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We Are Referring to Schmidt

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Abstract

The article distinguishes between logico-psychological and socio-linguistic perspectives on proper names. On the basis of the latter, it argues for allowing for different semantic mechanisms of reference of proper names in different contexts, societies and cultures. It outlines a metaphilosophical position, according to which the task of philosophy is to identify and discriminate possible mechanisms and modes of reference, while determining which of them are appropriate in specific contexts, societies or cultures is a matter for special sciences: linguistics, sociology or anthropology. Against this background, a project of another approach to proper names, termed 'Genealogical Descriptivism', is presented and confronted with several classical as well as recent approaches. It is argued that this approach deserves to be accepted alongside others, as plausible in certain contexts, without claiming to dominate in every context.

Keywords

Proper names; pluralism; descriptivism; metaphilosophy; Gödel case

1 The Distinction of Logico-Psychological and Socio-Linguistic Perspectives on Proper Names

Philosophical theories of proper names are numerous, and new approaches continue to be developed. This abundance might be viewed negatively, as a sign of our insufficient understanding of the domain: there are many theories because none is fully satisfactory. However, I propose a positive view of this situation: these theories are complementary rather than competitive, and they add cumulatively to our understanding of language – suggesting that there is still room to enrich our knowledge.

The problem of proper names owes its persistence to, *inter alia*, a conflation of various classes of contrast used to distinguish this category of expressions. A detailed account of them would require an encyclopedic effort.¹ However, on the surface, one might attempt to distinguish two broad

¹ For an interesting introduction to the interpretational muddle about proper names, see Bazzoni (2021).

perspectives, which I propose to term *the logico-psychological perspective* and *the socio-linguistic perspective*.

The logico-psychological perspective, which itself stems from multiple traditions, can be roughly summarized as encompassing the idea that names are representations of objects in the language. A name in a sentence stands for an object in a proposition. Simple propositions involve predication of a property about an object. According to Frege's conception of logical syntax, propositions have internal structure analogous to functional application in mathematics. A simple predicative sentence, respectively, can be decomposed into an unsaturated functor, the predicate, and its argument(s), the name(s). The logical role of the name in a sentence is thus exactly opposite to that of the predicate.²

At a purely abstract level, nominal symbols represent objects just by stipulation. For an early example we can take Frege's envisaged *Begriffsschrift* – an artificial calculus designed to be free from irregularities of natural languages and intended to encode logical relations precisely and unambiguously. However, when we descend to the level of natural language, an additional complication arises: the need to establish the actual semantic – or as some would say, metasemantic – mechanisms that enable language users to refer to objects.³ Frege himself opted for a satisfactoral model, claiming that objects do not occur directly in logical propositions but are represented by what he called 'senses', which can be grasped by language users and associated with names that denote those objects. The referent of a name is any object that satisfies the sense associated with that name. However, this idea is difficult to reconcile with another Fregean notion just mentioned above: that names are arguments of predicates, not predicates themselves in a sentence. There is, therefore, an inherent tension between satisfactoral (descriptive) accounts of the (meta)semantics of names and the logical role of names as arguments of the predicates.

Russell attempted to resolve the problem by adopting a relational mechanism of reference. He claimed that objects are directly components of singular propositions. However, based on his epistemology and the distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description, Russell developed the view that hardly anything but the utterances of 'this' and 'I' within natural languages can be properly related to the appropriate designates, and thus counts as genuine names. All traditional names – such as names of persons, places, etc. – are, in fact, predicates (descriptions).⁴

This austere categorization was hardly useful in the theory of natural language, so a more indulgent form of relational connection between name-utterances and their designates was needed. Current versions of the logico-psychological approach would render the category of proper names as based on the notion of 'singular thought' and 'epistemically rewarding' causal relations. Proper names, in this view, function as potential vehicles to carry such thoughts: every utterance of a name corresponds to the opening or activation of a mental file, causally connected with the referent of the name. This view has been developed by, among others, François Recanati (Recanati 2012; Murez and Recanati 2016).

² See Frege (1892). For a relatively recent reminder see Napoli (2015).

³ While I acknowledge the soundness of the semantics-metasemantics distinction in certain technical discourses, I will not observe it strictly in the present paper. Just as metaphilosophy is part of philosophy, metasemantics is part of semantics in a broad sense.

⁴ See, e.g., Russell (2010). A similar approach is developed in Quine (1948).

Importantly, regardless of the informational content, the referential power of these files depends solely on their causal relationship with the objects.

The socio-linguistic perspective, on the other hand, sets up the category of proper names quite differently: it sees them as resulting from socially restricted name-giving speech acts and socially governed name-using practices. The theory of names starts by examining why and how people use proper names in communication. As Strawson put it, ‘an understanding of linguistic function [of names] pre-eminently involves an understanding of the *utility* of linguistic forms in communication between human beings variously circumstanced and variously equipped (Strawson 1974, 35). This perspective highlights that naming, like other speech acts, has associated preparatory and sincerity conditions, which depend on linguistic and social requirements for successful communication.

