Public Proper Names and Idiolectal Identifying Descriptions
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Direct reference theorists tell us that proper names have no semantic value other than their bearers, and that the connection between name and bearer is unmediated by descriptions or descriptive information.[1] And yet, these theorists also acknowledge that we produce our name-containing utterances with descriptions on our minds: Saul Kripke, in the midst of rejecting the description theory of names, pauses to acknowledge that, for every speaker A and name "x", "...there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of properties ϕ such that A believes 'ϕx',"[2] and Scott Soames writes that "[d]ifferent speakers who use the name ['Carl Hempel'] to refer to the same man may, and standardly will, associate widely different descriptive information with it."[3]

In this paper, I propose a new role for descriptions in the direct reference account. After arguing that neither Kripke nor Soames have given descriptions their due, I show that speaker-associated descriptions must play a role in the direct reference portrayal of speakers wielding and referring with "public names"[4].

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[1] See Kripke (1980). Kripke acknowledges that descriptions do sometimes serve as initial reference-fixers when a name is introduced, but he maintains that no description, whether reference-fixing or otherwise, need be invoked in an explanation of how speakers refer with names. Arguments similar to Kripke's – against 'descriptivism' and in favor of a causal (or "historical") account of reference – were offered independently by Keith Donnellan in his rich (1972), the title of which inspires that of the present paper.

[2] Kripke (1980) p. 64.

[3] Soames (forthcoming), p. 8 (ms.).

[4] This label is applied by direct reference theorist Howard Wettstein in his (2004), where he writes that "the notion of what we might call a public name...provides us with a way of getting at things which does not depend much upon the vicissitudes of our epistemological situation. There is, then,

1. Public names

Direct reference theorists argue that name reference cannot proceed by means of speaker-associated descriptions, since speakers frequently use names to refer to things that do not uniquely satisfy the associated descriptions. Instead, these theorists explain successful reference by emphasizing the name used rather than the name user. On their view, a name comes into existence *as* a name of a particular thing, and a referent-complete name is passed from speaker to speaker, all intending "...to use it with the meaning or reference it has already attained."[5] A name user need not have any accurate conception of that to which he refers; rather, he must have encountered a particular public name, and must subsequently use that name with the appropriate intention(s) directed at it.

Having anchored names to referents, the direct reference theorist is required to account for speakers' uses of a particular public names on occasions of utterance. Though Kripke writes that "...the receiver of the name must, I think, intend *when he learns it* to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it," (italics mine)[6] he

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no special problem about reference in the absence of a substantial cognitive fix." p. 90. (Also: "Simply acquiring a name in some appropriate way (such as conversing with someone who is using the name) puts one in position to use the name." p. 102.)

[5] Soames (2007), p. 420. Also: "[t]hrough various sorts of talk *the name* is spread from link to link as if by a chain," Kripke (1980), p. 91, italics mine; "...it's in virtue of our connection with other speakers in the community, going back to the referent himself, that we refer to a certain man." *ibid.*, p. 94.

[6] *ibid.*, p. 96. Kripke provides, as contrast, a case in which no such intention is present: "If I hear the name 'Napoleon' and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition." This shows that, though Kripke has characterized the crucial attitude as an intention to use a name with the same *reference*, it might be better expressed as an intention to use the same *name*. If I decide, upon hearing "Napoleon", that it would be a nice name for my aardvark, then I intend to introduce a *new* name, not to use the name that I received with a different referent. In contrast, in intending to use the name "Napoleon" that I heard, it seems that I *automatically* intend to use it with the same reference as the person from whom I heard it, since its identity *as a name* is (at least partly) constituted by its being the name of a particular thing.

also tells us that someone may use a public name with no awareness of the circumstances in which he first encountered it.[7] Thus, though there is, for each public name in a speaker's vocabulary, a *fact* regarding when and from whom that speaker obtained it,[8] *the speaker* need not appeal to that fact in order to use the name. So, we must ask: how does direct reference theory account for a speaker's use of a particular public name on an occasion of utterance? Or, as direct reference proponent David Kaplan puts it: "What is it that makes a particular output the transmission of the same word as that carried by a particular earlier input?"[9]

