't invited to the party.

Following the analysis in (*Hankamer and Mikkelsen*, 2002) of Danish, I posit a lexical rule which turns a predicate into an intransitive determiner. Thus although names are predicates in the lexicon, they can be inserted into the syntax as determiners, and so cannot take restrictive modification. This explains the syntactic distribution of bare names. The second cross-linguistic comparison I make is to the availability of non-anaphoric definite descriptions in a variety of languages. Many languages make finer distinctions among kinds of definite noun phrase than does, for example, English. It is common for languages to have two forms of definite description: one which which can be interpreted anaphorically (roughly: by linking it to an indefinite antecedent), and one which cannot. I argue, by noting previously unnoticed features of the distribution of names, that we ought to think of the morpho-syntactic proposal at the core of the predicate view as an instance of the general phenomenon by which languages signal a restriction of the discourse role of a definite noun

phrase by allowing a morphologically reduced form of the definite determiner. Bare occurrences of proper names cannot be interpreted anaphorically. Rather, their role in discourse is to refer to an individual who is identifiable to conversational participants independently of the particular context of use. To sum up, the proposal is this: natural language grammar distinguishes between anaphoric and non-anaphoric definite descriptions. It also makes available two different ways of turning a predicate into a definite description - syntactic and lexical. Bare names involve both of these mechanisms - they are lexical, non-anaphoric definite descriptions.

The final central innovation of my dissertation as an account of name-bearing properties. One of the central challenges involved in developing the predicate view is an objection, originally due to (*Kripke*, 1980), that the view involves a vicious circularity. The predicate view explains the reference of an occurrence of a name *N* partially in terms of distribution of the property of *bearing N* (in the same way that the reference of an occurrence of **the dean** is partially explained in terms of the distribution of the property of *being a dean*). Kripke suggests that this approach is bound to be circular insofar as *bearing N* itself is bound to be explained in terms of the possibilities of reference with *N*. In the face of this apparently decisive criticism, proponents of the predicate view have denied that there is any constitutive connection between *bearing N* and *being referred to with N*. I show that this approach is a non-starter. Bearing a name and being referred to with that name do stand in a constitutive relation.

The challenge, then, is to show that this constitutive relation does not implicate PV in a vicious circularity. The first step in doing this is to show the role that names play in facilitating referential communication in a group of speakers. Evans writes

> [In a community of speakers] there will not be a naturally arising overlap between the information possessed by different people, adequate to ensure that any pair of people who possess information from an individual, and who can profitably engage in discussion and exchange of information, will be able to do so using a description...The institution of bestowing a name on someone - thereby producing an arbitrary distinguishing feature which everyone learns - certainly lessens the difficulty of achieving referential communication. (*Evans*, 1982, 379-380)

Names play the role of 'arbitrary distinguishing mark', but it is difficult to make this consistent

with the claim that they are predicates. Predicates encode some common feature in the individuals they apply to. The arbitrariness of names suggests that there is nothing which bearers of the name have in common. I resolve this tension by claiming that names are predicates with a *reflexive* meaning - the extension of a name is a function of how speakers are willing to use that name in referential communication. **Alfred** is true of those individuals for whom **Alfred** is a conventional mode of reference. I show that this picture is not viciously circular by noting that speakers' referential behaviour is not a function of their conception of the extension of the predicates used in reference. Thus, there is a form of circularity involved in name-bearing, but it is the virtuous practical circularity involved in cooperative conventional behaviour. Names have the arbitrariness that all forms of conventional cooperation have. The upshot of this approach is a new picture of the structure of name-using practices and the role that such practices have in facilitating referential communication.

The three central innovations in my dissertation - an account of the pragmatics of non-referential interpretation, the treatment of bare names as non-anaphoric lexical determiners, and the analysis of names as reflexive predicates - fit together to form a unified picture of names. The treatment of names as reflexive predicates shows why they are not typically involved in explanatory generalizations and thus not typical suited to non-referential interpretations. The treatment of bare names as non-anaphoric lexical determiners shows how the grammar marks names functioning in their characteristic role - making reference to individuals who are antecedently known to speakers in a context. Names play a characteristic role in facilitating communication. On this I more or less agree with an influential picture in philosophy of language. I show how we can understand names as playing this role without assuming that they are individual constants. Instead of thinking of names as embodying a direct semantic link to a particular individual, we can think of names as 1) having a special kind of reflexive meaning and 2) occupying a special place in the space of definite determiner phrases. All together, we can see names as forging a referential link between different contexts involving members of a group of speakers. They have the effect of creating and reinforcing speakers' ability to jointly keep track of individuals across changes, and from different

perspectives. This picture allows us to hold on to the insights about proper names that are contained in their illustrious history in philosophy, while integrating our understanding of names more fully into the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic systems of natural language.

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