Both perspectives provide substantially different notions of proper names.⁵ Even the indulgently understood singular thoughts are not always expressed using proper names in the socio-linguistic sense (for such thoughts might be expressed with, say, referentially used descriptions), and not all proper names in the socio-linguistic sense express singular thoughts (e.g. empty names or descriptive names presumably do not). A notable difference is also that while the logico-psychological perspective tends to assume that the mechanisms of reference will be uniform across name-using practices (unless we have good reasons to expect otherwise), the socio-linguistic perspective suggests, contrarily, that the semantics of names may well not be uniform across different practices, as the preparatory and sincerity conditions for the speech acts of naming may vary between different types of names, contexts of name-use, and communities (cultures, *a fortiori*) involved in name-using practices.

The socio-linguistic perspective thus motivates the rejection of the *Uniformity Principle* with respect to names. The principle features prominently in the discussions surrounding predicativism in the theory of names (Burge 1973; Fara 2015), but in its general form – ‘a theory that explains similar things in a similar way is better than one that does not’ – it might be perceived as a universally valid methodological guideline – Robin Jeshion calls this general form ‘Uber Uniformity Principle’ (Jeshion 2015, 235). However, its strength depends on its particular specifications: whether the type of similarity employed in specific explanations reflects the type of similarity spotted in the phenomena under explanation. If not, such uniformity is a burden rather than a benefit, as there is no methodological virtue in lumping together things that are in fact distinct.⁶

The uses of proper names in different ranges of cases or types of name-using practices are not sufficiently similar to justify a unified semantic treatment. It has been argued that the mechanisms of reference may differ not only between name-using practices but even for different participants of the

⁵ While the logico-psychological approach used to be dominant in the first half of the XXth century, the socio-linguistic perspective has been increasingly often acknowledged in the literature at least since Strawson (1959), for instance in Searle (1969); Strawson (1974); Evans (1982); Jeshion (2004); Rami (2016); García-Carpintero (2018). Classic examples of this approach are surely Evans’s and, earlier, Strawson’s.

⁶ ‘Uniformity shouldn’t be regarded as a virtue. It handles cases uniformly which shouldn’t be handled uniformly’ (Skiba, 2018, 169). In the context of challenging predicativism such an argument, based on the claim that modified uses of proper names aren’t similar to unmodified uses, can be found in Rami (2014); Jeshion (2015); Skiba (2018). In the broader context of the discussion with Hawthorne and Manley (2012) such an argument, based on the claim that proper names in general aren’t similar to other kinds of expressions, was given in Marti (2014). Similar observation in Kirkby (2012).

same name-tokening event, depending on their stance toward the referent or their role in the communication (e.g., speaker vs. hearer). For instance, Rachel Goodman suggests that even singular names tokened in a community of consumers might elicit descriptive thoughts (Goodman 2018).⁷ If we seek a constraint that is common to many name-using practices, perhaps the most we can get is *Psychological Neutrality*: a requirement that proper names serve the purpose of speaking about their referents in a psychologically neutral fashion, i.e., without thinking about the referents under any particular mode of presentation. Psychological neutrality, though, is compatible with different semantic mechanisms for determining the referent, whether relational or satisfactorial (Jeshion 2004, 600).

2 Metaphilosophical Motivation for Semantic Pluralism

From the socio-linguistic perspective on names, it is natural to expect that different name-using practices would involve different semantic mechanisms, accounted for by different theories. In this light, the abundance of theories of names presents itself as something reasonable, or even desirable. We might view these theories not as competing, but rather as complementary accounts, each contributing cumulatively to our understanding of the various semantic mechanisms available for different communicative needs. Given that multiple accounts are plausible across different contexts, one might expect proponents of new theories to define their scope on philosophical grounds, clearly articulating when, where, and which accounts are the most appropriate. Such theories might be termed ‘syncretistic’ (Voltolini 2016). However, the pluralism I am advocating does not aim at such a syncretistic approach; instead, it offers a rejoinder to this kind of requirement.

I believe that articulations of this kind, based on the individual linguistic intuitions of the proposing philosopher, are not very reliable unless supported by robust empirical evidence. Properly distinguishing between available theories requires extensive knowledge of the linguistic behaviors of diverse communities—knowledge that cannot be acquired a priori through individual convictions. A philosophy that claims to provide such knowledge would, so to speak, be ‘immodest.’ This is precisely the criticism Edouard Machery (2017) directed at such philosophical claims. Drawing on extensive empirical research, he demonstrates that philosophers’ judgments about how expressions refer in particular contexts of use are often influenced by philosophically irrelevant factors, rendering these judgments both ‘unreliable’ and ‘immodest.’

