THE REFERENCE AND CONTENT OF PROPER NAMES:
A SOCIAL AND PRAGMATIC APPROACH

DISSERTATION

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Yimin Kui, M.A.

The Ohio State University
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Dissertation Committee:                                                     Approved by

Professor Joseph Levine, Adviser

Professor Louise Antony

Professor Robert Kraut

Adviser
Graduate Program in Philosophy
ABSTRACT

The goal of my dissertation is to propose and defend a *unified* account of the semantic content of proper names that can address all the following six problems facing various theories of proper names: The Modal Argument, the Epistemic Argument, the Semantic Argument, Frege’s Puzzle, Belief Puzzles, and Empty Names.

I first defend a theory of reference concerning proper names. I argue that for every proper name, there is a structured web of community uses associated with it. Among the objects involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name, the object that stands out as the dominant bearer of the web of community uses is the referent of the name. Roughly, an object becomes the dominant bearer of the web of uses, if it either satisfies or causes the weighted most of the properties/uses in the web.

Secondly, I examine Nathan Salmon’s and Scott Soames’s defenses of the direct reference theory. For their strategies to succeed, they need the assumption that all the properties/beliefs (or at least the specific ones) in the web of community uses of a name are pragmatically imparted information and thus semantically irrelevant information. I adduce various examples to show that there are cases where we have strong intuitions that even specific properties/beliefs can *collectively* be semantically relevant. And I try to find good reasons to support and explain these intuitions.
Thirdly, I propose that the meaning of a name N can be given like this. N means the object that is the dominant bearer of the web of community uses in this (rigidified) world. On the surface, this is a version of rigidified cluster theory. However, I contend that in order to use this theory to solve all the aforementioned difficulties and more importantly, in order to understand our linguistic practices involving proper names, we must emphasize the indispensable roles played by social and pragmatic factors. Indeed, I submit and explain that in essence, this is a social, historical, holistic, and pragmatic viewpoint.
Dedicated to my wife Hua
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I would like to thank Robert Kraut for stimulating conversations throughout the years. I wish to thank him for his inspiring seminars in metaphysics in which I have learned not only contemporary issues in metaphysics, but also philosophies of Quine, Sellars, and Rorty. As a consequence, I feel that I am enlightened to approach the philosophical issues in my thesis from a social, historical, holistic, and pragmatic point of view.

I am grateful to Louise Antony for discussing with me various aspects of this thesis. Her questions often pose serious challenges to my account and force me to either clarify my arguments more carefully or reconsider my position from a different perspective. As a result, I believe that the quality of this thesis, especially the first chapter, has been improved significantly.

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VITA

September 16, 1964.......................... Born – Shanghai, China

1985......................................... B.S. Mathematics, Nanjing University China

1997-1999................................. Graduate Assistant in Philosophy
                                  Louisiana State University

1999-present............................ Graduate Associate in Philosophy
                                  The Ohio State University

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: Philosophy
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Any attempted account concerning the meaning and reference of proper names must face at least the following six major challenges:

(1) *The Modal Argument*: According to the traditional descriptive theories, the meaning of a name is given either by a definite description or a cluster of definite descriptions. For example, the meaning of “Shakespeare” can be given by “the author of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Romeo and Juliet*.” But Kripke’s modal argument shows that this is not true, because Shakespeare might not have written any of the great works. Since even the disjunction of the properties that the descriptive theorist usually associates with the name is not necessary, then the meaning of the name cannot be given by these definite descriptions.

(2) *The Epistemic Argument*: If the descriptive theories are true, that is, the meaning of a name is given either by a definite description or a cluster of descriptions, then a speaker who understands the name must know *a priori* the description or the cluster of descriptions. However, this is often not the case. For instance, a speaker can understand the name “Shakespeare,” but she must investigate the world empirically in order to know whether it is true of Shakespeare that he is the author of those books. Thus she does not know *a priori* about the description(s). Consequently the meaning of the name cannot be given by the description(s).
(3) **The Semantic Argument:** The descriptive theories also claim that the reference of the name is determined by the meaning of the name in the following manner: the object that satisfies the definite description or the weighted most of the cluster of descriptions is the reference. However, Kripke uses the semantic argument to show that it is possible that the referent does not satisfy any of the properties the descriptive theorist usually associates with the name. For instance, it is possible that Shakespeare did not write any of the great works commonly attributed to him. Consequently, the reference of the name cannot be determined by these definite descriptions.

(4) **Frege’s Puzzle:** According to the Millian theories, the meaning of a name has no connotation. A name is just a tag to the reference. Moreover, on the direct reference theory, the meaning of a proper name is the reference itself. Frege’s puzzle can be presented as follows. The two statements

(a) Hesperus is Hesperus

and

(b) Hesperus is Phosphorus

encode the same proposition, on the direct reference theory, the proposition is simply “Venus is Venus.” However, statement (a) is *a priori*, whereas statement (b) is not. How to explain this difference in cognitive significance is a challenge to the Millian theories.

(5) **Belief Puzzles:** Let S (a) be a declarative statement containing a proper name a. Substituting a with a coreferential name b, we will get another statement S (b). S (a) and S (b) encode the same proposition according to the direct reference theory. But a rational speaker often affirms one statement and denies the other statement at the same time. Consequently, the speaker affirms and denies the same proposition. The direct reference
theorist needs to explain this seemingly irrational behavior by a supposedly rational speaker.

(6) Empty Names: In our ordinary language, terms such as “Sherlock Holmes” and “Santa Claus” do not have reference. Nonetheless they all seem to have meanings. It is a burden for the direct reference theory to give an account of the meaning of these empty names.

The current general consensus is that problems (1)-(3) have refuted the traditional descriptive theories, whereas problems (4)-(6) pose serious difficulties for the Direct Reference Theory. The goal of my dissertation is to propose and defend a unified account of the semantic content of proper names that can address all these problems.