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[7] Kripke writes: "...it is not how the speaker *thinks* he got the reference, but the *actual chain of communication*, which is relevant." (*ibid.* p. 93) Kripke thus distinguishes between his view and one that he attributes to Strawson: "Strawson apparently requires that the speaker must *know* from whom he got his reference; so that he can say: 'By 'Gödel' I mean the man *Jones* calls 'Gödel'...The present theory sets no such requirement. As I said, I may well not remember from whom I heard of Gödel, and I may think that I remember from which people I heard the name, but wrongly." *ibid.*, p. 92. (Indeed, as McKay (1994) notes, "I can use a name without remembering whether I introduced it myself or whether I learned it from others before me." p. 297.)

[8] Devitt (2006): "The theory is that, after grounding, the name is passed on from person to person in communication situations: later users who have no acquaintance with the bearer borrow the reference of the name from earlier users. For example, consider our current uses of 'Aristotle' to designate the famous philosopher. These uses designate him in virtue of being causally linked to him via centuries of reference borrowings and the initial groundings." p. 138.

[9] Kaplan (1990) p. 102. Which public name occurs in a given utterance cannot be settled by looking to either spelling or pronunciation, since distinct names may share both. Nor, clearly, are public names individuated by their referents. In fact, Kripke (1980) tells us that:
> ... two totally distinct 'historical chains' that by sheer accident
> assign phonetically the same name to the same man should probably
> count as *creating distinct names* despite the identity of the referents.
> This identity may well be unknown to the speaker, or express a recent
> discovery. (p. 8)

Kaplan (1990) describes just such a case of two homonymous, synonymous proper names: "One evening, the mischievous Babylonian looked up and saw Venus, and he thought to himself: 'This one is just as beautiful as Phosphorus, so let's call it 'Phosphorus' too.'" Kaplan writes that, even if the mischievous Babylonian knows that he is naming a thing that already bears the name "Phosphorus," it will still be the case that there are now two public names "Phosphorus", "one somewhat older than the other...", p. 115.

Kaplan elaborates on the difficulty of providing a satisfactory answer to this question, although he does not himself offer a set of conditions the meeting of which constitutes use of one particular public name:[10]

> ...when the word is received from one person and stored for passage on to the next person, it isn't, of course, put into the pocket in the way in which a coin can be stored in its passage from person to person. The coin is put into the pocket and there it is located. There is a definite answer, whether we know what it is or not, as to whether the lucky coin that your coach gave you is really the very one that his coach gave him...

Kaplan advocates what he calls the "common currency" conception of names, on which public names are abstract entities of a very particular sort: "utterances and inscriptions are *stages* of words, which are continuants made up of...interpersonal stages along with some more mysterious *intra*personal stages." I do not elaborate on the particulars of Kaplan's position here; instead, I use the label "public names" to characterize the general position that I see both Kripke and Kaplan (though perhaps not Donnellan) as committed to: almost always, when a speaker uses a name, she is using a (public) name that has been passed to her (since creation of a new name presumably happens only rarely). (For discussion of the merits of, and possible problems with, Kaplan's view of words, see Cappellan (1999) and Alward (2005). Both Cappellan and Alward claim that "the causal-historical theory does not imply the common currency conception of names" (Alward (2005) fn. 22.) Whether or not they are correct about this, Kripke *does* explicitly characterize reference as proceeding via a single name's passage from speaker to speaker – thus, I take it that he *does* view the transmission of reference as necessarily involving public names.)

[10] As Alward (1994) puts it, "...Kaplan is a little vague about what kind of psychological process has to occur in order for a speaker's linguistic output to count as an occurrence of the same word as some prior linguistic input, that is, in order for the input and the output to be appropriately causally related." p. 174.
Kaplan does, however, maintain that if I say "Aristotle was wise," and you sincerely intend to *repeat* the name that I used, then you do so – though the sound that you produce may be wildly different from the sound that I produced, your intention to repeat suffices for you to utter the same name that I did. (See Cappelen (1999) for arguments against this claim.) Even if Kaplan is right about this, however, it does not solve the *general* problem of what determines name identity on an occasion of utterance. For that, we need an account that accommodates not just cases in which someone directs a repetition-intention towards a recently-heard name, but also (as noted earlier) those in which someone does not know from whom he received a name, and yet uses it, as well as cases in which a person has received several (perhaps homonymous) names from a single source, and uses a particular one of those names.