While I do not fully agree with Machery’s far-reaching conclusion that, once these excesses are corrected, little room remains for armchair philosophy, I do share his view that the philosophy of language should avoid making a priori empirical claims. I contend that it is the task of special sciences – such as linguistics, sociology, anthropology, cross-cultural studies, experimental philosophy, and others – to investigate how people actually use names, and how the conditions for names of different kinds in different situations vary. As some experimental findings suggest, we should expect significant variation in how names are used, depending on social status, culture, or even intracultural differences among people (Machery et al. 2004; Beebe and Undercoffer 2016; Machery, Sytsma, and Deutsch 2015; Machery 2017).

The role of philosophy, on the other hand, is to identify possible ‘varieties of reference’, to articulate their distinctness by describing differences in their possible applications, and to leave it to the sciences

⁷ See also Tałasiewicz (2010).

to determine which of these varieties are actually used by specific linguistic communities in particular circumstances. As David Lewis put it, we must ‘distinguish two topics: first, the description of possible languages or grammars as abstract semantic systems [...]; and second, the description of the psychological and sociological facts whereby a particular one of these abstract semantic systems is the one used by a person or population. Only confusion comes of mixing these two topics’ (Lewis 1970, 19).

This philosophical job isn’t finished yet. In the remainder of this paper, I will introduce a possible ‘variety of reference’ that has been overlooked so far, or at least remains unpopular, and elaborate on how it differs from certain traditional and recent accounts. I will proceed in a traditional manner, presenting an imaginary scenario to highlight certain questions and examine how the proposed approach – and these other accounts – address these questions. At the same time, I will refrain from attempting to definitively establish the full range of cases for which the proposed account should be considered the default, and will limit myself to making some tentative hypotheses.

3 The Gödel Case Revisited

On the view in question [...] since the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about ‘Gödel’, are in fact always referring to Schmidt. But it seems to me that we are not. We simply are not (Kripke 1980, 84).

Imagine the following blatantly fictional situation.

Rudolf and Marianna Gödel have a son, Kurt, born on 28 April 1906 in Brno (Brünn), in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. In January 1907, the father, trying to calm down the crying child, shakes him too hard and breaks his neck. Kurt dies instantly. The desperate father runs away and wanders aimlessly around the city. After a couple of hours, in a dark alley, he suddenly encounters an abandoned boy, just about his son’s age. He brings the boy home and says to his wife: ‘Now he will be our Kurt’. The parents secretly bury the dead child in a nearby forest and, from this day on, they present the foundling as ‘Kurt Gödel’. The foundling graduates from the University of Vienna, discovers the incompleteness of arithmetic, moves to Princeton, becomes a world-famous logician, etc. Unexpectedly, the whole truth comes to light in December 1969. It turns out that the accident in 1907 was witnessed by the Gödels’ housemaid, who described the story in her diary, published now after her death. It was she who stole a child and put it stealthily in Herr Rudolf’s sight. The child was stolen from the Schmidt family, staying in a hotel near the Gödels’ apartment. It was little Hans Schmidt, born on 17 May 1906 in Vienna, the only son of Joachim and Wilhelmina (the housemaid, before stealing the boy, checked the book in the hotel; later she checked the birth register in Vienna). Princeton is rife with rumors. On 31 December 1969, at the University New Year’s Ball, everyone expects a very well-known person, a colleague, a mentor, a celebrity, one of the most famous Princeton academics... well, whom?

According to the story, there is a certain man, expected to show up at the ‘69/70 New Year’s Ball, a man that most of Princeton society have had numerous physical encounters with and can identify in a you-know-who manner or just by rude finger-pointing: ‘that man’. That man discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic (which has been widely known ever since) and was a foundling raised by the Gödels (which was known to no one but the housemaid, until the publication of the housemaid’s diaries). We can ask about this man two parallel but not quite equivalent questions:

(1) Who is Kurt Gödel? You-Know-Who or the child who died in 1907?

(2) What is the name of You-Know-Who: 'Gödel' or 'Schmidt'?

Prima facie both questions might seem as merely rhetorical ones. Concerning (1) it can be said that obviously, in a sense, a name can be borne by more than one person – for instance in the case of the so called 'modified uses'. As we know well, there are many Alfreds in Princeton. There can be two different Gödels, too. But this is not a very enlightening sense in the case described in our scenario, for (1) presupposes rather a 'properist' approach to names, according to which a 'proper name [...] [is] a name which is essentially borne by one and only one thing' (Strawson 1974, 47). Under such presupposition (1) is about a single person and the specifying disjunction in this question is to be read exclusively. Only one person: either You-Know-Who or the dead child, but not both, is supposed to feature in a felicitous answer to this question.

