

## SUMMARY

The *TLP* semantics for simple names is that they express senses which are merely idiolectic, their semantic content being exhausted by their bearers.<sup>16</sup> As for ordinary proper names, Wittgenstein is best read as wishing to extend his thesis to them, but as having been misled into thinking that this would be consistent with subjecting their semantic content to analysis. Thus interpreted, he is still able to retain most of his views on identity as well as to reply to Frege's argument from the informativeness of identity-statements.

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 Proper Name Semantics

Our task in this chapter is to deploy Charity in defence of the reading outlined in chapter 12, sketching out how Wittgenstein's position – construed as an account of the semantics of ordinary proper names – is more powerful than any of its rivals.

## 13.1 THE SEMANTIC CONTENT OF NAMES

Consider first the thesis that the semantic content of a name is exhausted by its bearer, which contrasts with any form of full Fregean theory, that mutual knowledge of speakers' modes of determining the reference of a name is required for communication.

The most plausible version of Fregean theory is the so-called 'Cluster Theory' of names.<sup>1</sup> This holds that the public sense of a name will be a body of information about its bearer, consisting of both definite and indefinite descriptions, comprising all beliefs within that name-using community which are more or less truisms about the bearer. In order to allow for the possibility that some of this information may turn out to be false of the bearer without the name being deprived of reference, the theory holds that the sense of a name will take the form 'The thing of which most of the following body of information is true . . . .'. The criterion of sameness of sense for names is also to be construed loosely, in such a way that names may be said to have the same sense although the clusters of information associated with them do not precisely coincide. This allows a name to retain the same sense through a degree of change in its associated cluster, resulting either from addition or subtraction of information. It also permits speakers to be said to know the sense of the name although they do not themselves possess the full body of information associated with it. (Not everyone who is

competent in the use of the name 'Moses' knows that he was found in the bullrushes by Pharaoh's daughter.)

The Cluster Theory is at its most plausible in connection with names of historical and public figures and places, such as 'Moses', 'Margaret Thatcher' and 'Hiroshima'. For in such cases there does seem to be a body of public, truistic, information available, which most competent users of the name in the language-community will know most of. It is much less plausible in connection with names of private individuals and out-of-the-way places. For in these cases different users of the name may possess quite different – perhaps non-overlapping – bodies of information. Of course this fact in itself is not decisive, since Cluster Theorists can respond by claiming that the language-community for such a name in fact fragments into many different communities, each of which associates a different sense with it. But then they are constrained to say that speakers from these different name-communities will fail to understand one another in the use of the name, even if they know that they are talking about the very same thing, since they do not know what sense the other associates with it. Yet this is extremely implausible.

For example, someone who knew me well at school but who knows beyond this only that I went on to teach philosophy at Essex, and someone who knows my writing but who otherwise only knows my place of affiliation, may surely understand one another in the use of the name 'Peter Carruthers', and go on to exchange information about me successfully, as soon as they learn of the one piece of identifying information which they hold in common. They do not have to know the majority of the information which the other associates with the name before they can be said to communicate. It is natural to claim, on the contrary, that it is sufficient for understanding that the speakers know they are talking about the very same person – which is precisely the *TLP* thesis that the semantic content of a name is exhausted by its referent.

Faced with examples of this sort there is only one possible line for Fregean theorists to take: they must hold a shifting-sense theory, allowing the sense of a name to vary from context to context in accordance with the information held in common between the speakers.<sup>2</sup> But even this will not do, since it is possible for speakers to know that they are talking about the same thing without knowing anything at all about one another's mode of determining the reference of a name, and yet we should be strongly inclined to say

that they fully understand one another in its use. Any example of the following schematic sort will do:<sup>3</sup> A and B know that they each associate some piece of identifying information,  $\alpha$ , with the name 'N'; B and C know that they share a piece of identifying information,  $\beta$ , of what is in fact the same thing, also associated with 'N'; where the modes of thinking  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  do not in any way overlap. Then imagine that when A and B have been talking about N, B says to C as the latter enters the room 'We were just talking about N'. This gives both A and C sufficient reason to believe that they will use the name 'N', at least on this occasion, to refer to the very same thing. Then if A remarks 'I was just saying that N is now 64 years old', C surely understands this, despite knowing nothing whatever of A's mode of thinking of N. Here it can only be the mere fact of mutual knowledge of reference which suffices for understanding.