In the case of the word, we feel that the comparable question doesn't have the same very straightforward answer, because it isn't put into the pocket, it is put into memory…This form of storage, *in the mind* (rather than in the pocket) makes the continuity much harder to trace.[11]

Kaplan's use of the coin analogy is a particularly apt one: in portraying names as maintaining the identities and 'values' established at their creation even as they are passed from person to (very different) person, the direct reference view clearly assimilates names to currency. So we must consider carefully whether name and coin – and, in particular, their storage and retrieval process – really are so alike.

Imagine that my coach gives me his lucky 1968 quarter, which I put into my pocket. Some time later, I decide that I would like to hold the lucky coin as I walk onto the field. If I take a 1985 quarter from my pocket, then the coin that I hold as I walk onto the field is not the coach's lucky coin, even if I believe that it is. And if I instead pull a smooth, heavy plastic disk from my pocket, then what I have retrieved is not a coin at all, and could not serve as one in any normal transaction. In general, whether an object is indeed an item of public currency (and, if so, what value it has) is independent of a potential wielder's intentions and beliefs – and someone who has *no* intentions or beliefs directed at currency may still step squarely on the coach's one and only lucky quarter, even if she has never heard of the coach and doesn't know what a quarter is.

No so with names. The identity of an uttered name must, in some way, be determined by facts internal to its utterer. If, three years ago, I had a conversation with Mary and took "Aristotle" into my vocabulary as a result, and last year, acquired a

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[11] *Ibid.*, p.106

distinct "Aristotle" from Jane, then today, when I utter "I guess that Aristotle was a pretty good philosopher," *something about me* must (at least partly) determine that the first (rather than the second, or neither) of those public names appeared in my utterance.

To appeal, as direct reference proponents often do, to a "causal" or "historical" connection between my utterance and one of those past conversations will not suffice to account for the retrieval of one name rather than another. After all, neither one of the earlier conversations 'caused' me to produce my utterance today. Rather, I was listening to James, recalled that some time ago I had heard stories about a Greek who wrote about biology and logic and ethics, felt pretty confident that the Greek's name was "Aristotle," and spoke up. I really don't remember when, or from whom, I got the "Aristotle" that I uttered – but the direct reference account holds that, nonetheless, I have (let us suppose) used the public name that I received from Jane. This use forges a new link in a causal chain of uses tracing through Jane all the way back to the name's introduction, and that is why I refer to the object that I do. The causal chain that brought the name to me cannot, however, provide the explanation for why my utterance contained the particular public name that it did.[12]

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[12] The full account of how public name receipt and retrieval are linked will also need to accommodate the fact that a speaker may produce an utterance containing a single public name even though she thinks that she has used two. This becomes clear when we consider examples like that of Kripke's Peter, who believes himself to have acquired two names "Paderewski," one with which he has associated the description "talented musician", and one with which he has associated "unpleasant politician", though he has in fact only ever encountered a single public name "Paderewski" (in Kripke (1979)). Since there is only one public name "Paderewski" in Peter's vocabulary, it is that name that he uses (twice) when he says "Paderewski is not Paderewski," even though he produces that utterance believing himself to be using two names.

Kripke does tell us that in Peter's case: "[o]nly a single language and a single name are involved." (p. 421) However, in a footnote, he continues: "One might argue that Peter and we do speak different dialects, since in Peter's idiolect 'Paderewski' is used ambiguously as a name for a musician and a statesman (even though these are in fact the same), while in our language it is used unambiguously for a musician-statesman"). It is not clear what Kripke's own position is on the argument that "one" might give – surely it would raise the old worry, of how an advocate of

Perhaps surprisingly, Kripke offers a simple explanation of how, in his own case, he can account for having retrieved a particular name:

> ...I call only one object "Aristotle", though I am aware that other people, including the man I call "Onassis" or perhaps "Aristotle Onassis", had the same given name. Other readers may use "Aristotle" to name more than one object...and *for them* (1) ["Aristotle was fond of dogs"] has no unambiguous truth conditions. When I spoke of "the truth conditions of (1)", I perforce assumed a particular reading for (1).[13]