The properist approach might be highlighted in an extension to our scenario. Suppose that Rudolf Gödel's mother in her last will bequeathed a very precious jewel to her grandson Kurt, on condition that, after his death, the jewel goes to the Kunsthistorische Museum in Vienna. The jewel is now (Princeton, 1969) in the possession of You-Know-Who. The Museum, after the publication of the housemaid's diary, has quite a straightforward decision to make. They need to decide who is Kurt Gödel in order to establish whether he is dead or not, for this is the condition of their claim for the jewel. They might acknowledge that Kurt Gödel is You-Know-Who and let him keep the jewel, or decide that Kurt Gödel is the dead child and initiate a legal procedure towards reclaiming the jewel for their collection. It is fully legitimate for them to ask the question (1) with the exclusive interpretation of the disjunction therein. They are not interested in how many people can call themselves 'Kurt Gödel' for any reason, but whether certain particular Kurt Gödel is dead or alive.

As regards (2), analogously, You-Know-Who may well have two names (and many more). However, on the grounds of the socio-linguistic approach, in certain name-giving practices, preparatory and sincerity conditions might differentiate names of persons from names of other kind of objects (like pets, places, certain mathematical objects or natural phenomena),⁸ and further, differentiate 'real' names of persons from their nicknames, false names, pen names and other aliases. We ask about real names of people when we intend to reveal their identity: we ask about real names of spies or secret agents caught under false ones, or of authors known under their pen names. Aliases, on the other hand, usually serve the purpose of hiding one's identity, or feature in restricted contexts in which someone's identity as a person is irrelevant. Thus, we can reformulate this question as:

(2') What is the *real* name of You-Know-Who: 'Gödel' or 'Schmidt'?

Whether a person can have two different *real* names depends on the details of preparatory and sincerity conditions of the name-giving acts on the grounds of given name-using practice, although this possibility is not actualized very often, I presume. In such a case a person might be obliged to use, in

⁸ For instance, among preparatory conditions for naming places in certain name-using practices, there might be a requirement that a name shall be bestowed by a governmental body, such as the United States Board on Geographic Names, or that the name-giving procedures must involve opinionating by some official consulting body, such as the Ständiger Ausschuss für geographische Namen in German-speaking countries and regions. No such requirement features normally in the conditions for naming people (save, perhaps, within some dystopian totalitarian societies).

official circumstances, both her names simultaneously, e.g. in the form 'Jones vel Smith' (thus the difference between having two names and having a two-part name might be vague). However, according to the particular situation described in our Gödel case, all approaches considered below would hold it rather unlikely that You-Know-Who has two real names: Schmidt and Gödel, in the same sense (while it might be allowed that You-Know-Who bears both these names in different senses: one as a real name and the other as a name of a different sort, a family nickname or a pen-name or whatever).

4 Classic Accounts of Proper Names and the Gödel Case

Let us see now how the classic approaches would answer our questions. I contend that what they say about proper names in general should apply – in the case of persons – to real names of these persons.

When we ask whom some people are referring to when they are talking about 'X', we may be asking about the 'semantic reference' of their utterance or their 'speaker's reference' (Kripke 1977). In regard to semantic reference, Kripke's causal theory (Kripke 1980) says that Kurt Gödel is You-Know-Who and that the real name of You-Know-Who is 'Kurt Gödel'. For when the father brought the foundling home and said to his wife: 'Now he will be our Kurt', he performed an initial baptism (using an orphaned name while naming the foundling after his dead son). All further utterances of the name 'Kurt Gödel' during the foundling's later career, in Vienna and then in Princeton, were causally connected with that baptism and subsequent acts of introducing the foundling to other people by his parents (and by himself) as Kurt Gödel.

Evans' hybrid theory (Evans 2002; 1982) yields the same outcome. You-Know-Who is the dominant causal source of information connected with the name 'Kurt Gödel' in the Princeton society. These people establish a community of producers participating in a mature name-using practice and You-Know-Who is the individual that is consistently and regularly identified by them as Kurt Gödel. Thus You-Know-Who is Kurt Gödel. There is no other practice of using the name 'Kurt Gödel'. Even Rudolf and Marianna Gödels have been consistently using this name to refer to You-Know-Who ever since the accident; never to their dead son. None of the producers participating in the practice of using the name 'Kurt Gödel' in Princeton has the slightest chance to (regularly) misidentify another individual – some dead child in particular – as Kurt Gödel. Thus, Kurt Gödel is You-Know-Who.

Our Gödel case certainly resembles Evans' Madagascar case, but with an important difference in that there are two persons involved instead of two places. Indeed, Evans' account yields analogous outcome in both cases: the dominant source of information (the island/You-Know-Who), not the original one (a stripe of Africa's mainland/dead child), is what the names refer to on this account. However, on my account, the difference between persons and places is important, according to differences in preparatory and sincerity conditions for name-giving acts in the case of persons and in the case of places. Such differences might yield opposite outcome for the original Madagascar case and for the present Gödel case.

Even a naïve descriptivist, holding that 'Kurt Gödel' means 'the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic', would give the same verdict. You-Know-Who in fact is the author of the relevant theorem. Thus, You-Know-Who is Kurt Gödel, and Kurt Gödel is You-Know-Who.