It is easy to see how these intuitive judgements about mutual understanding can be underpinned if we recall that the purpose of successful communication, in factual discourse, is to facilitate the acquisition of rationally grounded beliefs about the world. For it suffices to give me reason to add a belief to my stock of information about an individual if I know that your assertion concerns that very same thing. And this reason-giving force will remain unaffected whether or not I know the manner in which you are thinking of it. Moreover, in contrast with the case of predicates and molecular and general statements discussed in chapter 5, even the practice of challenging and providing evidence for statements leaves the position unchanged. For a challenge to the truth of an atomic statement will hardly ever concern the existence of a bearer for one of the names involved. This is because we rarely have occasion to introduce a new name until the existence of its intended bearer is known for certain, and because a piece of information will not be added to a speaker's mode of identifying the bearer until it has for them the status of a truism about that thing. So there is no special pressure on us to try to secure mutual knowledge of one another's modes of identification (especially since the task would in many cases be onerous); on the contrary, mutual knowledge of reference will suffice.

## 13.2 INDIRECT DISCOURSE

If we are to provide an adequate defence of the *TLP* theory of names, then we should not rest content with raising objections against its rivals, but should also show how it can respond to the arguments deployed in their support. We saw at the end of chapter 12 how the sting can be drawn from Frege's argument from the informativeness of identity-statements. But what of his other main argument, that the notion of intersubjective sense is needed to explain the role of names within indirect discourse, for example within reports of belief?<sup>4</sup> Frege's view is that names here refer to the senses which they ordinarily express, these senses serving as a partial specification of the content of the subject's propositional attitude. Obviously we are prevented from offering any such account, since we are denying that there is in general any such thing as the intersubjective sense of a name. But in that case what is it that I assert when I say 'Mary believes that Reagan is kindly'?

Here we need to advert once again to the two different perspectives we can take towards belief-description, mentioned briefly in chapter 5. Sometimes our interest in reports of belief is itself belief-acquisitive, the fact that someone else reportedly believes something giving me some reason to believe it myself. From this perspective a report of belief has only to respect the semantic content of the belief in question, which in the case of names means only that reference is to be preserved. So reports of belief from this perspective are *de re*, and it matters not how you choose to refer to whatever the belief is about. Yet even so it is implied that the believer has some particular mode of thinking about that thing, though it is not specified what their mode of thinking is. Thus when our primary interest is belief-acquisitive, 'Mary believes that Reagan is kindly' may be understood to say the following: 'There is some mode of thinking  $\alpha$ , which is such that it is uniquely about Reagan, and Mary believes [that  $\alpha$  is kindly]'.<sup>5</sup>

The other major perspective which we take towards belief-description is explanatory. Here it is crucial that the report should respect the mode of thinking employed by the believer themselves, or at least be sufficiently close to it for the explanatory purpose in hand. In general the criterion of accuracy will be sameness of cognitive content (idiolectic sense): the sentence used in the report being required to have the very same cognitive content as the

thinker's belief, or otherwise to describe that content. This immediately raises a problem for us. For since we deny that names have inter-subjective senses, they are unfitted for use in communicating cognitive content. But I do not see that this is any real objection to our account. For it is independently plausible that one has to be careful in using proper names if we wish to specify the precise content of someone's belief.<sup>6</sup>

One way of using names to convey the content of a belief is indirect, drawing on our background knowledge of the believer's situation to enable us to recover from that report sufficient information about their mode of thinking. For example Kripke, in telling us the story of Pierre in his (1979), in fact gives us enough information to be able to approximate to the content of the beliefs reported by 'Pierre believes that London is pretty' and 'Pierre believes that London is not pretty' respectively. (The story is that having lived all his life in France, Pierre has acquired sufficient information about London for him to be inclined to assert 'Londres est jolie'. He then moves to England, settling in what is in fact part of London, and learns English by the direct method. Then, without having given up his earlier belief, he is inclined to assert 'London is not pretty'.) In the first case we know him to be thinking of London by description, presumably including such information as that it is the capital city of England, with many ancient buildings and parks and so on. In the second case we know him to be thinking of London through his acquaintance with the part of it in which he lives. This information is of course not strictly asserted by the reports of Pierre's belief, but is recoverable from them by those who know the story.<sup>7</sup>