That is, Kripke suggests that he maintains a personal policy of allowing only a single place in his lexicon for the sign "Aristotle", and that he uses "Onassis" for another man whose name is "Aristotle".[14] This is perhaps akin to claiming that one has ensured that the *only* quarter in one's possession is the coach's lucky quarter, and so is able to immediately determine that one has retrieved the lucky quarter, because one is holding a quarter. But this could not be endorsed as a general characterization of name storage

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idiolectal names could satisfactorily account for Peter's successful reference with his uses of the various "Paderewskis" with which he has associated such meager descriptive information.

[13] Kripke (1980), pp. 8-9; italics mine. The notion of "same given name" is of little use in the direct reference framework, in which the name "Aristotle" introduced at a particular time as a name of a particular person is as distinct from the name "Aristotle" introduced at a different time to name a different person as it is from the name "Plato". Of course we can acknowledge the obvious fact that some (distinct) names are spelled and pronounced the same – but to do so is not to accept that they are in any interesting way 'the *same* name', as far as direct reference is concerned. Thus, Kripke ought not to have claimed that Aristotle Onassis and Aristotle the philosopher have "the same given name," but rather, that the two men's names share pronunciation and spelling.

[14] Making this move does not actually improve the situation. First, it is not clear whether the man that Kripke calls "Onassis" was ever 'baptized' with that name. Furthermore, accepting that he was would seem to require us to accept that his name "Onassis" is distinct from the "Onassis" that his father was baptized with, which in turn is distinct from the "Onassis" that his brother was baptized with, etc., a position at odds with our understanding of the notion of 'a family name'. Finally, even if we allow that "Onassis" is a public name of just this man, we will find ourselves again facing the same problem: we will be at risk of encountering the name "Onassis" (of a woman whose name is also "Christina) and the name "Onassis" (of a woman whose name is also "Jacqueline Kennedy"). What will determine which of *those* names we are using when we utter: "Onassis is powerful"?

and retrieval by the direct reference theorist. After all, if I have an "Aristotle" in my vocabulary, and I encounter another's utterance of "Aristotle was fond of dogs," I have no control over the identity of the public name "Aristotle" in the utterance – either it is, or it is not, the name already in my vocabulary. If it is a different "Aristotle," then the only choice offered me by the public names position is to accept or decline the opportunity to add *that* public name to my vocabulary; nowhere in the view is there room for a unilateral speaker decision to "call" a name's referent something else. (Surely my conversational partner would become justifiably irritated with me if I refused to use his "Aristotle," and instead generated an "Ari" or "Onassis" of my own.)[15]

The most important thing to note, however, is that Kripke appears to be claiming that he identifies the *name* "Aristotle" that he is using via knowledge of which *man* it is the name of. This interpretation is supported by Kripke's subsequent claim that "...in practice it is usual to suppose that what is meant in a particular use of a sentence is understood from the context. In the present instance, th[e] context made it clear that it

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[15] Gottlob Frege's similarly stipulative impulse moved him to reject a public names conception. Of two men who both produce utterances containing "Dr. Gustav Lauben", Frege wrote:

> ...Herbert Garner knows that Dr. Gustav Lauben was born on 13
> September 1857 in NN and this is not true of anyone else; suppose,
> however, that he does not know where Dr. Lauben now lives nor
> indeed anything else about him. On the other hand, suppose that
> Leo Peter does not know that Dr. Lauben was born on 13 September...
> Then as far as the proper name "Dr. Gustav Lauben" is concerned,
> Herbert Garner and Leo Peter *do not speak the same language*, although
> they do in fact designate the same man with this name; for they do not
> know that they are doing so. (1997), p. 333.

And Frege went on to suggest that the way to "...avoid the awkwardness..." [of Garner and Peter unknowingly referring to the same man with their utterances] is to "...*suppose* that Leo Peter uses the proper name 'Dr. Lauben' and Herbert Garner uses the proper name 'Gustav Lauben'." (*Ibid.*, p. 333, italics mine.)

was the conventional use of 'Aristotle' for the great philosopher that was in question."[16] Here, again, we have the suggestion that an *identifying description of the referent* (or, at least, a description that accurately characterizes the referent – "the great philosopher") is what guides the identification of a name.