Let us consider now who was the speaker's reference for the Princeton folks when they were talking about 'Gödel' all these years. Were they referring to Gödel or rather to Schmidt? Did it change when the truth came out?

Obviously, they were referring to You-Know-Who. However, what is striking about all three classic accounts is that they are completely insensitive to the cognitive change in the community of name-users resulting from the publication of the housemaid's diaries. On all three accounts, when the folks were talking about 'Gödel', they were all the time referring to Gödel (for their speaker's reference was You-Know-Who, and You-Know-Who was Gödel on these accounts). Because their speaker's reference accords with the semantic reference of their utterances, publication of the diaries changes nothing here: they are still referring to You-Know-Who, who is still Gödel. The whole story means less than a shrug.

5 Introduction of Genealogical Descriptivism

In what follows I am going to present a sketchy outline of a different conception, capable of accounting for the cognitive change in the language community, resulting from gaining new information in the Gödel scenario. For reasons which will become obvious in the course of presentation, I propose for it the term 'Genealogical Descriptivism'.

According to Genealogical Descriptivism, a real name of a person designates the person who satisfies the identifying genealogical description, officially – as required by preparatory and sincerity conditions of name-giving speech acts – associated with the name. The person's identity *qua* name-bearer is thus constituted by certain genealogical facts, such as the identity of the parents and the date of birth. Quite naturally so, for these facts constitute the person's identity *as such*, and the identity of referents is certainly relevant to semantics on all accounts of reference.⁹

While it is not necessary to consider in full complexity the philosophical question of personal identity before we can attempt any semantic claims – in accordance with Kripke's claim that we do not need to find a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for being a certain object *before* we can speak about *that* object in counterfactual situations (Kripke 1980, 47) – in the case of persons and their real names, certain common-sense ontological claims do have some bearing on what may and what may not be said of a person in counterfactual situations. In this respect, Genealogical Descriptivism has a different position against the modal argument than naïve 'famous deeds' descriptivism.¹⁰ For while Kurt Gödel certainly might not have discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic, it is not so certain that Kurt Gödel might not have been the son of Rudolf and Marianna Gödel. Quite the contrary, he rather could not not have been; for 'how could a person originating from different parents, from a totally different sperm and egg, be *this very [person]*? [...] It seems to me that anything coming from a different origin would not be this object' (Kripke 1980, 113).

⁹ For a recent discussion of how the metaphysics of individuals bears on the semantics of proper names see Bazzoni (2016). Particularly interesting, in the present context, is the claim that not 'any notion of individual is central to the semantics of names, but rather [...] the specific notion of individual *as constructed by human cognition* is central to the semantics of names' (Bazzoni 2016, 131, emphasis original).

¹⁰ Incidentally, as argued in Gluer and Pagin (2006), the modal argument against descriptivism is too weak; for the modal intuitions can be accounted for without any resort to the rigidity of names.

Metaphysically, it is the *copulatio* of a particular sperm and a particular egg, in Kripke's words, that determines a person's identity (let us put aside the problem of identical twins). However, in the context of name-using practices it is important to acknowledge that we normally have no socially efficient access to such facts. The date of birth featuring in genealogical descriptions should be regarded as a social approximation of this fact.¹¹ The place of birth is of course of no weight in respect of a person's identity; it is important, though, for the social practice of name-use, as an indication where the relevant records are to be found.

Genealogical Descriptivism takes this – utterly Kripkean – view on personal identity and builds further on the claim that relevant details of personal identity play a crucial role in social practices of name-giving;¹² thereby endowing the name with a 'meaning' of a sort. However, while 'Kurt Gödel is a son of Rudolf and Marianna Gödel' is thus rendered as a kind of necessary truth, it is not a necessary requirement for a competent user of the name to know this truth. Most users – including most of the 'producers' in Evans's sense – defer their use to the 'procedures of miscellaneous sorts' that secure ordinary acts of implementing the name-using practice (García-Carpintero 2018, 1135). Among these procedures there is the use of various records, ID's, passports, etc., typically containing genealogical information. Certainly, such documents just inform the reader about the identity of the bearer; they do not constitute it and may be faked. It is pretty obvious that You-Know-Who (Hans Schmidt on my account, see below) had a passport in the name of 'Kurt Gödel' rather than 'Hans Schmidt', displaying Kurt Gödel's genealogical data.

Now, when it comes to our initial questions, Genealogical Descriptivism holds that the real name of You-Know-Who is Hans Schmidt and Kurt Gödel is the child who died in 1907. For what is essential for being Kurt Gödel is to be the son of Rudolf and Marianna Gödel, born on 28 April 1906 in Brno, and this son of theirs died in 1907. You-Know-Who was, in fact, the only son of Joachim and Wilhelmina Schmidt, born on 17 May 1906 in Vienna, and this son of theirs was named Hans Schmidt.

