Kripke's Critique of Descriptivism Revisited

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Abstract: This paper has two purposes: the first is to critically examine Kripke's well-known arguments against Descriptivism and suggest that they are not as decisive as many have thought; the second is to argue that proper names do encode descriptive information of various kinds, that such information may be truth-conditionally significant, and hence that a name's truth-conditional contribution is not limited to its referent.
Keywords: Kripke; Proper names; Scope; Modality

Resumo: Este artigo tem dois propósitos: o primeiro é analisar criticamente argumentos bem conhecidos de Kripke contra o descritivismo e sugerir que eles não são tão decisivos como muitos pensaram; o segundo é argumentar que os nomes próprios codificam informações descritivas de vários tipos, que tal informação pode ser verdade condicionalmente significativa e, portanto, que a contribuição condicional da verdade do nome não se limita ao seu referente.
Palavras-chave: Kripke; Nomes próprios; Escopo; Modalidade

1 Introduction

Forty years have now passed since Kripke gave his *Naming and Necessity* lectures, and it seems fair to say that his views regarding proper names, once novel and revolutionary, are now everyday, conventionally accepted truths. In particular, Kripke's forceful and many-sided critique of Descriptivism about proper names represents, for many philosophers, a definitive refutation of this theory. In this paper, my first goal is to take a fresh look at Kripke's well-known criticisms, in order to see how solid they really are. After summarizing them in the next section, in §§3-4 I discuss considerations that would indicate that they are not as ironclad as some philosophers have thought. This does not imply, however, that the

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traditional versions of Descriptivism are correct, and my purpose here is not to rehabilitate any traditional form of Descriptivism. The second aim of the paper is to argue (in §§5-6) that names do encode descriptive information that may be truth-conditionally significant, and thus that a name's truth-conditional contribution is not limited to its referent, contrary to what Kripke and many others today would appear to believe. These claims will be differentiated from traditional Descriptivism in §7, which will also offer some concluding remarks.

2 Kripke's Critique of Descriptivism

We shall begin by defining and briefly reviewing the history of the view about proper names, commonly referred to in the literature as Descriptivism, that was Kripke's target in *Naming and Necessity* (1970/1980). Descriptivism may be defined as the thesis that a natural language proper name is synonymous with (has the same meaning as) one or more definite descriptions (expressions of the syntactic form "the F"). Descriptivism is one of two main philosophical approaches to the semantics of names; the other is Direct Reference.[1] Direct Reference was fathered by Mill in (1872/1947), and claims that proper names have no meaning other than the individual who bears the name; a name's sole semantic function is to represent this individual, the name's denotation or referent, in discourse.

Descriptivism originates in the work of Frege, who argued in (1892/1997) that names, in addition to having referents, describe or present them as being a certain way. This additional function of a name he called the "sense" (*Sinn*) of a name. A name's sense, he claimed, serves as a "mode of presentation" of its referent. His view was that the sense of a name determines or uniquely identifies its referent.[2] According to Frege (1892/1997, p. 153, fn. B), senses vary from speaker to speaker.[3] He gives

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[1] Direct Reference is also known by other appellations: "Millianism," Russellianism," "Neo-Russellianism," "Naïve Russellianism," "The New Theory of Reference," "The Naïve Theory," and "The 'Fido'-Fido Theory."

[2] Dummett (1973, p. 110) suggests that the sense of an expression for Frege offers a "criterion" by which the expression's referent may be uniquely identified.

[3] Frege also says in (1892/1997, p. 153) that since our knowledge of the referent is never total, whether a particular sense is associated with a sign would depend on one's knowledge of the referent. This remark and the "Aristotle" example might suggest that for Frege sense

the following example: one speaker may associate the sense "the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great" with the name "Aristotle" while another might associate the different sense "the teacher of Alexander the Great who was born in Stagira" with the name. As in this example, Frege represented the senses of names using definite descriptions. Frege called an expression that "has as its referent (*Bedeutung*) a definite object" a "proper name." (p. 153) In this category he included not only ordinary names, but also definite descriptions and whole sentences.[4]

Descriptivism is also associated with Russell (1910, 1919), who, like Frege, believed that the information connected to a name could be expressed as a definite description. However, he went further than Frege in claiming that most names are "disguised" or "abbreviated" definite descriptions.[5] Russell also agreed with Frege that a name is associated with different definite descriptions for different people or even for the same speaker at different times. (1910, p. 114) Unlike Frege, however, Russell did not think that definite descriptions refer to[6] "definite objects." In

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is a subjective notion. However, in (1914/1997, p. 321) Frege stresses that "a common store of thought, a common science would be impossible" if sense were in this way subjective. (He makes a similar remark in [1892/1997, p. 154]). For Frege sense objectivity is necessary for the transmission of knowledge.

[4] This is not to say that for Frege names are semantically equivalent to definite descriptions. As Dummett (1973, p. 110) points out, it is doubtful that the thesis that the sense of a name is always the same as that of a definite description may be attributed to Frege, even as tacitly assumed by him (since, according to Dummett, Frege nowhere explicitly states such a view). But, as Dummett (p. 110) also admits, whenever Frege gave examples of the sense of a name, he articulated this sense by means of a definite description. This is all that is being claimed above.

[5] The phrase "most names" is meant to acknowledge that Russell held that there are "logically proper names" that are non-descriptive and solely refer to objects. However, the examples he gave of logically proper names are not names at all, but the demonstratives "this" and "that:" "We may even go so far as to say that, in all such knowledge as can be expressed in words – with the exception of 'this' and 'that' and a few other words of which the meaning varies on different occasions – no names, in the strict sense, occur, but what seem like names are really descriptions." (1919, p. 174).

[6] Russell calls definite descriptions "denoting expressions" and the object satisfying the properties expressed by a definite description the description's "denotation." Given the ambiguity of this term in current philosophical and linguistic literature (e.g. it can also mean "referent"), this object will be called here the "satisfier" of the description.

(1905), Russell argued that definite descriptions are to be analyzed as complex quantificational structures. The surface grammatical form of a definite description might give the impression that it refers, or, in more modern parlance, that it has an object as truth-conditional value. For example, "the current President of the U.S." might be taken to have the current President of the U.S., Barack Obama, as its value. However, Russell's analysis purports to show that definite descriptions have a "logical form" representable in logical notation by quantifiers, predicate-letters, variables, and logical connectives.[7] This structure does not contain an element that would single out any particular individual. Consequently, names, insofar as they are abbreviated definite descriptions, are not really referring expressions on Russell's account. Their truth-conditional values are not individuals, but whatever set is expressed by the noun phrase they abbreviate, together with the second-order set expressed by "the."[8]

Russell's view that names abbreviate definite descriptions was modified in an important way by Wittgenstein (1953, §79) and Searle (1958). These philosophers argued that a name is associated not with *one* definite description, but with a cluster of them. To qualify as the name's satisfier,[9] an object must satisfy an indeterminate number ("a weighted logical sum or inclusive disjunction," according to Searle [1958, p. 160]) of the definite descriptions associated with the name. For Searle it is necessary (p. 160) that the object possess *some* of the attributes expressed by the cluster of definite descriptions.

A newly popular form of Descriptivism, which may be labeled "Metalinguistic Descriptivism," claims that the meaning of a name consists of a definite description that mentions the very name. Thus, a name "N" is taken to mean "the bearer of 'N'" or "the individual called 'N.'" Metalinguistic Descriptivism was first seriously advocated by Kneale (1962, p. 630), though Russell (1919, p. 171) also alludes in passing to the possibility of interpreting names in this way. Authors who have more

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[7] Strictly speaking it is the sentence containing the definite description that has such a "logical form."