In cases where there is no such background knowledge about the believer's situation, a proper name will only be of service in describing the content of a belief from the explanatory standpoint in contexts where it can reasonably be presumed that we and our hearers (and of course the believer in question) associate sufficiently similar modes of thinking with it. Thus if I say to a philosophical colleague 'Mary believes that Michael Dummett lives in Oxford', then this should be construed as saying the following: 'There is a mode of thinking  $\alpha$ , which is uniquely about Michael Dummett and is close enough to our mode of thinking of him for the explanatory purpose in hand, such that Mary believes [that  $\alpha$  lives in Oxford]'. Whereas if I wish to describe Mary's

belief to someone who has met Dummett at a party without realizing that he is a philosopher, then I may have to adopt a more indirect mode of description, such as 'Mary, who knows of Michael Dummett as a famous philosopher, believes that he lives in Oxford'.

### 13.3 LACK OF EXISTENCE

Perhaps the strongest objection to the *TLP* account concerns names such as 'Vulcan' (intended to be the name of a supposed intra-Mercurial planet) which lack a bearer.<sup>8</sup> For it commits us to the view that sentences containing such names are without semantic content – utterances of them saying nothing (being unsinnig: 3.24), there being nothing which counts as understanding them. Yet is this not extremely counter-intuitive? For two scientists discussing the likely velocity of Vulcan or the temperature on its surface may surely understand one another and succeed in communicating.

In reply we only need to draw a distinction between understanding an utterance and understanding the person who makes the utterance. If Mary says to Peter 'Vulcan is hot', then on our account she has in fact said nothing, and nothing that Peter can do will count as understanding it (knowing its semantic content) since it is without semantic content. That sentence will nevertheless serve, in Mary's mouth, to express a particular belief (described from the explanatory standpoint). For we are conceding that names (even bearerless ones) have idiolectic senses, expressing for their users determinate modes of thinking. Peter will of course know that this is so, and in context may have a fair idea of what Mary's mode of thinking is. So when she says 'Vulcan is hot' he may be said to understand her, in that he knows (roughly) why she has uttered that sentence: he knows (roughly) what belief it expresses for her. This gives us a sense in which the two of them may be said to communicate despite the fact that their utterances are without semantic content (have no literal meaning). It is sufficient, for example, to distinguish their conversation from a random sequence of noises, and to explain how the various moves which each makes in the course of the conversation can be intelligible to the other. Nevertheless, considered as a piece of putatively fact-orientated discourse, the whole conversation must be regarded as abortive.

A closely related problem concerns the semantics of negative

singular existentials. If I say 'There is no such planet as Vulcan' (which we may represent either as having the form ' $\neg Eb$ ' or the form ' $\neg \exists x(x = b)$ '),<sup>9</sup> then I surely succeed in asserting something. Yet how can this be, if the name 'Vulcan' is without semantic content? We might try responding to this difficulty by denying that such statements have a determinate content, pointing out that our characteristic response to them is to ask 'How do you mean?'<sup>10</sup> But this is not very persuasive. Although it is true that if someone says 'There is no such person as Margaret Thatcher' my immediate response will be to ask 'What do you mean?', it does not follow from this that the statement lacks determinate content, since my response would be the same if it had been said instead 'Margaret Thatcher was never Prime Minister'. The question 'What do you mean?' in such cases is not so much a demand to specify a content, as a request to explain how we could have been so seriously mistaken.

What is right about the above suggestion is that a negative existential should be regarded as an hiatus in the normal use of a proper name.<sup>11</sup> But rather than denying it semantic content altogether, a better response to the problem is again to make use of the idea that bearerless names, while lacking semantic content, will still express idiolectic senses. We can then interpret the negative existential ' $\neg \exists x(x = b)$ ' (or ' $\neg Eb$ ') to say this: 'For all modes of identifying a thing  $\alpha$ : if  $\alpha$  is associated by us with this use of the name "b", then the thought [that  $\exists x(x = \alpha)$ ] is false'. So in the case of the statement 'There is no such planet as Vulcan' we can regard this as saying: 'For all modes of uniquely identifying a planet  $\alpha$ , associated by us with the name "Vulcan", the thought [that  $\alpha$  exists] is false'. This provides a semantic content for negative singular existentials while remaining faithful to the thesis that in normal discourse the semantic content of a name is its bearer.