I structure my dissertation as follows: In chapter 1, I defend a theory of reference concerning proper names which combines the merits of the traditional descriptive theory of reference and Kripke’s causal-historical picture. In chapters 2 and 3, I examine Nathan Salmon’s and Scott Soames’s defenses of the direct reference theory, respectively. I will argue that although their works shed illuminating light on various issues concerning proper names, their defenses of the direct reference theory are still unsatisfactory or at least unfinished. In chapter 4, I will discuss and elaborate David Chalmers’s work on two-dimensional semantics. Although I agree with Chalmers on the two-dimensional framework in general, I take a different approach from his regarding the crucial notion of epistemic intension. In the final chapter, I will use the result of chapter 1 to propose and defend a theory of the meaning of proper names that highlights the social and pragmatic factors in our linguistic practices involving proper names. I will explain how this theory
can address all the above six challenges and in the process I will present other arguments in support of this theory.
CHAPTER 1

THE REFERENCE OF PROPER NAMES

1.1 Introduction

My focus in this chapter is the following question: How is the reference of a proper name picked out in the actual world? In sections 1.2-1.3, I begin with Kripke’s criticism of the traditional descriptive theories of reference. Then I will discuss Kripke’s causal picture regarding reference determination. There are some problems with Kripke’s original heuristic account, notably the problem of reference change. Several philosophers have endeavored to either elaborate Kripke’s causal picture so that problems such as reference change can be eliminated or tackle the problem of reference determination from a different perspective. In sections 1.4-1.6, I will present and examine various views advocated by the following philosophers: Gareth Evans, Michael Devitt, Mark Lance, and Alan Berger.

In section 1.7, I adduce concrete examples to show a relevant phenomenon in reference determination. I dub this phenomenon “our conditional deference to the world.” I will expose some consequences of this phenomenon. In section 1.8, I will propose and defend an answer to the question concerning how the reference of a proper name is
determined in the actual world. I will emphasize the social, environmental, and pragmatic factors in our reference determination. Finally in section 1.9, I will reply to various objections and challenges to my proposal.

1.2 The Traditional Descriptive Theories of Reference

The traditional descriptive theory of proper names originates from Frege’s seminal work. On Frege’s view, every name is associated with a sense that is given by a definite description. For example, the sense of “Aristotle” can be given by “the teacher of Alexander the great.” Frege’s theory has two theses: (a) the sense of a name gives the meaning of the name; (b) the reference of the name is determined by the sense of the name in the following way: the object that satisfies the definite description as the sense is the reference.

There is another kind of descriptive theory, the cluster theory. In “Proper Names,” John Searle makes this important suggestion: “Suppose we agree to drop ‘Aristotle’ and use, say, ‘the teacher of Alexander,’ then it is a necessary truth that the man referred to is Alexander’s teacher—but it is a contingent fact that Aristotle ever went into pedagogy (though I am suggesting that it is a necessary fact that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive disjunction, of properties commonly attributed to him: any individual not having at least some of these properties could not be Aristotle).” (Searle 1958, 591)

Hence according to the Searlean cluster theory, the sense of a name is given by a cluster of descriptions rather than a single one. For example, we usually associate “Aristotle” with a cluster of properties that we commonly attribute to the great
philosopher. And this theory has two corresponding theses regarding meaning and reference, respectively: (a') the meaning of a name is given by a cluster of descriptions; (b') the reference of the name is determined as follows: the object that satisfies the most, or weighted most of the descriptions/properties in the cluster is the reference.

Kripke intends to refute both versions of descriptive theory. He offers two kinds of arguments. The modal argument and the epistemic argument are designed to refute the meaning theses (a) and (a'); whereas the semantic argument is designed to refute the reference theses (b) and (b'). Since we are concerned with reference determination in this chapter, let us consider the semantic argument first.

The question is this. If an object in the actual world satisfies the definite description given as the sense of the proper name, or it satisfies the weighted most of the descriptive properties we associate with the name, is it necessary that that object should be picked out as the reference of the name in the actual world? Kripke says no. He asks us to imagine the following scenario. We associate with the name “Gödel” the property “the author of the incompleteness theorem of arithmetic.” Suppose that the theorem was discovered by a man called “Schmidt” who died many years ago. And Gödel, the professor at Princeton, accidentally got hold of the proof and published it as his own. Now in such a case, although it is Schmidt who satisfies the description, we still feel that the reference of “Gödel” is Gödel the professor. It is also possible that all the great mathematical and logical achievements we commonly attribute to “Gödel” were done by Schmidt. But even in this case, we still feel that “Gödel” refers to Gödel the professor, not Schmidt who satisfies all the properties in the Searlean cluster. Therefore, Kripke’s
semantic argument shows that the reference theses given by the traditional descriptive theories are mistaken.

1.3 Kripke’s Causal Picture

Kripke proposes an alternative account on how the reference of a name is determined in the actual world. He writes: “A rough statement of a theory might be the following: An initial ‘baptism’ takes place. Here the object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by a description. When the name is ‘passed from link to link’, 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.” (Kripke 1980, 96) Kripke was cautious to emphasize that he may not have presented a complete theory, but he does believe that he has presented a better picture of what is actually going on than that given by the traditional descriptive theorists.

It is well known that Kripke’s heuristic account faces a few problems. Some are minor, others are more serious. In the following I will present three sorts of problems and show that they originate from the same source of difficulty.

The Problem with Initial Baptism

According to Kripke, the causal chain starts with a baptism. There the object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by a description. However, a lot of things could go wrong at the initial baptism. Someone might have a nice dream in which he saw a lovely boat. This person named the boat “Jenny” in his dream, pointing to his mental image of a boat. Suppose that when he woke up there was a
boat in his yard which is a surprise birthday gift from his rich friend and the boat looks exactly like the boat in the dream. This man might forget all about his dream and just start calling the boat “Jenny.” He might say something like this: “I don’t know where I have seen this boat before, but I am sure her name is Jenny.”

A father might get drunk at the party in celebration of the birth of his son. After the party, he went to the bedroom and pointed to the bed and claimed: “Let’s call him ‘Jack’.” But suppose that the baby was not in the bed, instead there was a doll with the same size as the baby. In the dim light the drunk father mistakenly took the doll as the baby and dubbed it “Jack.” Now since it is the doll that had causal contact with the speaker when the name was first given, should “Jack” refer to the doll? Obviously not. These are certainly minor or even trivial problems, but it seems that the causal picture needs some refinement about the notion of “baptism.”

*The Problem with Receiver’s Intention*

There is a key assumption in Kripke’s causal picture. That is: when a name is passed from one person to another, the receiver of the name must intend to use the name to denote the same reference as the person from whom he got the name. But in the actual world this idealized assumption can easily be violated.