[8] Russell is being interpreted here as claiming that "the" expresses the (higher order) set that the set F is uniquely instantiated.

[9] As on Russell's view, names on the cluster view abbreviate a set of definite descriptions; hence a name may be *satisfied by*, but does not refer to, an object.

recently argued for or explored the view include Loar (1976), Bach (1987/1994, Ch. 7; 2002), Katz (1990, 2001), Récanati (1993, Chs. 8-9), Geurts (1997), and Justice (2001).

Historically, Descriptivist theories have been motivated by the informativeness, substitution, and empty names/empty names-in-existence-sentences problems that were first discussed by Frege in (1892/1997). Frege's Descriptivism provides relatively straightforward solutions to these problems. The informativeness problem is solved by noting that identity statements composed of different but co-referential names may appear informative to someone who associates different senses or definite descriptions with the two names. Similarly, the substitution problem is explained if it is assumed that what falls under the scope of the propositional attitude verb is the name's sense and not its referent. For then there is no substitution of identicals for identicals, but of two non-identical things, two distinct senses. It is to be expected that the truth value of the sentence will change after a substitution of one sense for another. And the empty names problem disappears if we consider that while a name may lack a referent, it still has a sense. In virtue of the name's sense, the sentence containing the name may be considered meaningful and truth-evaluable.

Descriptivism may offer solutions to these longstanding puzzles, which, as is well known, pose a serious challenge to Descriptivism's chief rival, Direct Reference, but it also faces three serious objections of its own. The three objections were put forth by Kripke in (1970/1980). Let us now turn to these criticisms. Following other commentators, I shall refer to them as the "modal," "semantic," and "epistemic" arguments.

We consider the modal argument first. Suppose that according to a given Descriptivist theory the meaning of a name "N" is the definite description "the F." Then seemingly, this theory implies that if "N = the F" expresses a truth, this truth is also metaphysically necessary. That is to say, according to this theory, the proposition expressed by an instantiation of the sentence schema,

(1) N might not have been the F,

would be false. However, it seems that such a proposition is true. Thus, concludes Kripke, "N" does not mean "the F."

The argument may be illustrated by substituting "Gödel" for "N" and the definite description "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" for "the F:"

> *Premise 1:*
> If "Gödel" meant "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" then "Gödel might not have been the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" would be false.
> *Premise 2:*
> But, "Gödel might not have been the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" is true. (Gödel might have gone into architecture instead of mathematics, for example.)
> *Conclusion:*
> "Gödel" does not mean "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem."

This modal argument provides a basis for Kripke's claim that names are "rigid designators." According to Kripke, a rigid designator is an expression that refers to the same individual in every "possible world" in which that individual exists (i.e. an actual or counterfactual situation which concerns that individual in some stipulated way or other). The argument would show that proper names are rigid but most[10] definite descriptions are not; most definite descriptions, unlike names, may be satisfied by different individuals in different possible worlds. For instance, Kripke would say that the definite description "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" is non-rigid, since in another possible world it might be satisfied by Tarski, for example. Since what is actually true of Gödel may not have been so – the author of the Incompleteness Theorem might have been someone else – "Gödel" and "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" cannot be synonymous.

Kripke's distinction between rigid and non-rigid designators may be further illustrated by an example involving temporality instead of modality. The definite description "the president of the U.S." is satisfied by various individuals from various temporal worlds. In May 2010, the description is satisfied by Barack Obama; in May 2020 it might be satisfied

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[10] Kripke allows that some definite descriptions, like "the positive square root of four," are rigid.

by Arnold Schwarzenegger; while in May 1940 it was satisfied by Franklin D. Roosevelt. "Barack Obama," by contrast, is supposed to refer to the same man across worlds. Thus, "Barack Obama," on Kripke's view, is not semantically equivalent to "the president of the U.S."

In (Author, Article) I have argued that it is doubtful that proper names, when construed as types, are rigid. The reasons will not be reiterated here. The rigidity thesis in any case should be viewed as a separate, positive (and empirical) claim about the semantics of proper names, a claim whose evaluation requires taking into account a variety of other issues not pertinent to our present discussion, which is limited only to Kripke's criticisms of traditional Descriptivism.

The second of Kripke's objections is semantic: the definite description or cluster of definite descriptions associated with a name may in fact be satisfied by an object other than the actual bearer of the name. Kripke presents the following imaginary scenario. (1970/1980, pp. 83-4) Suppose once again that "Gödel" means "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem." Then imagine that the theorem was not proved by Gödel, but by a man named Schmidt, who died mysteriously without publishing it. Gödel came along, appropriated the manuscript, and published it under his own name. Thus people came to associate the definite description with the name "Gödel." Now, the satisfier (or "semantic referent," as Kripke puts it in [1977]), of "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem" is Schmidt, not Gödel. But, someone who uses "Gödel" nevertheless refers to Gödel, not to Schmidt. Kripke argues that:

> If a Gödelian fraud were exposed, Gödel would no longer be called "the author of the incompleteness theorem," but he would still be called "Gödel." The name, therefore, does not abbreviate the description. (1970/1980, p. 87)

The third objection is epistemic: if the meaning of a name "N" is a definite description "the F," then the proposition expressed by a sentence of the form "N = the F" should be knowable a priori. But this is often not the case; many times we simply don't know that N is the F, let alone know a priori that N is the F. Supposing still that "Gödel" = "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem," then the sentence,

(2) Gödel is the author of the Incompleteness Theorem,

would seemingly express a proposition knowable a priori to someone well acquainted with the name. However, someone may be very familiar with the name – e.g. the mailman who brought Gödel his mail – but not know the definite description that supposedly gives its meaning. Knowledge of the proposition expressed by (2) appears empirically grounded, in contrast to propositions whose justification seems more clearly independent of sensory experience, such as what would be expressed by (3),

(3) A bachelor is an unmarried man.

As Kripke's imaginary fraud scenario implies, we could discover that Gödel did not prove the Incompleteness Theorem or that someone else proved it first. On the other hand, that a bachelor could be married appears logically and metaphysically impossible, and thus not something that could be discovered.

3 Answering Kripke's Semantic and Epistemic Arguments

This section offers replies to Kripke's semantic and epistemic arguments; our discussion of the modal argument shall be postponed until §4. It should be kept in mind that Kripke presents the semantic and epistemic arguments as supplementary to his main criticism, the modal argument. In the same way, the replies presented in this section should be viewed as supplementary to the rebuttal of the modal argument, which will be developed in the next section.

It is helpful to introduce the replies via a brief discussion of an objection due to Ziff (1960, pp. 85-7) to the idea that names have linguistic meanings. Ziff observed that speakers are typically not familiar with a great many names, in the sense that they lack information about the bearers of these names. Nevertheless, he argued, no one would say that their linguistic competence is deficient as a result. For example, even though an adult, well-educated speaker of English may fail to possess any information about the bearer(s) of the name "Gareth Evans," she would still be considered competent in the language. So, Ziff concluded:

(a) Names have no meanings (they are merely devices of reference);
(b) Names are not part of a language.