### 13.4 FIT VERSUS ORIGIN

Many have agreed with Wittgenstein in rejecting Frege's theory of the semantic content of names. But few others have combined this with an acceptance of Frege's account of the manner in which reference gets fixed.<sup>12</sup> This is that the reference of a name, within

the idiolect of a given speaker, is determined by the mode of thinking – the sense – which that speaker associates with it. Most who have held the view that the semantic content of name is exhausted by its referent have seen reference as being fixed by something external to the speaker, generally a causal chain linking the speaker's use of the name, via the uses of it by other members of the speech community, to some baptismal or information-gathering episode involving the referent.<sup>13</sup> The difference can be summarized by saying that for Wittgenstein reference is determined as what best *fits* the mode of thinking which a speaker associates with a name, whereas for others it is determined by the *causal origin* of the speaker's use of it.

In the version of causal theory proposed by Kripke, the causal chain is to lead back to the first occasion on which the name was used. This can have counter-intuitive consequences. For example, suppose that the baby which was in fact baptized 'Margaret Thatcher' was switched soon afterwards with another without anyone knowing. Then according to Kripke we should all of us now be speaking of someone other than the 1989 Prime Minister when we use that name, and most of our beliefs involving the name would be false. But the causal theory also admits of more sophisticated forms, for example that the referent of a name is to be the causal source of most of the information which a speaker associates with it.<sup>14</sup> This has the desired consequence in the example above, that we are indeed speaking of the 1989 Prime Minister when we use the name 'Margaret Thatcher'. Yet what all forms of the causal theory agree on is that reference is determined by something outside of the speaker's thought and consciousness.

I confess that I find this difficult to understand. For reference is not – unlike parenthood – the sort of relation which we find ready-made in the world, our only tasks being to label it and investigate its nature scientifically, perhaps discovering *a posteriori* that it is causal. On the contrary, if causal origin has a role to play in determining reference this can only be because we as speakers intend that it should do so. It is these intentions which would find their expression in our intuitive judgements about who, in the sorts of example used to support the causal theory, has succeeded in referring to what. But then it would no longer be something external which determines reference, but rather the speaker's intention to refer to the causal origin of the information which they

associate with the name; which is just a more sophisticated version of the theory that reference is determined by *fit* with the speaker's mode of thinking.

The main problem for causal theorists is this: what if speakers were to dig their heels in when faced with the sort of example used to support the causal theory, and were to insist that no, they had not been referring to that thing (the thing which is in fact the causal origin of their use of the name), but rather to the one and only thing which is such-and-such? True enough, this does not tend to happen (the examples have a strong intuitive appeal); but what if it did? Would causal theorists really be prepared to override the speaker's own clear statement of what it is that they meant?<sup>15</sup>

So much for the theoretical case against the causal theory of referring. Defenders of the causal theory generally assume that their opponents are committed to the view that the sense of a name will always take the form of a definite description. But as we saw in chapter 12, this is false. Any plausible version of the theory that reference is determined by *fit* should maintain that the idiolectic sense of a name can consist – partially if not wholly – in a recognitional capacity. All the same it is worth considering the arguments of causal theorists on their own terms.

### 13.5 KRIPKE'S ARGUMENTS

One of the main arguments used against description-theories turns on the behaviour of proper names within modal contexts.<sup>16</sup> In particular, for any proper name 'N', it will be true that N might not have been F, where 'F' is any description which could plausibly be thought to constitute its sense. In contrast 'The F might not have been F' will generally be false. Kripke sums this up in the claim that proper names are rigid designators – they designate the very same individuals with respect to all possible worlds – whereas descriptions designate non-rigidly, their reference with respect to a given world depending upon the thing in that world which happens to satisfy (fit) the description. It follows, Kripke thinks, that the description-theory of reference-fixing for names must be false, since the logical behaviour of names and descriptions is so different.