First, some person may deliberately deviate the causal chain. Some historian with vanity might change the record of a remote historical legend so that it looks like one of his ancestors. If we can challenge the traditional descriptive theory by casting doubt on whether Gödel is immoral, then, by the same level of skepticism, we can challenge the causal theory by casting doubt on whether certain historical records are accurate. If the immoral historian *intends* to use the legendary name to refer to his ancestor, then the
future receivers who follow the rule of Kripke’s causal theory strictly will all use the name to refer to the historian’s ancestor rather than the real legend. The causal chain will be deviated.

It may be replied that there is no problem here because the original causal chain still leads to the real legend so that the correct reference is secured by the original causal chain. But the problem is that we have two causal chains involved here. One leads to the real legend, one leads to the ancestor of the bad historian. The causal theory itself does not provide a mechanism for us to choose between the two.²

Second, besides the imaginary case, in “The Causal Theory of Names,” Evans points out that the deviation of reference actually occurs by accident. He uses an example from Isaac Taylor’s *Names and their History* (1898): “In the case of ‘Madagascar’ a hearsay report of Malay or Arab sailors misunderstood by Mario Polo… has had the effect of transferring a corrupt form of the name of a portion of the African mainland to the great African island.”

Now in this case, we also have two causal chains involved. The original chain leads back to the portion of the African mainland whereas the second chain leads to the great African island. In this case, however, our intuition tells us that we should not follow the original causal chain, rather it is the second causal chain that leads us to the correct reference.

These two scenarios show that the causal chain alone cannot secure the right reference for the speakers, because the causal picture relies on assumptions about the intentions of the speakers that may turn out to be false. As a result, there might be several
causal chains involved with our uses of a name, and the causal picture as it stands does not provide a mechanism for us to choose the right causal chain.

*The Problem of Reference Change*

In “The Causal Theory of Names,” Evans presents the following case: “Two babies are born, and their mothers bestow names upon them. A nurse inadvertently switches them and the error is never discovered. It will henceforth undeniably be the case that the man universally known as ‘Jack’ is so called because a woman dubbed some other baby with the name.” (Evans 1973, 643)

Here is another metaphysical assumption presupposed by the causal picture that turns out to be false. That is, when our community as a whole uses a name, we will associate the name with a *fixed* object. But it is possible that *unbeknownst* to us, we may *systematically* associate the name with multiple objects.

Moreover, it seems to me that *the involvement of multiple objects* in the causal network of a name is the common source of difficulty for all three types of problems. For the problem of baptism, we need to make a decision between the doll and the son, or between the mental image of a boat and the real gift boat. For the problem of reference-securing intentions, we need to make a decision between the real legend and the ancestor of the historian, or between the portion of African mainland and the great African island. For the problem of reference change, we need to make a decision between the baby dubbed “Jack” at the baptism and the man growing up with the name “Jack.”

Having identified the involvement of multiple objects in the Kripkean causal network of a name as the root of the difficulties faced by the causal picture, next I will present and examine important works done by other philosophers coping with this
problem and subsequently with the question of reference determination in the actual world.

1.4 Evans’s Early View

“The Causal Theory of Names” was published in 1973 in which Evans first identifies the problem of reference change and proposes a solution to it. The following are some of the main ideas in Evans’s early position.

First, on the descriptive theory, the object a speaker intends to refer to by his use of a name is that which satisfies or fits the majority of the descriptions that make up the cluster of information the speaker has associated with the name. Evans points out that there is something absurd in supposing that the intended reference of some ordinary use of a name by a speaker could be some item completely isolated causally from the user and his community simply in virtue of the fact that it fits better than anything else the cluster of descriptions he associates with the name. The absurdity in supposing so in reference determination is parallel to the absurdity in supposing that one might be seeing something one has no causal contact with solely upon the ground that there is a wonderful match between object and visual impression.

Evans agrees with Kripke in thinking that the absurdity resides in the absence of the causal relation between the item concerned and the speaker or speaker’s community. But Evans believes that Kripke has mislocated the causal relation. The important causal relation lies between the item’s activities or events involving the item and the speaker’s body of information -- not between the item’s being dubbed with a name and the
speaker’s contemporary use of it. Here “contemporary use of a name” is a broader notion
than “body of information of a name.” A speaker can employ a contemporary use of a
name without knowing any significant piece of the body of information associated with
the name. As Kripke pointed out, a speaker can contemporarily use a name to refer to
whatever object at the end of the causal chain without knowing anything specifically
descriptive about the name.

Second, Evans’s main proposal is this. The item as the reference is not in general the
satisfier of the body of information the speaker has associated with the name. Rather it is
the causal source (or the dominant causal source if multiple items are involved) of the
body of information associated with the name by the speaker.

Thus there are two key notions in Evans’s proposal: source and dominance. Evans
explains them as follows. X is the source of the belief a speaker S expresses by uttering
‘Fa’ if there was a causal interaction between X and S that causes S’s belief of ‘Fa.’ It is
very difficult to clarify this notion of “causal source,” we can probably only have a vague
intuitive grasp of it. Fortunately, Evans’s later position will not need this notion anymore.

Regarding dominance, Evans says: “Dominance is not simply a function of
amount of information (if that is even intelligible). In the case of persons, for example,
each man’s life presents a skeleton and the dominant source may be the man who
contributed to covering most of it rather than the man who contributed most of the
covering. Detail in a particular area can be outweighed by spread. Also the believer’s
reasons for being interested in the item at all will weigh.” (Evans 1973, 648)

Third, with the above new theory at hand, Evans offers a solution to the semantic
argument: “Kripke’s Gödel, by claiming the proof, was the source of the belief people
manifested by saying ‘Gödel proved the incompleteness theorem of Arithmetic’, not Schmidt.” (Evans 1973, 647) The point is that although Gödel does not satisfy (fit) the body of information we associate with the name, he is the causal source of the information, therefore, on Evans’s theory, Gödel is the reference of the name, this matches our intuition.

Fourth, Evans gives many intriguing examples in his paper. I believe that the following two cases are the most representative of his early position.

*The Case of Napoleon*

If it turns out that an impersonator had taken over Napoleon’s role from 1814 onwards, then the body of information a typical historian has about “Napoleon” would still be dominantly of the man responsible for the earlier events and they would have false beliefs about who fought at Waterloo. Nevertheless, if the switch had occurred much earlier, it being an unknown army officer being impersonated, then the historian’s information would be dominantly of the later man. Consequently they would not have false beliefs about who was defeated at Waterloo, but rather false beliefs about that great general’s early career.