Recently, Récanati and Bach have defended (b):

> Name conventions do not seem to be *linguistic* conventions because it is not necessary to know the bearer of a name such as "Aristotle" or "Ralph Banilla" in order to master the language. (Récanati, 1993, p. 144, emphasis in the original)

> Proper names are not lexical items in a language. Dictionaries are not incomplete for not including them, and your vocabulary is not deficient because of all the proper names you don't know. (Bach, 2002, p. 82)

Ziff, Récanati, and Bach cite other reasons for holding (b), such as the fact that names are often not translated from one language to another[11] and the "localness" of names – i.e. that knowledge about a name's bearer varies in time and depends on the "location" or the social position or status of a name's bearer with respect to a speaker and the speaker's linguistic community. Here, however, we will not be concerned with (b). It will simply be assumed that names are indeed lexical items in a language. What follows regards only Ziff's "argument from linguistic competence" for concluding (a).

One difficulty with Ziff's argument is that it seems to presuppose a rather unrealistic view of linguistic competence. Ziff's assumption seems to be that in order to qualify as competent in a language, a speaker must know the meaning of most, if not all, of its words. But this is not the case. This point is raised by Abbott (2005, p. 13), who remarks (with Bach's discussion of (b) as her target) that:

> There are perfectly fine English speakers who do not know what "grilse," "retiary," or "chiasmus" means…People only learn words for what they want to talk about. Someone who is ignorant of a named thing is not going to need to know its name. And on the other hand there are many proper names ("Shakespeare," "Washington, DC," "Coca-Cola") which a present day English speaker *would* be regarded as deficient in their knowledge of English for not being familiar with. (2005, p. 13, emphasis in the original. Expressions in italics have been placed in quotation marks to maintain consistency of style.)

Abbott's point is well taken: a speaker's vocabulary would probably be considered deficient if she wasn't familiar with certain names (in the sense of not knowing any information about their bearers); and conversely,

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[11] But see footnote 22 below.

her competence in a language would not be seen as faulty if she didn't know the meanings of certain infrequently used words. Abbott adds that names do constitute a sizable percentage of the terms that appear in a dictionary and that the excision of names from a dictionary would greatly curtail its usefulness.

Abbott's remarks suggest a more general reply to Ziff's argument: speakers' failure to know any information concerning the bearer of a name "N" does not warrant the conclusion that "N" encodes no information, any more than their ignorance of the information encoded by a word "W" (of a type other than a name) does not warrant the conclusion that "W" is meaningless.

This general observation would seem to provide a basis for a reply to Kripke's semantic argument as well. Kripke's semantic argument, once again, says that for any definite description put forward as giving the meaning of a name, speakers may be ignorant or mistaken as to whom the actual satisfier of the definite description is, yet the name still refers to its actual bearer. The name, therefore, cannot mean the same thing as the definite description. For our purposes, Kripke's conclusion that a name is not semantically equivalent to a definite description (specifically, that it does not abbreviate a definite description) may be interpreted as the claim that the information encoded by a name is not expressible as a definite description. This is a claim weaker than Kripke's actual conclusion, but it is consistent with his (1979) view about the "linguistic function" of names: "the linguistic function of a proper name is completely exhausted by the fact that it names its bearer." (1979, p. 240) Also, in (1971, p. 57) he states: "the function of a name is simply to refer, and not to describe the objects so named by such properties as 'being the inventor of bifocals.'" Seemingly, then, Kripke's view is that names do not describe but "simply refer" to an individual.[12] There are two reasons why the conclusion of Kripke's semantic argument will be interpreted more weakly than how Kripke states it: 1) the defense in §§5-6 of a very mild form of Descriptivism does not require a commitment to the view that names are synonymous or

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[12] Although this view appears very close to Direct Reference, it is known that Kripke does not regard himself as a Direct Reference theorist.

semantically equivalent to definite descriptions and 2) to remain neutral regarding the semantics of definite descriptions.

In responding to the semantic argument, two types of error need to be distinguished: an individual speaker's error and error of the entire linguistic community.

Let us first construe the argument according to the first possibility, individual speaker error. In this case, an individual speaker's error concerning the satisfier of the definite description he believes defines a name would serve as a ground for concluding that the information encoded by a name is not expressible as a definite description. Understood in this way, however, the semantic argument presents the following difficulty: it is hard to see how, generally speaking, one speaker's mistaken belief about the meaning of an expression is supposed to have any consequences (semantic or otherwise) for a language.[13] Suppose A mistakenly believes that "arthritis" means "an infection of the eye." Does A's error imply that "arthritis" is meaningless (and simply refers) or that its meaning cannot be expressed via a particular type of construction? Certainly not. An analogous point can be made in the case of names. Suppose that A also mistakenly believes that "Einstein" means "the inventor of the atomic bomb." (To use an example of Kripke's.) Does A's error imply that "Einstein" expresses no descriptive information (and simply refers) or that this information is not expressible via a definite description? It would seem not. The fact that the satisfier of the definite description "the inventor of the atomic bomb" is not Einstein but Oppenheimer does not imply that the "Einstein" encodes no information whatsoever, or that the information it may encode may not be put as a definite description; only that "Einstein" does not mean "the inventor of the atomic bomb." The name may still express other, correct, descriptive information that is unknown to A. In other words, an individual speaker's error about a given name would appear to have no clear implications about the descriptive content of the name or the possibility of expressing any descriptive information it may encode via a definite description.

Let us now consider the second type of error, community-wide error. This is the type of error that Kripke seems to have in mind in

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[13] When the language is viewed, as it is by Kripke, as a public entity.

presenting his "Gödel" example. As noted in §2, the "Gödel" example is supposed to show that the name "Gödel" does not abbreviate the definite description "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem," since, in the imaginary scenario Kripke describes, someone else, Schmidt, actually proved the theorem, and if Gödel's fraud were to become publicly known, people would still refer to Gödel by "Gödel" but would no longer consider him to be the author of the Incompleteness Theorem. In this case, then, a community's error regarding the satisfier of the definite description viewed by the community as giving the meaning of a name would serve as a ground for concluding that the information encoded by a name is not expressible as a definite description.

A problem with the semantic argument, understood in this second way, is that in the past linguistic communities have been wrong regarding aspects of the meaning of the expressions they use, but such cases do not warrant the conclusion that the expressions in question are meaningless (and simply refer) or that their meanings cannot be expressed via a particular type of construction. For example, at one point in history, most English speakers would have probably defined the noun "whale" as "the largest of all fish." Later on, it was determined that whales are not fish, but mammals. The discovery that whales are mammals, and the subsequent realization that "whale" needed to be redefined, does not imply that the word is meaningless, or that a particular type of construction is inadequate for expressing its meaning.[14] Rather, the most palpable implication seems to be that the definition of "whale" is revisable in light of new evidence. Analogously, the discovery that Gödel did not prove the Incompleteness

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[14] Of course, for Kripke a natural kind term such as "whale" is a rigid designator and is non-descriptive, in much the same way that a name is a rigid designator and is non-descriptive. However, Kripke's proposal regarding natural kind terms is problematic. To mention a pertinent issue, it would appear that there is a divergence in the epistemic, modal, and semantic statuses of a sentence "defining" a name (e.g. "Gödel is the author of the Incompleteness Theorem") and a sentence "defining" a natural kind term, (e.g. "Whales are marine mammals"). Whereas in the first case the definition seems a posteriori, contingent, and synthetic, in the latter the definition seems a priori, necessary, and analytic. Yet according to Kripke, both the name and the natural kind term have essentially the same semantics; in particular, they are both rigid designators. A more fundamental problem with Kripke's proposal is that natural kind terms are general terms, and the extension of a general term varies from one possible world to another.