The argument is unsound however. Notice to begin with that there is a way of reading 'The F might not have been F' according

to which it comes out true, namely where we understand the definite description to fall outside the scope of the counter-factual, being indexed, as it were, to the thing which is in fact the F in the actual world. For example, 'The Queen might never have become a monarch' would naturally be understood as saying that the person who is in fact Queen in the actual world in some other possible world lives her life without ever ascending to the throne (e.g. because she has an elder brother). So in order to rebut the argument it is formally sufficient to claim that there is a convention according to which the modal operator in a sentence containing a proper name is always understood to have narrow scope, so that the name is indexed to its reference in the actual world.<sup>17</sup>

Of course it is one thing to make such a claim, and another thing to motivate it properly. But in fact the combination of views we are attributing to Wittgenstein means that a defence of our claim is not far to seek.<sup>18</sup> For in the absence of the above convention, the truth-value of a modal statement – and hence of course its semantic content – would vary depending upon what descriptive information is associated by the speaker with the proper names involved. Then since speakers do not in general know the modes of determining reference which others employ, this would mean that in modal discourse we should constantly be misunderstanding one another. If Wittgenstein is right that the semantic content of a name in transparent contexts is exhausted by its referent – different speakers differing over the modes of determining reference they employ – then a convention whose effect is to retain the same semantic content for names in modal contexts is almost inevitable, else we should continually be having to exchange descriptions before we could understand one another's counter-factual and other modal statements.<sup>19</sup>

Kripke's other major argument against description-theories of reference-fixing turns on the fact that a speaker may succeed in referring via the use of a name, despite the fact that all of the information which they associate with the name is in fact false of its bearer. In which case it follows, he thinks, that it cannot be the associated information which determines the reference. For instance, consider his famous Gödel/Schmidt example.<sup>20</sup> Suppose that my only identifying information about Gödel is that he was the first to prove the incompleteness of arithmetic. But suppose that, unknown to me, it was in fact a little-known Austrian called

'Schmidt' who first constructed such a proof, Gödel having stolen his result and published it under his own name. Despite this, we should surely wish to maintain that I say something true when I assert 'Gödel is now living in America', which requires that my use of the name 'Gödel' has somehow succeeded in referring to Gödel, and not to Schmidt who still lives in Austria.

Of course there is one further identifying description available to me in this example, namely 'The person referred to as "Gödel" by those from whom I derived this use of the name'. If it were this rather than the previous description which determined my reference, then I should after all have been talking about Gödel, just as intuition suggests. This would be sufficient to save the description-theory from Kripke's counter-example.<sup>21</sup> But what needs to be shown is that speakers do indeed employ such descriptions; and it needs to be explained why they should allow these other-dependent descriptions to override their identifying information, serving ultimately to determine what they refer to.

The important feature of Kripke's example is that both the belief and the name in question are derived from hearsay, since it is an obvious piece of common sense that the information which we base upon the word of others is very often wrong. For consider the risks that we would run if we allowed information gained through hearsay to determine the reference of names which are introduced to us in that way. Firstly, as we built up our dossier of information around the name we should risk failing to refer at all, since there may be no person, or no one person, of whom most of that information is true. Secondly, we may end up referring (as in the example above) to someone other than was referred to by those from whom we derived our use of the name, thus entirely undercutting any warrant which their assertions may have given us for our beliefs. The only way for us to safeguard reference, and to maximize the opportunities for successful communication, is to hold ourselves responsible, in the use of the name, to the reference which it has for those from whom we derived it.

In fact the users of a proper name may be divided into producers and consumers, as Evans suggests.<sup>22</sup> The producers are the primary users of the name, who are acquainted with its bearer and refer to it by virtue of that acquaintance. This gives pride of place to recognitional capacities amongst the senses of names, since it seems very likely that such capacities must play a crucial part in a

producer's mode of thinking of the bearer of a name. The consumers are secondary users, deriving their use of a name (either directly, or indirectly through other consumers) from that of the producers, and holding themselves responsible to the reference which the name has for those producers from whom they derived it.