Evans thinks that this example clearly shows that in general a speaker intends to refer to the item that is the dominant causal source of his associated body of information.

*The Case of “Turnip”*

Evans ends his paper with this example that enables him to draw various threads together and summarize how his position differs from the causal picture.

Here is the story. A young man, A, leaves a small village in the Scottish highlands to seek his fortune having acquired the nickname “Turnip.” Many years later an old man,
B, comes to the village and lives as a hermit over the hill. Only a few old villagers who knew A are still alive. They falsely believe that it is A that returns. Subsequently they use the name “Turnip” among themselves and it gets into wider circulation among the younger villagers. At this early stage, the body of information the old villagers associate with “Turnip” is dominantly of A rather than B, hence “Turnip” still refers to A.

But suppose that the old villagers die off. Now we have a homogeneous community using the name to solely refer to B. If gradually the body of information the young villagers associate with the name become dominantly of B instead of A, then the reference of the name changes from A to B. In this way, Evans believes that his new theory provides an explanation of the phenomenon of reference change whereas the original causal theory lacks a mechanism to deal with such problems.

I agree with Evans that it is implausible that the reference of a name should just fit the majority of the body of information associated with the name without any causal contact with the speaker or the speaker’s community. I also agree with Evans that the dominant causal source of the body of information the speaker associates with the name should play an important role in reference determination. But I am not sure about Evans’s claim that the body of information the speaker associates with the name can secure the reference of the name via finding the dominant causal source of this body of information.

Let’s look at Kripke’s Gödel case. A typical speaker in our community associates with the name “Gödel” this piece/body of information: “the author of the incompleteness theorem of Arithmetic.” Evans claims that the dominant causal source of this body of information is the reference of the name. Gödel the professor, by claiming the theorem, had a causal interaction with our community that causes the belief of that piece of
information. Thereby Gödel the professor is the dominant causal source of that body of
information. Consequently, it is Gödel the professor rather than Schmidt that is the
reference of the name. I believe that this solution from Evans to Kripke’s Gödel case is
mistaken. The following example shows why.

*The Modified Gödel Case*

Let’s assume that the man who was regarded as “Gödel the professor at Princeton”
actually murdered a man named “Schmidt” many years ago in Vienna and stole his proof
of the incompleteness theorem. This man, whose name used to be “M,” had also
committed a number of other crimes. He had been on the run without an identity for a
long time.

Suppose that M, the murderer on the run, accidentally ran into K who was brought
up since he was a newborn infant by mother Gödel and father Gödel and had been living
with the name “Kurt Gödel” for more than twenty years. M found that he and K resemble
each other very well. Desperately wanting an identity to settle down, M murdered K and
appeared as “Gödel” himself. Then he published the proof of the incompleteness theorem
and consequently became “professor Gödel at Princeton.” But let’s finally assume that
shortly after that he had a heart attack and died.

In the foregoing scenario, there are three objects/items involved: (1) Schmidt who
satisfies the body of information, (2) M, who is the dominant causal source of the body of
information, (3) K, who had grown up with the name “Kurt Gödel” and was murdered by
M.

The descriptive theory is mistaken about the reference of “Gödel” because
Schmidt is not the reference of the name. The original causal theory will pick out the
object that was named “Kurt Gödel” at the baptism. To see this won’t always work, we can imagine that there were several inadvertent switches among the newborn babies. The Gödels named another baby L (who had been switched with their biological son) “Kurt” at the name ceremony and then took baby K back home and raised him up as “Kurt.” It is hard to see that L who has been growing up with another name and has nothing to do with the Gödel family except one interaction at the name ceremony should be the referent or partial referent of the name “Kurt Gödel.” Evans’s new theory also seems problematic because intuitively M as the dominant causal source of the body of information is not the reference of the name in this scenario.

My analysis of the situation is this. In the original Gödel case, we intuitively pick out Gödel the professor as the reference not just because he is the dominant causal source of that one piece of information. Intuitively, we realize/assume that Gödel the professor has been with our community all his life. He has had countless causal interactions/contacts with various members of our community. Ask the people close to him: his parents, his relatives, his colleagues, his teachers and students, etc., each of them will give you some instances of causal contacts with the man they believed rightly or wrongly, to be Gödel. A lot of information about these causal contacts has been forgotten and thus forever lost, nonetheless they should be there as metaphysical facts.

It seems to me that it is this collective body of information that should play an important role in determining the reference of the name. That is, if there is a dominant causal source of the collective body of information regarding our community’s uses of the name,\(^4\) then that dominant causal source should be picked out as the reference of the name. In the original Gödel case, Gödel the professor is the dominant causal source of the
collective body of information regarding our community’s uses of the name “Gödel,”
thus he is the reference. In the modified Gödel case, K, the man who was murdered by M
and thus has nothing to do with that one piece of information we usually associate with
the name, is nonetheless the dominant causal source of the collective body of information
determined by *more than twenty years community uses of the name “Kurt Gödel,”* and
this is why he is the reference of the name.\(^5\)

I want to emphasize the point that sometimes the body of information about our
community’s past uses of the name which is not available to the current members of the
community anymore may play an important role in reference determination. The
following example can highlight this point.

*The Modified Napoleon Case*

Suppose that the man born with the name “Napoleon” is a plain man with no special
talent. There is a bizarre genius who is excited about fighting great battles and changing
the history of human beings but nevertheless utterly impatient with ordinary interactions
with people in everyday life. So this genius, who found out that the ordinary Napoleon
resembles himself very well, had a deal with the ordinary Napoleon. That is, the genius
would take care of all the great things whereas the ordinary man would enjoy and handle
all the mundane stuff.