Theorem, but stole someone else's proof, would not compel the conclusion that "Gödel" encodes no information (and simply refers) and that such information cannot be expressed as a definite description. For the "definition" of "Gödel" could be revised to include the phrase "the man who stole Schmidt's proof of the Incompleteness Theorem and for many years passed it off as his own," for example. Thus, "Gödel" would still convey descriptive information expressible as a definite description.[15]

Let us now turn to Kripke's epistemic argument. The argument is that a sentence defining a name via a definite description would seemingly have to express a proposition whose truth is justified a priori, but this does not seem to be the case. To repeat the example given in §2, suppose "Gödel" means "the author of the Incompleteness Theorem." Then, the sentence,

(2) Gödel is the author of the Incompleteness Theorem,

would seem to express a proposition whose justification is a priori. However, this does not appear to be the case: that Gödel proved the theorem would seem to be an empirically ascertainable fact about Gödel. As Kripke's fraud scenario suggests, we could discover that Gödel didn't prove the theorem at all. In addition, as was mentioned in §2, the contrast is often made between the epistemic status of a name's definition and the epistemic status of the definition of some other type of term, such as "bachelor:"

(3) A bachelor is an unmarried man.

The epistemic status of (3) seems more clearly a priori than that of (2).

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[15] As Dummett (1973, p. 130) pointed out, Kripke's semantic objection can be met by adopting a Wittgensteinean "cluster" view of the definition of a name. The "definition revision" suggestion made here is not substantially different from such a cluster approach to this objection. However, such a similarity should not be seen as a surreptitious endorsement of the cluster view. The view held in this paper (to be explained in §7) is that the level of descriptive information encoded by a name is not semantically equivalent either to one definite description or a cluster of them.

The following might be said in response to this argument:

First, the argument seems rather weak, since it invokes a notion – the notion of the a priori – which is rejected by a number of philosophers and whose analysis has always been difficult and controversial.

Second, and illustrating this point, if Epistemic Contextualists such as Cohen (1991) and DeRose (1999) are right, then what counts as known or justified, and therefore what counts as known or justified a priori, is a matter of the epistemic context, which includes the operative standards of epistemic evaluation of the knowers in the situation. Arguably, then, on this view there might be contexts in which (2) could be evaluated as expressing a proposition knowable a priori.

Third, even if the notion of the a priori is admitted and is interpreted traditionally (say, as "justified without recourse to sensory experience"), it would appear that Kripke's inference that names do not express descriptive information that is knowable a priori is too pessimistic. For instance, it would seem that,

(4) Gödel was a person,

where it is understood from the context that "Gödel" is being used to refer to the logician,[16] expresses a proposition knowable a priori. But if so, this is because "Gödel" encodes certain descriptive information; presumably, this is the information that the bearer of the name was a person.

The idea that (4) may express a proposition knowable a priori might seem highly contentious. We can try to explain the idea as follows. Kripke claims that the proposition expressed by the sentence "Stick S is one meter long at t_0" is known a priori to someone who has "fixed" the metric system by reference to stick S. (1970/1980, p. 56) The individual is alleged to know the proposition a priori because he has chosen a particular stick, stick S, and stipulated that it is a meter long. According to the example, the stick will henceforth serve as the standard by which all other meter sticks are to be measured. The point is the following. By analogy with Kripke's meter stick example, if it is contextually *given* or stipulated that "Gödel"

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[16] This is a requirement that Kripke would allow. See, e.g., (1970/1980, pp. 8-9).

refers to a particular person, the famous mathematician, then it would seem that the proposition expressed by "Gödel is a person" is knowable a priori to the people in the context in which the stipulation is carried out. Similarly, to a parent who named her newborn baby "Michelle," the sentence "Michelle is a person" would express a proposition knowable a priori by Kripke's logic. In short, by Kripke's own understanding of "a priori," (4) could be considered to express a proposition knowable a priori.

Lastly, it may be wondered how many expressions are like "bachelor" in that their definitions express truths knowable a priori. A quick look at a dictionary reveals a multitude of terms whose definitions reflect important empirical discoveries or hypotheses (e.g. "atom," "gastric," "schizophrenia") and the accrual over time of knowledge about the things defined (e.g. "whale," "witch"). The epistemic status of these definitions seems fundamentally empirical. Hence, the apparent a posteriority of the definitions yielded by a Descriptivist account of names need not militate against it. Such is the epistemic status of the definitions of other types of expression as well.

5 Answering Kripke's Modal Argument

The starting point of this section is a well-known reply to Kripke's modal argument. This reply, which is originally due to Dummett (1973, p. 112-6; p. 128-33), argues that Kripke's modal argument is invalid, since it equivocates on two possible scope readings of the names and modal operators in the premises of the argument. Dummett's argument illustrates the point that proper names have narrow and wide scope interpretations with respect to modal operators. In addition, Dummett suggests that the two scope interpretations yield different "senses" for names. (1973, p. 128) In this section it is argued that in certain contexts the two scope interpretations may in fact correspond to distinct truth-conditional contributions made by the names.

Nothing said in this section should necessarily be construed as an endorsement of Dummett's particular defense of Frege's Descriptivist theory of names, his own views on the semantics of names, or other elements of his critique of Kripke's arguments against Descriptivism. Here Dummett's reply will be used as the springboard for a discussion of the issues that interest us.

To anchor our discussion of Dummett's reply, let us restate the modal argument presented above in §2, this time exemplified by the name "Aristotle" and the definite description "the teacher of Alexander:"

Premise 1:
If "Aristotle" meant "the teacher of Alexander" then "Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Alexander" would be false.
Premise 2:
But, "Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Alexander" is true. (Had circumstances been different, someone else, e.g. Speusippus, could have taught Alexander.)
Conclusion:
"Aristotle" does not mean "the teacher of Alexander."

The sentence in Premises 1 and 2, "Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Alexander," is ambiguous between narrow and wide scope readings of the definite description that gives the meaning of "Aristotle" ("the teacher of Alexander"). On the narrow reading, the definite description appears after the modal operator:

(N) It is possible that: Exactly one person taught Alexander, and whoever taught Alexander did not teach Alexander.
In logical notation:
(N) $\Diamond\ (\exists x)[Tx\ \&\ ((\forall y)Ty \rightarrow y = x)\ \&\ \neg Tx]$.

On this reading, the sentence expresses a falsehood; the sentence is self-contradictory.
On the wide scope reading, the definite description appears before the modal operator:

(W) Exactly one person taught Alexander, and it is possible that *that person* [e.g. Aristotle] did not teach Alexander.
In logical notation:
(W) $(\exists x)[Tx\ \&\ ((\forall y)Ty \rightarrow y = x)\ \&\ \Diamond\ \neg T(x)]$.

The sentence could express a true proposition on the wide scope reading, since someone other than the person who taught Alexander (Aristotle, in the actual world) could have been his teacher instead, e.g.

Speusippus. Dummett's objection is that in Premise 1 the description is being interpreted narrowly but in Premise 2 widely. Thus the modal argument is a sort of equivocation; it is invalid as it stands.