Genealogical Descriptivism – compared to naïve descriptivism, Kripke's causal account and Evans' hybrid theory – has the advantage that it can account for a cognitive change caused among the Princeton society by the publication of the housemaid's diaries. It says that when the folks were talking about 'Gödel', they were all the time referring to Schmidt (for their speaker's reference was You-Know-Who, and You-Know-Who is Schmidt on this account). They didn't know it during all these years, until it was revealed in the housemaid's diaries, but that was the truth. You-Know-Who, the person they had in mind when they talked about 'Gödel', was – to their great surprise – not Kurt Gödel.¹³ He was Hans Schmidt. What the Princeton folks can do about it, when the truth is revealed, is to acknowledge

¹¹ Consider that while it doesn't make sense to say: 'If your parents had met in high school, you would have been born five years earlier'; for the correct answer to this exclamation would be: 'No, I would just have had an older sibling', it makes sense to say: 'If your mother hadn't been hospitalized during pregnancy, you would have been born two months earlier' – because in such a case we still assume the same moment of conception.

¹² Among preparatory conditions for naming, according to Robin Jeshion's suggestions (Jeshion 2004), there is the *Social Standing* condition. It says that if someone aims to introduce a name of a person she must possess a relevant social standing towards the person named. This link between the namer and the person named enables that some details of the personal identity of the latter might be taken into consideration in the name-giving act performed by the former.

¹³ As Genoveva Marti aptly noted, 'Having the referent in mind is neither necessary nor sufficient for a use of a name to refer to it' (Marti 2015, 80).

this fact and change their speaker's reference in order to coordinate it with the newly revealed semantic reference. 'Kurt Gödel' is how they can refer to the dead boy now, and when in need of referring to You-Know-Who they can use the name 'Hans Schmidt'. Of course, everyone is invited to keep the name 'Kurt Gödel' for You-Know-Who in their idiolect, but as a nickname now, or a pen-name, not as a real name.

6 Genealogical Descriptivism Versus Selected Contemporary Accounts of Proper Names

For comparison with some more recent accounts it will be useful to check Manuel García-Carpintero's taxonomy of theories of proper names (García-Carpintero 2018). On the grounds of this taxonomy, Genealogical Descriptivism shall be counted as a variety of *properist referentialism* of a hybrid Millian-Fregean character, quite as Garcia-Carpintero's own account.

Millian-Fregeans are in accord on the claim that, in spite of being associated with some descriptive contents, 'proper names contribute their referents to the contents of the primary speech acts they help to perform' (García-Carpintero 2018, 1107).¹⁴ There are two important differences, though, between Garcia-Carpintero's account and mine. One is that while according to Garcia-Carpintero the Fregean part is performed by a *metalinguistic* description 'being called *N*', I contend that there is an *object-language* description containing genealogical information. The other difference is situated in the Millian part and concerns the details of reference-fixing. According to Garcia-Carpintero, 'for any use *n* of proper name *N_i*; *n* refers to *x* if and only if *x* is the unique individual picked out in the act of naming instituting the *N_i*-appellative practice to which *n* belongs' (García-Carpintero 2018, 1132),¹⁵ while on my account there can be such use *n* of a proper name *N_i* that refers to a different object than the one picked out in the act of naming instituting *N_i*-appellative practice to which *n* belongs.

Both differences show up in my version of the Gödel-Schmidt case and favor Genealogical Descriptivism. First, as we have seen, 'being called *N*' – if it is supposed to be non-circular – can be false about the semantic referent. Hans Schmidt in the Princeton name-using practice wasn't called Hans Schmidt but rather Kurt Gödel. Second, the Princeton uses of the name 'Kurt Gödel', as all uses of this name on my account, semantically refer to the dead child, while they belong to a practice originating from an act of naming in which it was the foundling who was fixed as the referent (recall Rudolf Gödel's name-giving act: 'Now he will be our Kurt').

Genealogical Descriptivism can also be presented as a certain modification—or perhaps a far-reaching specification in a particular aspect—of the approach adopted by Dolf Rami (2016). Besides discussing many aspects of the theory of names, which go beyond the scope of the present article (such as the issue of name individuation), Rami includes also threads that are directly relevant to Genealogical Descriptivism, such as the acknowledgement of the category of 'official names' or 'legal names' and of the importance of 'conventionalized name-using practices'. He adopts the following characterization of the name-bearer relation:

¹⁴ An early account of this type was Strawson's. According to this account, on the one hand, a proper name is associated with a cluster of identifying descriptions, but on the other hand, 'in an appropriate setting the name, as used, will *act* as an ideal or Russellian proper name' (Strawson 1974, 47).

¹⁵ For a similar reference-fixing formula see also Kawczyński (2010).

(NR) For every name x and object y : x is a name of y at t iff either there exists at t a conventionalized branch of a name-using practice of x and this practice has y as referent or at t there is an explicit legal act of naming in force that assigned the name x to y (Rami 2016, 83).