In such a case, the genius is the dominant causal source of the body of
information currently associated by the historians with “Napoleon.” But it is not clear at
all that he should be the reference of the name. It seems plausible for some people to say
that historically Napoleon was just an ordinary man, all the great things we usually
falsely attribute to him were actually done by a bizarre genius named “X.”
Here is a possible objection to the foregoing example. When people attributed falsely all those great things to the ordinary Napoleon, he also became a dominant causal source of the current body of information associated with “Napoleon.” I think that we can draw a distinction between (indirect) causal factor and direct causal source (I will elaborate on this point later in 1.9). The ordinary Napoleon is a necessary causal factor for us to have current body of information about “Napoleon,” but he is not the direct causal source of this body of information. For example, the piece of information about the battle at Waterloo originates from a direct causal interaction between our community and the genius, not the ordinary man. Thus the genius is the causal source of the body of information about all the great things, whereas the ordinary man is the causal source of the lost information about all the mundane things. We may also say that an object is the original causal source of a piece of information only if it was actually involved in the historical event described by that piece of information.6

Let me summarize. In Evans’s early view, the reference of a name is the dominant causal source of the body of information a typical speaker or an expert in the current community associates with the name. I suggest that Evans’s theory should be modified as follows: the reference of a name is the dominant causal source of the body of information concerning our community’s uses of the name; importantly, large portions of this body of information might not be available to any speaker/expert in our current community anymore. Nonetheless, this lost body of information might in some cases play an important role in reference determination.7
Whether this modified Evansian theory can provide a satisfactory answer to our central question regarding reference determination in the actual world is still an open question. With this in mind, let us now turn to Evans’s position in his later work.

1.5 Evans’s Later View

Evans’s book, *The Varieties of Reference*, was published in 1982. It contains Evans’s later view regarding reference determination. The following are some of the major ideas in Evans’s later position.

First, consider an ordinary proper name using practice, in which the name “N” is used to refer to a person X. In any such practice, there exists a core group of speakers who have been introduced to the practice via their acquaintance with X, and they have the ability to re-identify X on later occasions. Evans calls members of this core group “producers.” The producers do more than merely use the name “N” to refer to X, they have causal contacts with X from time to time and use the name in those contacts. They use the name in speaking to X and in spreading information gained from their causal encounters with X. Other members in the community, who are not acquainted with X, can be introduced into the practice via getting the information from the producers. Evans calls these members “consumers.”

Second, although many utterances of producers and all utterances of consumers have other functions, there is a subset of utterances involving the name in which some particular individual may be said to have been authoritatively called by that name. It is these utterances involving the name, which may be regarded as the point of contact
between the practice and the world, that determine which individual the name as used throughout the practice refers to. In other words, if some one individual is *consistently and regularly identified by producers as N*, that individual will be the reference of the name as used by participants in the practice.

Sometimes it is possible that “N is the F” expresses a piece of false information widely disseminated in a practice in which “N” is used as a name for X. In such a case, we will still conclude that the producers and consumers intended to use X’s name, even though X is not the F. So on Evans’s view, it is quite possible that all the information a consumer has may be false of the reference of the name. In fact a tremendous amount of false and groundless information may be circulating in the community about N, without there being any change in the kind of facts which determine a particular individual as the reference of the name.

Third, Evans points out that there are two elements in Kripke’s causal picture of reference of names. The first is Kripke’s idea that names are endowed with a reference by an initial baptism, or some kind of decision by some speaker or speakers to start a practice of using a name in a certain way. The second element is the reference-securing chain of intentions which Evans calls the Recursive Principle. Namely, a speaker can use the name to refer to the correct reference simply via the intention to refer to whatever was referred to by that speaker from which his use of the name derives.

Although Kripke’s picture is extremely simple and elegant, and makes no appeal to the idea of a name-using *practice* and consistent and regular causal encounters with a particular object, Evans says that he doesn’t believe that an appeal to such an idea can be avoided. Because the use we make of a name depends on the existence in our community
of a coherent practice of using that name to refer to a fixed object. If our community uses of that name have involved several different objects, because the producers regularly confuse them and are not capable of distinguishing them, then a particular speaker’s use of the name will be without a referent, no matter what has happened in the origin of the use of the name.

Finally, as a summary of his later position, Evans writes: “In giving an account of the mechanism whereby a name is endowed with a reference, I have also found it necessary to appeal to a richer and more complicated set of facts than Kripke’s initial baptism, or deliberate reference-initiating act: namely, the activities of the producers, in their practice of using the name in connection with their encounters with a particular object. One of the ways to see the importance of this range of facts in determining the reference of a name is to imagine a case in which they change: a case in which there is an alteration in the identity of the individual which the producers recognize as N.” (Evans 1983, 387-8)

It is clear that the central idea in Evans’s later position is this. If the producers of the name consistently and regularly identify a fixed object as the reference of the name in their causal encounters with the object, then that object should be the reference of the name. Now the information drawn from these causal encounters might all be false, that is why Evans emphasizes that the information that the consumers have may all be groundless. It certainly looks like Evans’s early view that reference is the dominant causal source of the body of information associated by the speaker in the current community with the name. But it is unclear from Evans’s writing whether on his later view, it will be allowed that a certain portion of the body of information concerning past
producers’ causal encounters with the object may not be available to the current speakers in the community. My view is that it should be allowed as I have argued previously.

Now I want to study this question: whether Evans’s later view has given us a solution to our central question. That is, if the producers in our community have had consistent and regular causal encounters with a fixed object when they used the name, should that fixed object be picked out as the reference of the name in the actual world?

It seems to me that the answer is no. Let’s consider the following counterexamples.

*The Case of Goldbach’s Conjecture*

Suppose that one day a man, L, goes to the department of mathematics at Princeton University. He claims that he has a proof of the famous Goldbach conjecture. After talking to L for a while, the professors at Princeton realize that this man has profound knowledge of mathematics. So they ask him what he wants to do with the proof. L says that the proof is quite long, he can give a series of talks in ten days to complete the proof. Thus the talks are arranged. The proof, although long, is very clear with fascinating ideas and methods. After ten days, all the experts are convinced that it is a genuine proof of the conjecture. Since L calls the proof “Newman’s proof,” the mathematicians who attend the talk assume that L is Newman and they start to call the groundbreaking key ideas in the proof “Newman Theory/Method.”

Mysteriously, after the last talk, L disappears forever. But the mathematicians soon have discovered many wonderful applications of the Newman Theory/Method. So they start to say things like: “This Newman is really a genius,” or “Newman’s ideas are
incredibly profound.” Many books and papers have been subsequently published quoting the Newman Theory/Method.

Let’s suppose that the man who gives the talks in the ten days, i.e., L, is not the author of the proof. He is a resident on an advanced planet far away from the Earth. His close friend on that planet, G, actually proves the conjecture. But G, although he has the good will to help the mathematicians on Earth, is too lazy to come a long way to give the lectures himself. So he asks his good friend L (who likes space traveling a lot) to do him a favor. Before L leaves the advanced planet, G asks L to tell the folks on Earth that it is Newman’s proof, while actually there is no one on that planet named Newman.