Dummett then contends that the phenomenon of rigidity that Kripke attributes to names amounts to the questionable view that natural language names always take wide scope relative to modal operators:

> Kripke's doctrine that proper names are rigid designators and definite descriptions non-rigid ones thus provides a mechanism which both has the same effect as scope distinctions and must be explained in terms of them. We could get the same effect by viewing proper names, in natural language, as subject to the convention that they always take wide scope…Kripke's account makes the difference between [names and definite descriptions] seem greater than it is by appealing to different mechanisms [scope in the case of definite descriptions and the distinction between metaphysical and epistemic necessity in the case of names] to explain comparable phenomena, and by arbitrarily ruling out the use of proper names with narrow scope to yield a distinct sense from the wide-scope reading, save by using a distinct modal operator. (1973, p. 128)

As Dummett notes, names, like definite descriptions, also admit of distinct wide and narrow readings. Consider (5).

(5) Aristotle might have been rich.

Wide scope reading: Aristotle is such that it is possible that he [Aristotle] was rich.

In logical notation:[17] $[\lambda x. \Diamond Rx]$ (a).
Narrow scope reading: It is possible that: Aristotle was rich.
In logical notation: $\Diamond [\lambda x. Rx]$ (a).

Since, according to Dummett, Kripke "arbitrarily rul[es] out the use of proper names with narrow scope to yield a distinct sense from the

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[17] The two readings are formalized employing the predicate abstraction notation presented in (Fitting & Mendelsohn, 1998), in order to present the contrast between the two readings more clearly.

wide scope reading," Kripke's rigidity thesis, therefore, would seem reducible to the claim that names always take wide scope.

In the Preface to (1970/1980), Kripke denies that the modal argument is an equivocation, "…the contrast [between names and definite descriptions] would hold if all the sentences involved were explicitly construed with small scopes" (p. 13), and also rejects that rigidity may be equated to names' always having wide scope. In reply to Dummett, he argues that names are rigid in simple sentences, too. That is, names reveal themselves to be rigid even when they are not embedded in sentences that contain modal operators.

Kripke's claims regarding names in simple sentences will not be considered in this paper; for a detailed discussion of them see (Author, Article). In what follows we will be concerned with an argument that has been put forth by Soames (2002) in defense of Kripke and against Dummett and which concerns the issue of scope.

The argument is that even though syntactically speaking, names do admit of wide and narrow scope readings relative to modal operators, *semantically* speaking, there is no difference.[18] Consider (5) once again. Under both readings, (5) appears to be about a specific individual, Aristotle, who might have been rich. The sentence seems to express the same proposition, an object-dependent proposition about Aristotle, regardless of whether "Aristotle" is taken to have wide scope or narrow. The irrelevance of scope for names is cited by Soames as a reason to reject Dummett's identification of rigidity with the wide scope reading:

> [A]s Kripke has pointed out, there is clearly a sense in which (i) the teacher of Alexander might not have taught Alexander, and so might not have been the teacher of Alexander, and (ii) someone other than the teacher of Alexander might have been the teacher of Alexander; however, there is no sense in which (i) Aristotle might not have been Aristotle or (ii) someone other than Aristotle might have been Aristotle…If "Aristotle" were equivalent to a non-rigid description that could be given any scope, then there would be corresponding senses of "Aristotle might not have been Aristotle" and "Someone other than Aristotle might have

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[18] That is, that the sentence has two possible translations in logical notation. This does not necessarily imply that the sentence therefore has two LF representations, or that scope in general is representable syntactically in the sense of Chomsky's Minimalist Theory of syntax. These questions are not considered in this paper.

been Aristotle" in which they express truths. The fact that these sentences do not have such interpretations shows that any analysis according to which "Aristotle" is analyzed as being equivalent to a non-rigid description, must be one in which the description is not allowed to take small scope… (2002, pp. 28-29. Expressions in italics have been placed in quotation marks to maintain consistency of style.)

Soames may be interpreted as saying that "Aristotle" in (6),

(6) Aristotle might not have been Aristotle,

cannot be equivalent to a definite description (e.g. "the teacher of Alexander"), since even though (6) has two readings, namely:

(W) Aristotle is such that it is possible that he [Aristotle] is not Aristotle,

(N) It is possible that: Aristotle is not Aristotle,

the two readings are truth-conditionally indistinguishable. However (6) is read, its truth conditions will involve a particular individual, Aristotle. No matter where the name appears with respect to the modal operator, (6) expresses the same necessarily false proposition, a proposition concerning Aristotle, the man. In contrast, the two readings for (7),

(7) The teacher of Alexander might not have been the teacher of Alexander,

which were given above, do yield different truth values. Hence, it appears that Kripke is vindicated: whether their scope is wide or narrow, and whether they are components of simple or embedded sentences, names always seem to refer to their bearers, in contrast to definite descriptions, which may be satisfied by different individuals in different possible situations. As a result, the irrelevance of scope in the case of names would serve to confirm that they are rigid designators.

But is it true that one cannot but express a falsehood in uttering "Aristotle might not have been Aristotle" (6), as Soames suggests above? For instance, it seems (6) could be used to assert truthfully that Aristotle might

not have existed (were "is" to be interpreted as "to exist"); or, more mysteriously, that Aristotle could have lacked the property of being Aristotle (if "is" is used predicatively). Or perhaps someone may use the sentence to say that Aristotle might not have been called "Aristotle," since some authors (e.g. McKinsey [2005, fn. 6]) intuitively interpret what appear to be identity statements as implicitly metalinguistic claims.

However, Kripke and Soames would insist that such interpretations be set aside. If "is" means "is identical to," and provided that the remaining components of (6) express their literal meanings, then, they would argue, the sentence cannot but express a necessarily false proposition.

Such an argument, however, would appear to presuppose two problematic assumptions. The first is that sentences, in abstraction from contexts, may express propositions.[19] As a way of facilitating exposition, I have so far talked as though sentences express propositions and as if sentences may be true or false. A more accurate, though somewhat more cumbersome (for our purposes), mode of expression would take into account Strawson's (1950) fundamental distinction between the linguistic meaning of a particular sentence (type) and the proposition expressed (or truth conditions of) a particular dated utterance of that sentence. My view is that utterances and not sentences have truth conditions and express fully truth-evaluable propositions. However, Strawson's distinction between sentences and utterances is seemingly ignored by Kripke (and by Soames, too, in his discussion of the modal argument).

Indeed, as a number of writers have noted (e.g. Katz, 1990; Bach, 2002; Author, Article), in (1970/1980) Kripke often seems to confuse the semantic properties of an expression type with how speakers in a context

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[19] It should be noted that Soames is of the view that not all sentences have fully propositional "semantic contents" in the absence of a context. Some sentences only express incomplete "propositional matrices." Nevertheless, Soames does believe that each well-formed sentence possesses a core semantic content that is context-invariant and is supplemented with contextual information. For example, Soames would say that Aristotle, the individual, is the contribution the name "Aristotle" makes to the core semantic content of (6). When used in a context, however, the name's content may be enriched with descriptive material presupposed by the interlocutors in the context, e.g. "the teacher of Alexander." Thus according to Soames this descriptive material may be part of the proposition literally expressed – what is said – by an utterance of (6), but it is not part of the semantic content of the sentence, considered outside of a context.

may use or interpret the expression. Now, it is false that (6), abstractly considered, expresses a determinate proposition. For it to do this, not only must "is" be disambiguated, but the truth-conditional value of "Aristotle" must have been decided. The second questionable assumption made by Kripke and Soames is that to each name there corresponds just one bearer: "[D]istinctness of referents will be a sufficient condition for the uniqueness of the names," writes Kripke. (1970/1980, p. 8, fn. 9) In this case, Kripke (1970/1980, pp. 8-9) insists, it is to be understood as given that "Aristotle" refers to a particular individual, namely, Aristotle the philosopher. It is *this* Aristotle who is the truth-conditional value of "Aristotle" in (6).