The sense which a consumer of the name 'N' will associate with it, will therefore be such as to imply the following description: N is the thing referred to by those from whom I derived this use of the name 'N' (where the use of the name in question is individuated by means of the dossier of information associated with it). Notice that I say that the consumer-sense will imply, rather than be identical with, such a description. For if a consumer thinks 'N is bald', it would in general be implausible to identify the cognitive content of their thought with the content of a thought involving a description of the above form. One reason is that their thought is surely focused outwards on the person N, not inwards on the dossier of beliefs which they associate with the name 'N'. Nor is it very plausible to claim that they are explicitly thinking about causality. But this need not prevent their thought from implying such a description, as will emerge from the fact that they are disposed to take themselves to be committed to certain other thoughts and beliefs. Indeed our intuitive response to Kripke's own examples is evidence of just such a situation.

So when I entertain the thought 'Gödel is in America' the cognitive content of what I think cannot be expressed by any sentence which employs a definite description in place of the name 'Gödel'. But the fact that I respond to Kripke's hypothetical example by saying that I should nevertheless have been thinking about Gödel, and not Schmidt who lives in Austria, is sufficient to show that I understand the name in such a way as to commit myself to the description 'The person referred to by those from whom I acquired this use of the name "Gödel"'. Thus a consumer-name has an idiolectic sense which implies a definite description mentioning causality, and the name comes to have the reference which it does in virtue of there being a unique thing which fits the implied description; and yet the cognitive content of the name is not expressible by means of any such description.<sup>23</sup>

Note that there is nothing incoherent about the sense of a name implying a description which mentions the reference which that name has for others, so long as the chain of dependent usage comes

to an end somewhere. For remember that we are not concerned with the public, intersubjective, senses of names (it really would be incoherent to claim that all speakers employ a name with an other-dependent sense). Indeed we are engaged in defending a thesis which denies that there are any such senses. Our claim is only about how any given speaker's use of a name comes to refer: namely, that reference is effected by virtue of a unique object fitting the mode of thinking which the speaker associates with it, the consumer-sense of a name always having an other-dependent form.

Turning now to consider the producer-sense of a name, we should notice that there are examples which are formally analogous to the ones we have been discussing. These force on us a parallel modification in the form which such a sense will take. Thus suppose that when I first meet and am introduced to Gödel he is (unknown to me) heavily made up for a part in a play, in fact closely resembling Schmidt. I might thereafter take my use of the name 'Gödel' to be founded on a recognitional capacity when really it is not. For although I should be disposed to 'recognize' Schmidt as Gödel, I would surely succeed in referring to Gödel when I use the name. This raises a *prima facie* difficulty for the thesis that the reference of a producer-name is determined by *fit*. But here I have available the further description 'The man through acquaintance with whom I acquired this use of the name "Gödel"' (the use in question being individuated by my 'recognitional' disposition).<sup>24</sup> And we can explain why this description should be allowed to override my supposed recognitional capacity in determining the reference of my use of 'Gödel' in a manner similar to the other-dependent case. For since it is a matter of common sense that defects in perception and recognition can occur, and that the appearance of objects can change very greatly over time, if I were to allow reference to be determined by whatever fits my recognitional capacity I should risk referring to things which I was never in fact acquainted with, thus undercutting the rational basis for my beliefs.<sup>25</sup>

We can therefore continue to maintain that reference is determined by *fit* rather than mere causal origin in the face of Kripke's counter-examples; our account having the additional advantage that both the consumer and producer senses of a name are of a form such that the things fitting their implied descriptions will in fact be the causal origin of those uses of the name, thus explaining the intuitive appeal of the examples.

statement true is an object, not a state of affairs.) See note 15 below, as well as chs. 15 and 16 where a non-referential semantics for predicative expressions is outlined.

- 15 This way of handling identity-statements is similar to that suggested by Salmon (1986) pp. 78–9, as well as having much in common with Morris (1984). But Morris thinks that what I call the pragmatic function of identity-statements should be used to elucidate their content. I am unconvinced by his arguments against what he calls the 'objectual analysis', which holds that the content of an identity-statement concerns the referents of the names involved. To endorse this is not necessarily to claim that identity is a genuine relation, nor that what makes an identity-statement true is a special sort of fact, namely an object being self-identical. For as will we shall see in ch. 16, I deny that *any* relational expressions serve to refer to relations. Rather they express rules for mapping the objects referred to onto truth-values. In the case of the identity-sign, the rule is that an atomic sentence containing it is true if and only if the objects referred to on either side of it are one and the same. What is distinctive about the identity-sign, as against genuine relational expressions, is that there is no relation-token involved in its truth-condition, but simply an object.
- 16 Note that even if we were wrong in arguing in the last chapter that 'name' in *TLP* means 'proper name', this interpretation would remain unaffected. It would merely follow that the doctrine should be extended more widely, to cover predicates and relational expressions as well.