The author describes this relation as ‘gruesomely gerrymandered’ and claims that it only constrains, but does not determine, semantic reference. Indeed, this account does not clearly indicate how to interpret a situation in which both members of the disjunction involved in the (NR) definition are true, but for different substitutions of the variable y . Incidentally, we are dealing with exactly such situation in our Gödel case: the referent of the name-using practice of ‘Gödel’ in Princeton (the speaker’s referent within the Princeton society) is You-Know-Who, while the legal act of naming in force assigned the name ‘Gödel’ to the dead child. Meanwhile, according to Genealogical Descriptivism, such legal acts—in relation to persons—have clear priority over any further practices. They take into account certain genealogical facts and associate the names with the appropriate genealogical descriptions, taken as reference-determining descriptions. In particular, according to this account, the name ‘Kurt Gödel’ is associated with the description ‘the son of Rudolf and Marianna Gödel’. It is thus determined that only the person who actually fulfills this description—which can be established, for example, through genetic testing—is the true Kurt Gödel, regardless of any name-using practices that have developed in connection with this name after its official, legal assignment.

7 Render Unto Sciences That Which Is Theirs

In line with the metaphilosophical perspective outlined above, I postpone the question about the relevant range of applicability of Genealogical Descriptivism for future empirical research. We have just said that – on the socio-linguistic approach to names – it is natural to expect that different name-using practices would be based upon different mechanisms, accounted for by different theories. We might thus acknowledge loosely that, for instance, Kripke’s original account works fine, but for nick-naming rather than real name giving (as it is insensitive to requirements for naming as a socially-governed speech-act) and that Evans’ theory works fine for the names of historical personages (such as Napoleon or Aristotle), whose genealogical whereabouts are not as important for us as their being the causal source of certain ‘famous deeds’. We might contend that the case of descriptive names, such as ‘Vulcan’, is convincingly conceptualized by Robin Jeshion’s account (Jeshion 2004); and that Burge’s and Fara’s predicativism accounts nicely for the modified uses of proper names (Burge 1973; Fara 2015). Genealogical Descriptivism in turn might help in explaining how given names of contemporary people designate their referents in regular circumstances.

It might help, too, with peculiar cases of historical personages who are now known (or suspected) as *not* having done the famous deeds traditionally ascribed to them. Kripke convincingly argues that, for example, if the famous deeds attributed to Moses in the Bible, hardcore miracles among them, in fact were never accomplished, descriptivism (including Evans’ hybrid form of it) is in trouble when it comes to establishing Moses’ identity as an object of reference. Now, I contend that we can refer to Moses – even if he supposedly didn’t set plagues on Egypt or lead the exodus of the Israelites through the Red Sea – because he was introduced as a son of Amram and Jochebed. Amram in turn was a son of Kohath, who was a son of Levi. Levi’s father was Jacob (Israel), son of Isaac. Isaac was a son of Abraham, whose father was Terah, son of Nahor. Nahor was a son of Serug, who was a son of Reu. Reu’s father was Peleg, and his father was Eber, son of Shelah. Shelah was a son of Arphaxad, who was a son of Shem, a Noah’s son. Noah was a son of Lamech and a grandson of Methuselah, who was a son of Enoch.

Enoch's father was Jared, and Jared's father was Mahalalel, son of Kenan, who was a son of Enosh. The father of Enosh was Seth, a son of Adam and Eve. Fondness for genealogy is not our recent invention.

Such loose acknowledgement is very far from providing a general theory of reference of proper names. I am well aware that it leaves underdetermined, for instance, what is to be considered as 'regular circumstances'. Apart from the case of identical twins that we have circumvented above, there are other problematic cases: adoption, surrogacy, egg donation, sperm donation, etc. Moreover, it might be hard to decide when a person ceases to be a 'contemporary' person and becomes a 'historical personage'. For Kripke in 1970, Gödel was a colleague from Princeton Faculty; for us today Gödel is more like Aristotle than like a colleague.

While determining these matters would certainly be interesting and contribute to the development of our understanding of language, undertaking this task from the armchair would be unwise. As we mentioned earlier, it risks falling into the problem of unreliability, as highlighted by Machery's criticisms. This task should be left to the sciences.¹⁶ In addition, it is a job of the sciences, too, to establish the folks' readiness to think that You-Know-Who is Hans Schmidt. Substantial differences can be hypothesised here, depending on the extent to which the story is told¹⁷ or on the choice between questions (1) and (2), for it is cognitively quite a different thing whether we have one name and two persons to match or one person and two names. From the philosophical point of view, though, it is enough for the plausibility of my account that the verdict that You-Know-Who is Hans Schmidt is just non-null in at least some of the settings. It need not be dominant or even popular.