Despite Kripke's best efforts to downplay the artificiality of his one bearer/one name "homonymy" doctrine, various authors concur that the "multiple bearers problem" is a real problem for Kripke. (See, e.g., Katz, 1990; Récanati, 1993; Bach, 1987/1994; Bach, 2002; Author, Article) Here, however, we need not pause to consider this problem. Let us instead go along with Kripke and Soames suppose that "Aristotle" in (6) denotes Aristotle the philosopher. Let us suppose, too, that it is not (6) itself but an utterance of (6) in a context that expresses a necessarily false proposition. (6), then, should be imagined as uttered in a context in which the speaker is referring to Aristotle the philosopher and is using the "is" of identity.

The problem is that even granting these assumptions, it is not clear that the only thing that could be expressed by the utterance of (6) in such a context is the necessarily false proposition that Aristotle might not have been identical to himself. This is not to deny, of course, that the speaker could intend to say this by uttering (6). However, if the speaker *doesn't* have this intention, it seems the case can be made that the utterance may be literally interpreted as expressing a different, true, proposition. For instance, suppose A and B are discussing what might have happened if Plato had abandoned philosophy for politics. The Academy is never founded and Aristotle ends up studying philosophy under sophists. A utters (6). Given the background discussion and A and B's knowledge of Aristotle's actual achievements, B would be justified in interpreting A as saying that Aristotle would never have accomplished the work for which he is famous. On such an interpretation, (6) expresses a truth if the first instance of "Aristotle" is given wide scope with respect to "might not have been" and the second

instance of the name is understood as expressing descriptive information, which may perhaps be articulated as "the famous philosopher." That is, (6) is true if it is interpreted as,

(W) Aristotle [the individual himself] is such that it is possible that he [the individual himself] is not Aristotle [the famous philosopher].[20]

On a narrow reading, (6) would appear false in this context, whether "Aristotle" is understood as standing for an individual or as expressing descriptive information:

(N) It is possible that: Aristotle [the individual himself / the famous philosopher] is not Aristotle [the individual himself / the famous philosopher].

Thus, the example would seem to substantiate Dummett's suggestion that different scope readings yield different "senses" for names. It should be emphasized, however, that the different kinds of information a name may express – and the effects of the name's scope upon what is said (i.e. the proposition or truth-conditional content expressed by the utterance) – only become apparent when the sentence containing the name is considered *in relation to a context*. (6), considered in a vacuum, does not express anything definite.

Now, Soames and Kripke would object to the idea that a name may literally express descriptive information.[21] Perhaps they would argue

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[20] In such a context, an utterance of (6) would also be true on a wide scope reading if the first instance of "Aristotle" is understood as expressing "the famous philosopher." However, this is uncontroversial, since modal sentences containing definite descriptions are acknowledged to express truths when the definite description is interpreted as taking wide scope. In supposing that "Aristotle" denotes an individual (Aristotle the philosopher) in its first instance, the presumption is that this would be the most natural interpretation of the name in the situation.

[21] Soames would certainly not deny that names may pragmatically convey descriptive information, but he would reject that such information is part of the "semantic content" of a name, i.e. the context-invariant contribution a name makes to the content of a sentence, which for him is an object. Also, it should be noted that he believes there are "partially

that to assume this is to beg the question against their account of (6). However, to claim that there are contexts in which "Aristotle" in (6) may literally convey descriptive information is not to beg the question, for there are independent reasons, which will be explained in §§5-6 below, for thinking that all names may do this. In light of this evidence, it would appear that the onus is rather on Kripke and advocates of Direct Reference to demonstrate that the sole function of a name (type) is to refer to an object and to do so rigidly. This conclusion is not warranted on the strength of the modal argument alone, since this argument is grounded in the two problematic assumptions that were identified four paragraphs back.

5 Evidence for Descriptionality

In this section and the next my goal is to defend a very modest form of Descriptivism, a form consisting solely of the following two claims:

(A) Proper names encode descriptive information.

(B) The descriptive information encoded by a name may be truth-conditionally significant; that is, proper names may be literally interpreted as having the descriptive information they encode as their truth-conditional value (instead of, or in addition to, an object).

This section is dedicated to justifying (A). Some reasons for thinking that names encode descriptive information are the following. (The reasons go from least to most compelling.)

First, as Horwich (1998, pp. 124-5) notes, there is the intuitive observation that we commonly talk of *understanding* or failing to understand a name, and of *knowing* or being ignorant of the "meaning" of a name. Such locutions are perfectly ordinary. Furthermore, knowing or failing to know the "meaning" of a name would seem to be a matter distinct from knowing or failing to know *who* (or *what*) the bearer of a name is. For instance, one may be able to accurately specify some of the information

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descriptive names," such as "Princeton University," which include properties along with objects as constituents of their semantic contents.

encoded by the name "Gareth Evans," and have a good idea of how the name functions in the language, without knowing who bears the name.

Second, many names can be translated from one language to another, just like other types of expression (e.g. "Aristotle" is "*Aristóteles*" in Spanish).[22, 23] Even empty names are capable of being translated (e.g. the English "Santa Claus" is "*Papa Noël*" in French). Intuitively, as Horwich suggests (1998, p. 124), what is thought of as translated from one language to another is an expression's linguistic meaning.

Third, there is syntactic evidence. In (1973) Burge pointed out that names may be "modified." In particular, Burge noticed that (a) like common nouns, names can be pluralized, for instance (the following examples are given by Burge on p. 429),

(7) There are relatively few Alfreds in Princeton;

(b) like nouns, they can combine with the definite and indefinite articles,[24] e.g.,

(8) An Alfred joined the club today;

(9) The Alfred who joined the club today is a baboon;

and (c), like nouns, they can combine with determiner-quantifiers,[25] e.g.,

(10) Some Alfreds are crazy; some are sane.

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[22] By "can be" is meant here that a name is translatable in principle; in practice, of course, many names are not translated, but are borrowed from one language into another. Names of well-known people or places are often translated: e.g., the Spanish "*Aristóteles*" names both the Greek philosopher and the late Greek shipping magnate ("*Aristóteles Onassis*"). However, Abbott (2005, p. 12) notes that as a rule, "borrowed" names conform to the phonotactic constraints of the borrowing language. So from a phonotactic point of view names are almost always "translated." For instance, "Hsieh Ho" (to use Ziff's example [1960, p. 85]) is pronounced in English according to the phonotactic rules of English, not Chinese.

[23] Admittedly, it is a bit strange to say that "*Aristóteles*" is the *translation* in Spanish of "Aristotle," but neither is it a transliteration, of course. Perhaps, following a suggestion by Neale (2004), it is better to say that this is the name's *rendering* in Spanish.

[24] In other languages (e.g. Romance languages, German, and Modern Greek) names combine with the definite article much more frequently than in English.

[25] In von Fintel's (1994, p. 2) terminology, determiner-quantifiers are determiners that have been formally analyzed as quantifiers. Examples of determiner-quantifiers include "all," "every," "each," "some," and "many."