In such a scenario, some people might judge that the reference of “Newman” should be G who actually proves the conjecture rather than L, the man who gives the talks. Nonetheless, the producers of “Newman” in our community have had consistent and regular causal encounters with L, the man who gives the talks, rather than the real author G. So this is a case in which it is at least not clear that the dominant causal source of the body of information regarding our community’s uses of the name must be the reference of the name. It also poses a challenge to Evans’s later view. The producers of “Newman” in our community have had consistent and regular causal encounters with a fixed object, namely, L, but it is at least not clear that that object L should be picked out as the reference of “Newman” in the actual world.

In this scenario, some people pick out the actual author of the proof as the reference of “Newman” because (1) he really satisfies some crucial pieces of information we (especially the mathematicians, they are the experts in this case) associate with the name, (2) the fact that he actually satisfies these crucial pieces of information we
associate with the name *outweighs* the fact that L is the dominant causal source of the *limited and trivial* body of information we associate with the name about those talks in ten days. Especially when a hundred years later, the Newman Theory/Method flourishes and dominates the mathematics on Earth whereas details about those talks have been completely ignored and forgotten.

The difference between this case and the original Gödel case is this. In the original Gödel case, although Schmidt also actually satisfies some crucial pieces of information we associate with the name, Gödel the professor is the dominant causal source of the *huge* body of information regarding our community’s uses of the name for many decades. Intuitively, we feel that the latter factor *outweighs* the former factor. In the Newman case, although L is the dominant causal source of the *tiny* body of information regarding our community’s uses of the name for ten days, it is easily outweighed by the fact that it is G who actually satisfies many crucial pieces of information we associate with the name.\(^8\)

This may suggest that Evans’s theory at this point needs further elaboration. It is not sufficient to simply use the notion “regular and consistent causal encounters” to identify the referent of a name. There are *various kinds* of “regular and consistent causal encounters,” sometimes the **Quantity** as well as the **Quality** of the causal encounters matter in reference determination.

Here is another possible counterexample to Evans’s later theory.

*The Case of Baby Jack*

Suppose that mother Goodman and father Goodman named their newborn son, J, “Jack Goodman” at the name ceremony. There is an evil scientist who is very interested in the
Goodman family’s unique genetic structure. He needs J for his research and the research will be fatal to the baby. The evil genius creates a baby, E, in his laboratory, he then switches E with J immediately after the name ceremony.

Mother Goodman and father Goodman take care of baby E for a month. During that month, they have consistent and regular causal contacts with E and they recognize E as Jack and they call E “Jack,” although they have always had the suspicion whether E is really their son because E doesn’t look like either of them. At the end of the first month, baby E is killed in a car accident. By that time, baby J has already died after the evil scientist’s research.

In such a scenario, when mother Goodman and father Goodman get to know all the facts, it seems compelling for them to point to the body of baby J and say that this is Jack because *Jack is our son*. So here *satisfying* a crucial piece of information outweighs being the object with which the producers of the name have consistent and regular causal contacts.

A possible objection to the counterexample goes like this. Why can’t we say that there are two Jacks in this scenario? Since a speaker can say so, then this is not a *clear* case where the object that is regularly and consistently identified by the producers as the referent of a name is NOT part of the referent of the name.

I think the challenge can be put as follows. According to the linguistic norms imposed by our community, mother Goodman and father Goodman have the *linguistic freedom* to *insist* that there is only one Jack and that is their beloved son. And they have the freedom to *insist* that baby E is not their Jack as far as the way they use the name. If someone else wants to use the name differently, that is fine. But the challenge to Evans’s
later account is that it cannot explain the Goodmans’ uses of the name which are
normatively permitted by our linguistic community.

From the cases we have considered so far, we can draw the following morals: (1)
In determining the reference of a name in the actual world, both satisfying some pieces of
information (lost or currently available) and being the causal source of some pieces of
information (lost or currently available) carry weight in our decision. When multiple
objects are involved in the causal network of the name, the object that carries the
dominant weight when those two factors considered conjointly should be the reference of
the name. (2) The descriptive theory is problematic because it only takes into account the
factor of satisfying the body of information. Evans’s view seems also problematic
because it goes to the other extreme, it only counts the factor of being the causal source
of the body of information. The original causal picture is problematic because it does not
even provide us with a mechanism to make a decision when multiple objects are
involved.

1.6 Other Proposed Theories: Devitt, Lance, Berger

Devitt’s View

The following are some of the very helpful notions and ideas in Devitt’s work.
First, Devitt says that “underlying” a name token is a “causal chain” “accessible to” the
person who produced the token. This chain is *grounded in the object* the name designates.
For example, if “Nana” is the name of my Cat, the chain underlying my first use of
“Nana” begins with Nana the cat at her naming ceremony, it runs through my perception of that ceremony, from then on it is my ability thus gained to use “Nana” to designate her. Devitt calls such a causal chain a “d-chain,” short for “designating-chain.”

Regarding his key concept of “grounding,” Devitt clarifies that the grounding consists in the person coming to have “grounding thoughts” about that object as a result of the act of perceiving the object. If an object is involved in the causal network for its name at many points other than its naming ceremony, then the causal network is multiply grounded in the object. Devitt emphasizes that multiple grounding is very important, it enables a causal theory to explain reference change and various other problems.

The idealized picture for the causal theory is this. When a name occurs in a statement, there is underlying that occurrence a causal network grounded in a fixed object. In virtue of this the name designates that object. But many things can go wrong. One problem is that the causal chains underlying a name may be grounded in more than one object. As I have argued before, this seems to be the origin of the troubles for the causal picture of reference.

Devitt says that his causal theory of proper names consists of two parts: a causal theory of grounding and a causal theory of reference borrowing. The theory of grounding explains how names are linked to their objects via the activities of the producers. The theory of reference borrowing explains how those members of the community (the consumers) who have never grounded a name in its bearer can get the benefit of the groundings of others. It is clear that Devitt’s distinction between reference grounding and reference borrowing matches very well with Evans’ distinction between producers and consumers.
Second, to propose a solution to the problem of reference change, Devitt appeals to the Gricean distinction between speaker meaning and conventional meaning, and Hartry Field’s notion of *partial reference*.