#### CHAPTER 13 PROPER NAME SEMANTICS

- 1 Versions of this theory have been defended by Searle (1958) and by Dummett (1973), pp. 95–102. See also *PI* 79.
- 2 Russell certainly held a shifting-sense theory, though it is doubtful whether he requires mutual knowledge of sense for successful communication. See his (1917), p. 158.
- 3 I first developed an example of this kind in my (1983a).
- 4 See 'On Sense and Reference' (for example in Frege, 1984), where the bulk of the paper is taken up with this issue.
- 5 Of course Mary's belief is not *about* the mode of thinking  $\alpha$ , but is expressed by means of it.

This way of handling belief-sentences is very similar to that given by Salmon (1986), pp. 111ff., though arrived at independently. However, Salmon does not notice the distinction between the belief-acquisitive and explanatory perspectives on belief-description. And although it is clear from the context of his discussion that he is concerned with descriptions of belief from the explanatory standpoint, he makes no real attempt to show how a name can be used to convey something about the believer's mode of thinking, as manifestly it can. In fact his

- proposal is adequate only to express the content of belief-ascriptions made from the belief-acquisitive perspective, where we have no interest in the believer's mode of thinking. It is clear, moreover, that Salmon would want to deny (what I have asserted) that it is the mode of thinking which a believer associates with a name which determines the reference which it has for them.
- 6 Hence the difficulties Kripke notices in his (1979). In my view the correct solution to his puzzle is that the principle of Disquotation (if A is prepared to assert 'P' then A believes that P) is only fully adequate for descriptions of belief from the belief-acquisitive standpoint. Where our interest is explanatory we may have to do more to characterize A's understanding of any names involved.
- 7 So when Kripke presses the question 'Does Pierre, or does he not, believe that London is pretty?' (Margalit, 1979, p. 259), the correct response is that both of these reports can serve as adequate characterizations of (non-contradictory) beliefs, when set against the background of the story Kripke has told us.
- 8 I focus here on the use of bearerless names in factual discourse, leaving to one side the problem of names in fiction. On this see Evans (1982), ch. 10.
- 9 For present purposes it matters little whether or not 'exists' is ever a predicate.
- 10 Compare *PI* 79: 'If we are told "N did not exist" we do ask: "What do you mean? Do you want to say . . . or . . . etc.?"'
- i1 In this much, at least, I agree with Donnellan (1974).
- 12 Perhaps Noonan (1979) holds such a combination of views, as does Searle (1983). However Searle seems prepared to allow that speakers' modes of determining the reference of a name can form part of the semantic (communicated) content of sentences containing that name (*ibid.* pp. 256 and 260). Moreover he is sloppy about what does and what does not belong to the cognitive content of thoughts employing names, making no real attempt to distinguish between what belongs to that content and what is implied by it (on which see the discussion in the final section of this chapter).
- 13 See Donnellan (1972) and (1974), Kripke (1980), and many others.
- 14 This is Evans' view. See his (1982), ch. 11.
- 15 At this point causal theorists might attempt to deploy the distinction between what a speaker literally says and what they mean, claiming that the external causal chain is part of a theory of literal saying. But this is not a plausible move for them to make. It would, for example, be plainly crazy to base a semantics for words like 'carburettor' on what it is about a speaker's use of that word which makes it true that they have said that there is a fault in the carburettor, when what they meant is that there is a fault in the exhaust system.
- 16 See Kripke (1980). In the preface Kripke tries to distance his views on names from the question of their behaviour in modal discourse, claiming that the issue of rigidity arises in connection with simple



sentences, such as 'Aristotle was fond of dogs', which contain no modal terms (*ibid.* p. 11). He says that the issue concerns the truth-conditions of such sentences with respect to counter-factual situations (*ibid.* p. 12). But I agree with Dummett that there is no way for someone to manifest grasp of such truth-conditions except in judgements where the simple sentence occurs within the scope of a modal operator. See his (1981b), pp. 571 and 582.