To Burge's four examples, the following should be added:

    (11) That Alfred is funny (combines with the distal demonstrative);

    (12) This Alfred is a bore (combines with the proximal demonstrative);

    (13) Our Alfred is talented (combines with possessive determiners);

    (14) Which Alfred did you mean? [Alfred Molina or Alfred Hitchcock?] (combines with an interrogative determiner);

    (15) The new Alfred likes coffee (combines with adjectives).[26]

Syntactically, the name in the preceding examples behaves just as a common noun, a type of expression standardly taken to have a property or a set as truth-conditional value. (To see this comparison more clearly, substitute "Alfred" in the examples with a noun that would harmonize with the rest of the components of the sentences, such as "actor.") Of course, according to current syntactic theory, names are noun phrases (NPs).

The resemblance of names to nouns can be characterized further. In (7)-(15) "Alfred" seems to behave as a count noun. Count nouns are nouns that can combine with numerals, the definite and indefinite articles, determiner-quantifiers, and have both a singular and a plural form. They apply to things that may be individuated and counted. In contrast, *mass nouns* apply to things that are not counted, such as water. Mass nouns present characteristics opposed to those of count nouns: they often do not combine with the definite and indefinite articles; they do not usually pluralize by adding "s," and they combine with only certain determiner-quantifiers, such as "some" and "much." Quine (1960, p. 91) observed that many count nouns can "double" as mass nouns. For example, the count noun "rabbit" has a mass reading in (11),

(16) Alfred served rabbit and garlic mashed potatoes for dinner.

The same appears to be the case with names. The following examples are from (Allers, 2006, p. 12).

(17) Hannibal Lector served Jason and garlic mashed potatoes for dinner.

(18) I can only handle so much Jason at this hour in the morning.

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[26] Other examples are *Ugly Betty* (the title of the TV show), and adjuncts such as "junior" and "senior" (e.g. "Jr." in "John F. Kennedy, Jr." conveys that John F. Kennedy, Jr. is younger than John F. Kennedy, Sr.).

(19) Jason in the morning is bad for your health.

Another piece of syntactic evidence that suggests that names encode descriptive information is that they commonly take noun suffixes such as "ic," "ist," "ian/an," and "esque" (e.g. "Platonic," "Marxist," "Cartesian," "Kafkaesque"), which serve to adjectivize a name. Adjectives, like nouns, are taken to have properties or sets as truth-conditional values.

Fourth, names encode cultural and linguistic information. The name "John," for example, is an English name. Just like any other English word, it conveys the information that it is an English word. Moreover, the name suggests that its bearer is an English speaker and that this individual is in some way or other (perhaps through genetic heritage or assimilation) connected to Anglo-Saxon culture. That names carry such cultural and linguistic information is evidenced by the common occurrence of questions seeking to confirm it. Two typical situations in which such questions arise are, for instance, when one is traveling in foreign countries (e.g. "Your name is 'John'…Are you American?") or when one is introduced to someone with a foreign name (e.g. "'François'…Is that French?" "Are you French?" "Do you speak French?"). Evidently there are many individuals who do not conform to the expectations raised by the cultural and linguistic connotations associated with his or her name. However, this does not negate the fact that names encode such information; if anything, such cases would confirm this fact by presenting an unexpected contrast.

Fifth, names encode natural gender. An expression that possesses natural gender (as opposed to "grammatical" gender[27]) encodes the information that the things to which the expression applies are sexed. "John," for instance, encodes the information that its bearer is male, whereas "Jane" encodes the information that its bearer is female. In the great majority of cases, the gender of name and bearer agree.

To some, these last two points may seem trivial; it might be thought that it is a purely adventitious feature of natural language names that they encode cultural/linguistic information and natural gender. As we shall see in a moment, it is far from trivial that names do this. For these two

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[27] Grammatical gender is a morphological feature of words of certain languages. A word's having grammatical gender is unrelated to the question whether the word applies to sexed things.

types of descriptive information may constitute the contribution of a name to the truth-conditional content of an utterance containing it. That is, the name will be interpreted to have general, descriptive information as its truth-conditional value, instead of an object, contrary to what the standard semantic picture of names implies.

Summing up, the reasons for thinking that names encode various sorts of descriptive information (thesis [A]) are the following:

1. As with other expressions, it is perfectly natural to say that one knows or doesn't know the meaning of a name.
2. Names may be translated or "rendered."
3. Names behave syntactically like nouns (syntactically, they are NPs), which are expressions that encode descriptive information and whose truth-conditional values are properties or sets.
4. Names encode cultural and linguistic information.
5. Names possess natural gender.

6. Non-standard truth-conditional values of names

Let us now turn to thesis (B), which says that the truth-conditional contribution of a name may be the descriptive information it encodes, i.e. that names may be literally interpreted as having descriptive rather than objectual truth-conditional values. Two points that support thesis (B) are the following.

First, there is the syntactic argument derived from the syntactic evidence presented above: names sometimes are (syntactically) nouns; nouns have properties or sets as truth-conditional values; therefore names sometimes have properties or sets as truth-conditional values. Independently of how to make sense of the first premise of the argument from a formal semantic point of view (according to which proper names have objects as truth-conditional values and are of type <e>), the fact remains that this argument provides a strong prima facie ground for thinking that names may have truth-conditional values other than objects. Syntactic evidence is always to be taken seriously.

Second, as Martinich (1977), Devitt (1981, §5.6), and Bezuidenhout (1997, p. 385, fn. 6) have suggested, names, like definite descriptions and other expressions, admit of the referential/attributive distinction.[28, 29] An attributively interpreted expression contributes descriptive information to the truth-conditional content of an utterance that contains it. The utterance expresses a "general" or "object-independent" proposition.[30]

So, when interpreted attributively, a name would contribute descriptive information – not an object – to the proposition expressed by the utterance that contains it. An utterance containing an attributively interpreted name would thus be taken to express an object-independent proposition. If it is true that names have an attributive interpretation, this would be sufficient to prove thesis (B).

The following examples show how names may be interpreted attributively.

First example, demonstrating the existence of the attributive interpretation. Suppose Tom is checking the messages recorded on his answering machine. He listens to a message left by someone who identifies himself as "John," and who says is calling to invite Tom to dinner that night. However, Tom is unable to determine who John is. Even so, Tom later explains to his wife that he might not be home for dinner since:

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[28] Martinich, however, expresses doubts as to the clarity and import of the notion of "attributive use" as characterized by Donnellan in (Donnellan, 1966).

[29] Devitt, however, considers "attributive names" to be a different "type of name" from "referential names."

[30] Following Neale (1990, pp. 49-50, fn. 1; 2010 forthcoming, p. 139), by an object-dependent proposition I mean a proposition (whether conceived in Fregean or Russellian terms – no position on propositions is assumed in this paper) whose existence essentially depends upon the existence of a particular object. Put in terms of utterances and truth conditions, an utterance has object-dependent truth conditions if they include a particular object. By an object-*in*dependent or general proposition is to be understood then a purely qualitative or descriptive proposition, a proposition whose existence is not dependent on the existence of any particular object; and correspondingly, an utterance has object-independent truth conditions if no specific individual is included among these truth conditions.

(20) John, whoever he is, invited me to dinner.[31]

In uttering (20), Tom is not using "John" referentially, since he does not know who John is – i.e. since he has no particular individual in mind – and as the clause "whoever he is" suggests. Tom's use of "John" would be interpreted as expressing certain general information, and his utterance of (20) a general proposition, which may be partially represented in first-order logic as follows:[32]

∃x (Jx & Ix) [Something or other has the property of being a John[33] and the property of having invited me to dinner.]