8 Conclusion

The article explores philosophical perspectives on proper names, distinguishing between two primary approaches: the logico-psychological and the socio-linguistic. The former, rooted in traditional logic and psychology, views names as linguistic representations of objects. Modern iterations of this perspective, like Recanati's theory of mental files, stress the causal connection between names and their referents. In contrast, the socio-linguistic perspective emphasizes the role of social conventions and communicative practices in the usage and meaning of proper names. This view highlights the conditions under which names are given and used, such as social norms and intentions of the speech acts of naming. Unlike the uniformity often assumed in the logico-psychological approach, the socio-linguistic perspective suggests variability in how names function across different cultures and contexts, rejecting the idea of a one-size-fits-all semantic mechanism for names.

The article advocates semantic pluralism, where different theories of naming coexist as complementary rather than competing. The role of philosophy is to articulate possible mechanisms of

¹⁶ My metaphilosophical plea for modesty concerns the discipline of philosophy, while many theorists work in an interdisciplinary area and reasonably aim at giving a fuller account of natural language – including the perspective of linguistics or sociology. The point is that they have different tasks qua philosophers than qua linguists or sociologists. As Burge put it (albeit in a somewhat different context): 'Semantics [...] need not await the full returns of sociology' (Burge 1973, 435).

¹⁷ Consider the initial story told somewhat further. Suppose that when You-Know-Who finally shows up at the ball, an elderly lady in her nineties approaches him, throws her arms around his neck and cries: 'Oh, my beloved Hans, I have finally found you. I've always believed that you were alive.' This is, certainly, Frau Schmidt. We might add that You-Know-Who has a mark on his skin, characteristic of the Schmidt family. And so on – up to the DNA tests.

reference and describe their distinctions, while empirical sciences should determine the prevalence of these mechanisms in real-world contexts. This pluralistic stance counters criticisms of traditional philosophy, such as those by Machery, who argued against overly speculative theories in philosophy, particularly theories of reference.¹⁸

A novel contribution of the paper is the introduction of ‘Genealogical Descriptivism.’ This approach posits that a person’s name is tied to their genealogical identity, defined by factors like parentage and birth circumstances. Genealogical Descriptivism contrasts with traditional descriptivist and causal theories by addressing a variant of the famous Gödel case. In this fictional scenario, it eventually turns out that the person commonly known as Gödel, who indeed made the important discoveries historically attributed to Gödel, is in fact not Gödel, but a foundling raised under that name, whose real name is Schmidt. Genealogical Descriptivism accounts for the cognitive and semantic shifts in such cases, when genealogical truths are uncovered, by anchoring the referent of a name in genealogical facts, rather than merely in causal chains or descriptions of the ‘famous deeds’.

The article also contrasts Genealogical Descriptivism with certain contemporary theories, such as García-Carpintero’s hybrid Millian-Fregean model and Rami’s account of conventionalized name-using practices. While these approaches share some commonalities with Genealogical Descriptivism, they differ in how they prioritize the mechanisms of reference and the role of social conventions. Genealogical Descriptivism uniquely emphasizes the primacy of genealogical facts over causal connections and common beliefs. The article acknowledges the limitations of its approach, noting unresolved issues like identical twins, adoption, and evolving historical perspectives on name usage. Nevertheless, it argues that the introduction of Genealogical Descriptivism enriches the philosophical discourse on proper names and offers a robust framework for addressing complex cases in specific scenarios, especially involving shifts in identity or reference. At the same time, it avoids the task of proper delimitation of the proposed account and emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration in studying proper names. Philosophy’s task is to delineate theoretical possibilities, while specialized sciences should be asked to investigate their empirical validity.

In conclusion, the article advocates a pluralistic approach to the philosophy of names, emphasizing the integration of insights from both philosophical and empirical studies. It acknowledges the complexity

¹⁸ Quite naturally, a legitimate question arises: what kind of metametaseantics would be plausible for such a pluralistic stance in metaseantics? While I have throughout the paper attempted to adhere to a broad understanding of semantics and to avoid fine-grained distinctions between successive ‘meta’ levels, a brief comment on this point is certainly in order. The type of pluralism I advocate aligns with a desideratum proposed by Filip Kawczyński: ‘metametaseantics should allow for the application of different metaseantic theories to different linguistic phenomena. A common issue in the philosophy of language is that, at the metaseantic level, there is a default tendency to construct a single, monolithic theory for the entire language. [...] It seems that one of the primary motivations for philosophers in seeking a monolithic metaseantic theory is to avoid indeterminacy. A situation in which different metaseantic theories are applied to various areas of language potentially generates more possible interpretations than the application of a single overarching theory. [...] However, when metametaseantics, which relies on non-linguistic facts, can effectively mitigate the threat of indeterminacy, the possibility of applying different metaseantic theories to different linguistic phenomena appears much more feasible’ (Kawczyński, forthcoming). My appeal to the sciences as the proper domain for establishing the facts that ground particular metaseantic mechanisms is intended precisely as a gesture towards such a metametaseantic framework.

of naming practices and the necessity of multiple theories, arguing that Genealogical Descriptivism rightfully earns its place among them and provides valuable insights into understanding these practices.

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