And so, we arrive at a dead-end of sorts. According to direct reference proponents, speakers refer by using public names that have been "passed" to them. These theorists must, therefore, provide an explanation of what makes it the case that a speaker uses a particular public name on an occasion of utterance. Kripke suggests that a speaker identifies and uses a public name *as* the name of a particular referent – and so it seems that the very arguments from ignorance and error that direct reference theorists marshaled against descriptivism can be deployed against their view as well.

2. Solving the problem

Direct reference theorists must come to terms with the role of speaker-associated descriptions in name use and reference. In particular, theoretical acknowledgment of the fact that speakers associate descriptions with names can provide direct reference with the means to resolve the problems raised in the previous section.

Soames, though he denies that names have descriptive *meaning*, nonetheless takes the position that the descriptions that a speaker associates with a name can be part of *what she asserts* with that name.[17] He claims that, in uttering "Carl Hempel was my

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[16] Kripke (1980), p. 9.

[17] Soames (forthcoming).

neighbor," he asserts that the philosopher, Carl Hempel, was his neighbor;[18] another speaker, who associates different descriptive information with the name "Carl Hempel," could utter the same sentence but assert something different with it. Soames' conclusion is that, "[a]lthough Kripke was right that the *meanings* of these names are thoroughly nondescriptive, Frege was right that we often *use* sentence containing them to make assertions, and express beliefs, that are, in part, descriptive."[19]

The role that Soames assigns to descriptions is, however, problematic. Soames suggests that the actual meaning of a name –that is, its referent – can constrain what one asserts with a sentence containing that name. In particular, only some propositions will qualify as what Soames calls "proper pragmatic enrichments" of a sentence meaning. Though Soames does not offer a detailed account of what distinguishes proper from improper pragmatic enrichments, all of his examples of name-containing sentences being used to assert descriptive propositions involve descriptions that actually fit the name's referent. If, as the choice of examples implies, descriptions associated with a name that do not fit its referent are not part of what one can assert with the name, we are left with an odd combination of speaker power and impotence: the descriptions that a speaker associates with a name (in part) determine what she asserts, even though they are no part of the meaning of the expressions that she employs – except in cases where her descriptions do not meet a certain standard (in which case it is unclear what she asserts, or whether she asserts anything at all).

Furthermore, the descriptions that a speaker associates with a name do not appear to be good candidates for information that she intends to assert. If, as Soames

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[18] *ibid.*, p. 7.
[19] *ibid.*, p. 9.

and other direct reference theorists emphasize, speakers do very often diverge in the descriptions that they associate with the same name, someone who uttered "Carl Hempel lived in Princeton" should not expect to convey to her audience a proposition containing the descriptions that *she* associates with "Carl Hempel". Rather, she should expect that, when she uses that name, her audience will associate descriptions other than the ones that she does with it; to the extent that speaker and hearer entertain descriptive propositions when they hear the sentence, we should expect them to be *different* descriptive propositions. (A more minor, but related, point is that, at least sometimes, the descriptions that we associate with a name are very much *not* something that we would wish to assert.)

Rather than following Soames' proposal that we associate descriptions with public names in order to *say* something descriptive, direct reference theorists would, I suggest, do better to recognize that such descriptions perform a rather different function. It turns out that speaker-associated descriptions are what complete the story of how speakers employ and refer with public names: speakers use descriptions in order to (idiosyncratically) individuate, and then re-identify for use, *particular* public names. As direct reference theorists have amply emphasized, the description or descriptions that a speaker associates with a name may accurately characterize the name's referent – but it need not; the description may be uniquely true of the referent – but, again, it need not be; and finally, the description may be one that is commonly associated with that name by other speakers in the community – but it may also be a description that only a single speaker has associated with that name.