Second example, illustrating that the natural gender information encoded in a name may constitute the name's truth-conditional contribution. Suppose now Tom returns home from his dinner with John. His wife notices that the collar of his shirt is stained with the imprint of a woman's lips in bright red lipstick. Recognizing which particular brand of lipstick it is, she says:

(21) Funny that John should prefer Laura Mercier [the lipstick's brand].

As in (20), the name "John" in (21) seemingly does not denote a specific individual, but rather descriptive information. And (21) would likewise be taken to express a general proposition, which may be partially represented in first-order logic as follows:

<<∃x (Jx & Mx & Px)>, F> [Someone or other has the properties of being a John, of being male, and of preferring Laura Mercier lipstick, and this proposition is funny.]

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[31] Some might object that "John" here is really "short for" a longer, perhaps quotational expression such as "A person called 'John,'" for example. See (Author, Article, §3) for a reply to this sort of objection.

[32] Normally a natural language name would be rendered in logical notation as a constant. However, this would not be accurate for an attributively interpreted name, which is interpreted as predicating certain properties of a random object. This random object is better represented by a variable.

[33] Here we are being totally open and neutral as to what sorts of things may be considered properties. From this perspective, the property of *being a John* is a perfectly legitimate property, and on a par with the property (also encoded by "John") of *being male*, for example.

Note that, as in (20), it would have been natural to insert in (21), following "John," the phrase "whoever he is," which serves as a test for the attributive use. Note, too, that the various implicatures that Albert's wife may be making in this context by uttering (21) – e.g. *you* [Tom] *did not have dinner with a man called 'John'* or *you* [Tom] *lied to me* – depend on the gender information encoded by "John."

Third example, illustrating that the cultural/linguistic information encoded in a name may be interpreted as constituting the name's truth-conditional contribution. Suppose two students are looking for help in translating Baudelaire's "L'Invitation au Voyage." They go to the school's Language Center, where pasted on the door is a list of tutors' names. Seeing the name "François" on the list, one student says to the other:

(22) Judging by the name, I think that François, whoever he is, can probably help us out.

What are the truth conditions of this utterance? The speaker has the belief that a tutor named "François" should be able to help them translate the poem. And she is explicitly appealing to the cultural/linguistic information encoded by the name to support this belief. Clearly in this case she isn't using "François" referentially, since the students have no idea who François is. (22) would seem to be true, then, just in case the speaker believes that the tutor, whoever he is, lives up to the information encoded by François, i.e. possesses one of certain properties – *being French* or *being a French speaker* – and, *because* he possesses such a property, would thus be able to help them.

Once again, we may partially represent the seemingly object-independent truth conditions of (22) in logical notation as follows:

<BEL{A, <∃x (Fx & Gx & Hx)>}> [A (the student) believes (stands in the binary belief relation BEL to the proposition that) someone or other has the property of being a François, the property of being French, and the property of being able to help.][34, 35]

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[34] As suggested in §2, natural language names convey the information that their bearers belong to the linguistic and cultural group with which the name is associated. While this information may of course turn out to be false (e.g. François may not be French), this does not negate the fact that the *name* conveys this information.

[35] I am here employing a standard relational analysis of belief purely for convenience's sake, without a commitment to the adequacy of such an analysis.

Now, it might be objected that while it is true that names encode gender and cultural/linguistic information, it is too strong to claim that this information is truth-conditional.[36] After all, one can make a true utterance containing "François," where the name is interpreted attributively, and this utterance would not be falsified if "François" turned out not to be French. For example, an utterance of (23) (in the situation described above) would appear to be true, even if François turned out to be German and not French.

(23) François, whoever he is, works at the Language Center.

Hence, if *being French* (or *being a French speaker*) were a property with truth-conditional import, (23) could not be true if François were German, but it appears that (23) *can* be true if he is German.

This objection might be correct as far as (23) goes, but it doesn't apply to (22). If evaluated in the circumstances in which it was uttered, which were described above, (22) would indeed be falsified if François were German. The reason the speaker is proposing that François could help them translate the poem is because the name "François" suggests that its bearer is French or knows French. That is why she *thinks* that François would be able to help them. Remember, she is going by the name alone; there would have been no point to her suggestion if she had had any reason to believe that François were not in fact French (or a speaker of French) but German, for example.

In other words, the objection fails to engage the claim that was actually made above. Our claim is not that "François" (or any name, for that matter), when interpreted attributively, *must* have as its truth-conditional contribution the cultural/linguistic information it encodes, but that the name *may* have this information as its truth-conditional contribution. (Note that "François" encodes natural gender just like the pronoun "he" does, but this information is truth-conditionally inert in the example.) The example tries to bring this out, without presuming that such descriptive information is always, in all contexts, truth-conditional. The aim of course is to cast doubt on the mainstream view that the only truth-conditional contribution a name can have is an object.

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[36] This objection was made to me by Stephen Neale (conversation).

The attributive interpretation of names, as illustrated by these examples, seems literal. From an intuitive standpoint, uncorroborated by any empirical research, the attributive interpretation would appear rather frequent, or at least not rare.[37] Be that as it may, no great weight will be placed on the notion of "literal" here. Of more interest to us is the following: that the examples of the attributive interpretation seem to show clearly that the descriptive information encoded by a name may enter into the truth-conditional content of the sentence containing the name. In other words, thesis (B) is shown correct.

Recapitulating the main points of this section, thesis (B) is warranted on the following grounds:

1. Names behave syntactically like nouns (syntactically, they are NPs), which are expressions that encode descriptive information and whose truth-conditional values are properties or sets.

2. Names admit of the referential/attributive distinction. Attributively interpreted expressions contribute general or descriptive information, not objects, to the truth conditions of the utterances that contain them.

7 Conclusion: Names' Descriptive Content and Traditional Descriptivism

The claim that names encode descriptive information, which was labeled "thesis (A)" in §5, may be viewed as a species of Descriptivism about names, insofar as it affirms, as all traditional Descriptivist theories claim and contrary to what Direct Reference holds (and what Kripke also appears to hold in various texts), that names do express certain information in addition to having the role of standing for the individuals that bear the names. That is, (A) agrees with this core insight of Descriptivism: that the semantics of names includes a level of information that is distinct from the individuals that may bear the names.

However, (A) is to be considered Descriptivist only to that limited extent. In particular, (A) should not be interpreted as being equivalent to, or as presupposing or entailing, other claims that may characterize traditional forms of Descriptivism, such as the following, for example:

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[37] Frequency, however, is not a sufficient condition for literality, as shown by the phenomenon labeled "standardization" by Bach (1987/1994, 1998).

Traditional Descriptivism
D1: Names are/are semantically equivalent to definite descriptions.
D2: Names have "senses" and also referents.
D3: The sense of a name determines or identifies its referent.

Names encode descriptive information, but in most cases (e.g. "Alfred," "John," "François") this information seems to be of a very general and schematic sort. To my mind, it is not necessary to express this information in the form of a definite description. (It is debatable even whether the descriptive information encoded by most names is adequately captured via a definite description, as compared to, for example, an *indefinite* description.) The view defended in §§5-6 concerning the descriptive content of proper names and their varying truth-conditional contributions should therefore not be assimilated to the traditional Descriptivism of Frege and Russell, which constitutes the main target of Kripke's critique. This critique, because of the reasons discussed in §§3-4, no longer seems as compelling as it once did.[*]

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