According to Devitt, what the speaker means by the name he utters is determined by the meaning of the thought that causally underlies his utterance. The conventional meaning of the name in a community is determined by what a member of that community using that name would commonly mean and be taken to mean.

The idea of partial reference can be explained by a concrete example. Again let Nana be my cat. Suppose that Jemima is another cat that resembles Nana and I have been constantly confusing the two. Thus on various occasions, I have made statements like: (1) That cat is Nana, (2) Nana is a Persian, (3) Nana is black, (4) Nana is tired today, (5) Nana catches that mouse very quickly, etc. Since some of my uses of the name are grounded in Nana and some of them are grounded in Jemima, then we can say that the name partially designates both cats. In other words, both cats are partial references of the name.

Third, here is Devitt’s solution to the problem of reference change: “There are two possibilities with designation change: either the name continues after the change to have its old designatum as well as the new, or it does not. In the former case one semantic type splits into two; in the latter one semantic type changes into another. If the community that uses ‘Nana’ for Nana remains largely unaffected by my false statement, ‘This is Nana,’ while the network arising from that statement becomes thoroughly grounded in Jemima, we have an example of splitting. If, on the other hand, Nana is switched with Jemima and
then destroyed, the switch never being discovered, we have an example of one semantic type changing to another.” (Devitt 1981, 151)

I only disagree with Devitt on one point. It seems to me that Devitt’s account does not cover one important type of scenario. That is, when multiple objects are involved in the grounding of a causal network of a name, if there is one object that is the dominant bearer of the grounding of that network (I will clarify this notion later in this chapter), then that object will usually be picked out as the sole reference of the name.

Let me use the Nana/Jemima example to explain. This time let us assume that they are two indistinguishable dogs. If Nana is a dog that doesn’t mean much to me emotionally, then when I find out that I have been using the name “Nana” to refer consistently and regularly to both dogs, I may readily accept that the name has two partial references.

However, I may be emotionally firmly attached to Nana. Suppose that Nana is the dog who once risked her own life to take a bullet and saved my daughter’s life. And when my grandma died, who brought Nana back as an injured and abandoned little puppy and took care of her, Nana was so sad that she stayed around the grave and refused to eat for days. And before a major earthquake, Nana dragged each of us out of the building and saved many lives. And once I had to give Nana away, but she ran 4000 miles from the new home to come back to us and refused to leave. Let’s just suppose that Nana is just such an amazing dog and she has done so many other things that meant so much to me and my family. The fact that it is Nana who actually satisfies these crucial pieces of information that mean tremendously to me seems to break the tie easily. In such a scenario, when I find out that I have been consistently and regularly identifying both dogs
as “Nana,” I will simply say that I have been consistently mistaken to identify Jemima as Nana. Moreover, when I find out that Jemima has none of the great qualities that Nana has, I will adamantly refuse to take Jemima as even part of the referent of the name “Nana.” Sometimes the Qualities of the regular and consistent causal encounters do matter in our reference determination.

I hope that this example shows that Devitt needs to add a notion of “dominance” regarding grounding bearer to his account. In our ordinary uses of a name, we almost take it for granted that various producers of the name will occasionally misidentify some other objects as the reference of the name. But as long as there is an object that is the dominant bearer of our uses of the name, then we will take that object as the only reference of the name.

This example also shows that, contrary to Evans’s later view, we should be cautious not to pick out the object that has been consistently and regularly identified by the producers as “N” in the causal encounters as the reference of “N.” Because the producers may consistently and regularly identify more than one object as “N” during various causal encounters, but satisfaction of some important pieces of information associated with the name may make only one of them the dominant bearer of the uses of the name and thus the only reference of the name. Again, both satisfying certain pieces of information associated with the name and being the causal source of certain pieces of information associated with the name are relevant factors in our reference determination of the name.
Lance’s View

In his 1984 paper “Reference Without Causation,” Lance offers an alternative theory of reference which he believes to be superior to the causal theory. The alternative theory is far more social in character than the causal theory. Lance’s main ideas are as follows. First, Lance takes the central job of semantic theory to be the explanation and prediction of human linguistic behavior, not on the level of the individual but on that of the community. The goal is to explain patterns of behavior present within a community.

Second, Lance relies heavily on Brandom’s theory of reference. Brandom views “refer” as a complex proform forming operator. According to Brandom, claiming that “X” refers to Y is not to say that a certain relation exists between “X” and Y. Rather it is to establish an anaphoric link between “X” and “Y.” Therefore, on Brandom’s view, reference claims relate the use of one term to the use of another term.

Hence to ask what a given term, S, refers to is to ask on what other terms or utterances, S or this utterance of S is anaphorically dependent. That is to ask which other words are used in a way that is similar to the way in which S is used. But on what terms is S anaphorically dependent? How do our linguists decide which terms are related to S? These are tough questions facing Brandom’s account of reference.

The clearest and most easily understood cases are those in which the term in question is an unambiguous one for which there is widespread collateral information in the community. For instance, “the Washington Monument” is anaphorically linked with “that monument in Washington D. C. erected in honor of George Washington.” But there are more difficult cases: What is it about an utterance of a term S that allows us to say that S as used on this occasion is anaphorically linked to U rather than V?
The most difficult cases for this type of view are the ones concerning historical names. One might suggest on behalf of Brandom’s account that there is an anaphoric dependency relation between the present rules for the use of the term and those in force several thousand years ago. But what would be the ground for us to postulate such a relation? Lance’s suggestion is this. The present day community decides to use certain terms in a way that is similar to that of those ancient people and by this decision, they allow them into the linguistic community.

Third, Putnam has introduced the idea of the linguistic expert in a society with regard to natural kind terms. According to Putnam, the reference of these terms is determined not by ordinary speakers of the language but by the experts. In general, the experts for natural kind terms are respected scientists. Lance wants to extend this notion to apply to all terms and I believe this is an important idea contributed by Lance.

Lance explains: “The experts in the use of a proper name for a newborn child will be the child’s parents, the experts in the use of a name of a pet will be the owners, etc. What linguistic fact in general marks one as an expert in the use of a term? It is the fact that the other members of the community are ready to defer to her/him on questions of the stimulus meaning of the term. The experts are the people within the community that have status. Within the context of a small neighborhood, the parents of little Johnnie have the final say on the stimulus meaning of ‘little Johnnie’. The other members use the name only as part of a community within which these experts exist.” (Lance 1984, 346)

Lance is cautious to say that there are many interesting but difficult questions concerning the exact nature of the deference relation by which we determine the experts in a community. But some cases are easier than others. For example, a historical name as
used now is anaphorically dependent on ancient uses of the name because we as a linguistic community are willing to defer to certain ancient language users in the use of that name.