- 17 This defense of description-theories has been employed, in rather different ways, by Dummett (1981b), pp. 557–600, and Noonan (1979).
- 18 Burge gives a similar explanation of rigidity to that given here. See his (1979), p. 413. See also Noonan (1979).
- 19 This point is also sufficient to undermine A. D. Smith's argument in his (1984), pp. 186–7, which attempts to attack description-theories by showing that names refer to the very same individuals with respect to all counter-factual situations, even in a language containing no modal operators. He claims very plausibly that when speakers of such a language are first introduced to modal operators it would not need to be explained to them that such operators always take narrow scope with respect to a name. But this does not show that reference is not determined by *fit* with the descriptions which speakers associate with names. For if they know that it is not a requirement for them to understand one another that they should all associate with those names the same modes of thinking, then they will automatically take names as having wide scope with respect to modal operators. For they will see that they would otherwise be constantly at risk of misunderstanding one another.

However I agree with what is in fact the main thesis of Smith's paper, that the important thing about names is not their behaviour in modal contexts but rather that they are what he calls 'purely referential' (*ibid.* p. 190) – if this just means that their semantic content is exhausted by their bearers. But it does not follow from this that reference is not determined by *fit*.

- 20 See Kripke (1980), pp. 83–92.
- 21 It also is sufficient to counter one of the main arguments of his (1979), involving the premiss that speakers will often have only an indefinite description to associate with a name, for example 'Tully was a famous Roman orator'. (See Margalit, 1979, p. 246.) For there is in fact a further (definite) description here, namely 'The person referred to as "Tully" by those from whom I acquired this use of the name'.

A similar suggestion can solve the problem of Pierre who learns 'Platon' in France as the name of a Greek philosopher and learns 'Plato' in English with the same (indefinite) identification, subsequently asserting both 'Platon était chauvre' (Plato was bald) and 'Plato was not bald' (*ibid.* p. 260). There need be no contradiction in Pierre's beliefs if in the first case he believes that the man called 'Platon' by those from whom he acquired this use of the name was

- bald, whereas in the second case he believes that the man called 'Plato' by those from whom he acquired this use of that name was not bald.
- 22 See Evans (1982), ch. 11.
- 23 For further development and defence of a view of this sort in connection with demonstratives, see my (1987a).
- 24 As before, such a description is implied by the producer-sense of a name, rather than being identical with it.
- 25 The proposal made here is sufficient to handle Donnellan's example (Davidson and Harman, 1972, p. 368) of the man who introduces the names 'Alpha' and 'Beta' to refer to each of two similar squares visible before him on a screen, when unknown to himself he is wearing spectacles which invert his visual field. For then even if he believes Alpha to be the upper square he is in fact referring to the lower, since it is the lower square through acquaintance with which he acquired this use of the name 'Alpha'.

#### CHAPTER 14 ISOMORPHIC REPRESENTATION

- 1 This does not mean that the concern with sentential significance has been dropped, however. On the contrary, in the 'Notes dictated to Moore' of April 1914 Wittgenstein explicitly deploys a fact-analysis of propositions to explain the impossibility of wrong substitutions (*NB* 115).
- 2 Thus Stenius, who has been foremost in interpreting the Picture Theory as expressing the thesis of isomorphism, says that there are two aspects to the understanding of a sentence: there is knowledge of the 'key of interpretation' (which elements in the sentence stand for which elements in reality), and there is the general knowledge that the sentence, like any other, is intended to represent isomorphically. See his (1960), pp. 91–9.
- 3 This would then be isomorphism, not in the sense of 1–1 correspondence of parts, but rather in the sense that states of affairs of a given type (e.g. relational ones) would be symbolized by sentences belonging to the same type.
- 4 There could be a similar convention governing spoken discourse, perhaps relating to the tones of voice with which predicates and relational expressions are spoken. Of course either form of language would suffer from severe practical limitations, since there may be many more things that we want to refer to than there are distinguishable styles of script or tones of voice. But all this shows is that such languages would have to use one and the same name for a variety of different individuals (as natural language in fact does), leaving it to the context to disambiguate the different uses.
- 5 Many, of course, regard this as the defining characteristic of genuine language. The later Wittgenstein apparently disagrees – see *PI* 2.
- 6 This is the line taken by Stenius in his (1960).