We can imagine a student who accompanies a friend to a class, and listens with interest to a lecture that commences with the announcement: "Aristotle was the first biologist." The student takes this name "Aristotle" into his vocabulary, associating with it the description: "the Roman biologist". Some weeks later, this same student reads a biography of the singer Maria Callas and takes another "Aristotle" into his vocabulary, associating rather different descriptions with it. When he later says to his friend: "Aristotle sure seemed to know a thing or two," the 'retrieval' process that leads to his utterance – that is, whether he intends to use the name with which he has associated "first Roman biologist," or instead the name with which he has associated "international lover" – determines which "Aristotle" that utterance contained. We can recognize that the description "international lover" plays an essential role in this speaker's idiolectal individuation of a particular public name, while also maintaining that the man to whom he refers need not be a lover at all (perhaps the biography contained some shockingly misleading anecdotes).[20]

By associating descriptions with an encountered name, a speaker provides herself means by which to be guided on occasions of name retrieval. Since the aim of associating

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[20] Highlighting the systematic speaker practice of description-association also allows us to explain how Peter can believe himself to use distinct names as he utters a single name "Paderewski" twice. Peter has made the mistake of 'sorting' one public name as two names by associating different descriptions with two occurrences of that single name, which he then uses in his utterance of "Paderewski is not Paderewski". Just as Peter's (erroneous) belief that he has met two men does not make it true that there really *are* two men, so too should we recognize that, in taking himself to use two names, Peter, in this case, is simply wrong. When we point out to Peter that he has in fact used the same name twice in his utterance, we should expect him to accept that he has made an error, and say something like: "Oh, I see: Paderewski *is* Paderewski!" Peter can thus not only *assert* the opposite of what he had previously done, but can do so by using, as before, a single name twice. Peter's cognitive architecture will surely undergo a notable realignment between his two utterances, but that will have no effect either on what he says, or which names he uses when he says it.

descriptions is neither specification of a referent, nor provision of content to our audience, we should not find it surprising that, as Kripke reminds us, we sometimes associate the same description with *different* names:

> ...many people who have heard of both Feynman and Gell–man, would identify each as "a leading contemporary theoretical physicist".... to the extent that the *indefinite* descriptions attached or associated can be called 'senses', the 'senses' attached to "Cicero" and "Tully", or to "Feynman" and "Gell-man", are *identical*. Yet clearly speakers of this type can ask..."are Feynman and Gell-man two different physicists, or one?" without knowing the answer to either question by inspecting 'senses' alone...[21]

Someone who has associated the description "leading contemporary physicist" with both "Feynman" and "Gell-man" may well wonder whether, or believe that, "Feynman" and "Gell-man" are names of the same person. She will, however, use the striking *prima facie* differences in pronunciation and spelling to sort "Feynman" and "Gell-man" as distinct *names*. Having done so, she will associate a description or descriptions with each – for it is by means of associating the description "leading contemporary theoretical physicist" with "Feynman" that she can distinguish it from the "Feynman" with which she associates the description "daughter of a famous physicist". When this is *not* so – when, for example, someone encounters two public names "Feynman" but

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[21] Kripke (1979) pp. 409-10. Though Kripke does not mention it here, there will also be cases where what is associated with "Feynman" (the name of the physicist) are descriptions like "famous lounge singer," "scheming captain of industry," etc. Association of some combination of descriptions, even if they abysmally fail to characterize a name's referent, is what allows a speaker to track that particular name.

associates no descriptive information *at all* with them, or associates the very same descriptive information twice – then, if she later produces an utterance containing "Feynman", there can be *no answer* to the question: "Which name did she use?" (and, if there are two referents of the two names "Feynman", to the question: "To whom did she refer?"). For these questions to have an answer, there must be some means by which she is able to distinguish these names in cognition, such that she indeed produced her utterance with an intention directed toward one name rather than another.

3. Conclusion

In rejecting description theories by emphasizing their inability to account for reference in cases of speaker ignorance or error, Kripke foreshadowed a challenge to his own direct reference view of name use and reference. The direct reference account portrays speakers wielding particular names with objective histories and properties, but does not acknowledge that speakers must have some means of overcoming inevitable *name-directed* ignorance and error. That, I have claimed, is what descriptions do: they are attached by individual speakers to public names for the purposes of identification and retrieval. In the end, we can have an account that embraces the notion of public, shared names, and so does not place the burden of identifying a referent on each individual speaker's shoulders – but only if we acknowledge that uses of a particular public name are linked via idiosyncratic descriptive associations.

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