Finally, Lance summarizes his position as follows: “Thus a name, on my account, refers to what the experts in the community say it does. That is just to say that a given utterance of a name is anaphorically dependent on prior uses of that name by the experts in the community. This is just to say that the proper use of a name in a community is that of the experts.” (Lance 1984, 348)

I agree with Lance that the social character of our language and subsequently the social character of our reference determination are extremely important. My main worry with Lance’s view is that sometimes even the experts in the community are not capable of determining the reference correctly. For example, I as the owner of my dog Nana may confuse her with another dog Jemima. If someone replaces little Johnnie with another baby exactly like him, then even the experts, little Johnnie’s parents, may falsely identify the other baby as the reference of “little Johnnie.” Also, if Aristotle had an impersonator who replaced him on rare occasions, then even those ancient experts who were the closest to Aristotle might mistakenly refer to the impersonator on those occasions as Aristotle. The common source of these problems is that even the experts sometimes lack sufficient knowledge about the world in order for them to pick out the right reference or refer to the right object. Thus even the experts in our community must defer to the world so that they can make the right decision about reference determination.

There are two key ingredients in our language and reference. First, it is a social matter as Lance has highlighted. Secondly, it is a matter about the causal interaction
between our community and the world. It seems to me that this second character of our language and reference must also be emphasized. Accordingly, there are two sorts of deference relations involved in our reference determination: ordinary speakers’ deference to the experts in the community and the experts’ deference to the world.

**Berger’s View**

In his 1989 paper “A Theory of Reference Transmission and Reference Change,” Berger offers an articulation about how the reference of a term can change from one object to another. The following are some of the major ideas in Berger’s theory.

First, Berger draws a distinction between two ways in which references of names are determined. The first rests on an intentional notion that he calls “focusing,” the second rests on the semantic notion of “satisfying-a-given-condition.” With this distinction, Berger develops an anaphoric theory of reference transmission and reference change.

The distinction is based on Kripke’s proposal that there are two ways in which an object may be initially baptized: via ostension and via satisfying a description. In Berger’s view, ostension itself typically involves two aspects. First, the baptizer intends to focus on a particular thing. Second, the baptizer generally at the same time uses a description ascriptively (not attributively). That is, the baptizer ascribes a certain property to that object, or takes the object to have that property.

According to Berger, any term whose reference for a given linguistic community is obtained by focusing on an object taken as having a certain property is called an *F-type term*. The process of determining reference in this manner is called *F-style rigid designation*. The second style, which Berger calls *S-style rigid designation*, adduces
descriptions used attributively—corresponding to Kripke’s second way to fix the reference of a name.

Second, on Berger’s account, there are two ways that we transmit the reference of an F-type term. Take, for example, the F-type term “Aristotle.” Obviously there is no object we can *currently focus* on. In such a case, Berger suggests that we might use a description such as: “Aristotle” denotes whomever the historical chain of intentions to corefer ultimately goes back to. Berger calls this mode of transmitting reference “mock-focusing.” The community passes the term “Aristotle” from link to link along an anaphoric chain that is grounded in the object focused on at the baptism. Thus reference determination for terms whose reference is transmitted by “mock-focusing” rests ultimately on an actual focusing.

On the other hand, take the F-type term “Alan Berger.” Here the reference is still alive. People can and do focus on the reference. Berger calls the mode of transmitting reference of an F-type term such as “Alan Berger” *genuine focusing*. It is a process through which a linguistic community passes an F-type term along a historical chain of speakers’ intentions to corefer by means of currently focusing on an object—an object that the community takes to be the reference of the term. Through this process, the community passes the F-type term from link to link along an anaphoric chain that is grounded in the object focused on at the baptism.

Third, Berger gives a necessary condition for reference change of F-type terms. He says: “An F-type term can undergo an unintended change in reference at a particular stage in the transmission of its reference only if at that stage the term’s reference is transmitted by
a genuine focusing on a new referent. Here, current and later focusings can dominate over
previous or even initial focusings in determining the term’s referent.” (Berger 1989, 188)

With regard to a sufficient condition for reference change of F-type terms, Berger
suggests that it should be sought in various social and legal conventions (for example,
those governing the selection and status of names), special interests that attach to certain
kinds of references, the time period during which the community genuinely focuses on
the new referent and so on.

I agree with Berger’s suggestion about the sufficient condition for reference
change of F-type terms. But his necessary condition seems to me problematic. For a
historical proper name, if the genuine focusings were on two objects X and Y, it is quite
possible that for the ancient society, the focusings on X were dominant, thus X was the
reference. But the value of our society may evolve so that our current society may judge
that focusings on Y are dominant, thus Y becomes the reference. Therefore it is possible
that a reference change occurs at a stage where no genuine focusing is involved.

A concrete example may be like this. In China, the name “Lao Tzu” is now
almost synonymous with “the author of the great book *Tao Te Ching.*” But historically
we know little about Lao Tzu. Suppose that there was indeed a man named “Lao Tzu”
2500 years ago, but he was an ordinary man with no talent to write the great book.
Instead it was another talented man in disguise of this ordinary man that wrote the book.
So the genuine focusings were indeed on two objects. The ancient community had no
idea about the profound impact this book would have had on Chinese history and culture.
Consequently it would certainly value the focusings on the ordinary man as dominant
because they had been with him day in and day out and let’s suppose that they had only
had one causal contact with the talented man, why would they pick the talented man out as the reference of “Lao Tzu”? For our current community, the great historic impact of the book certainly makes the focusings on the real author dominant. We will most likely say that Lao Tzu is the man who actually wrote the great book.\textsuperscript{10}

A Proposed Solution

Having presented and examined various views concerning reference change and reference determination, I would like to propose a solution to the problem of the involvement of multiple objects in the causal network of a name. I believe this problem is the origin of most of the troubles facing the causal picture of reference.

The following are the main points I have contended so far.

(1) Being the causal source of some portion of information concerning our community’s uses of the name (not only information available to the current community, but also the lost information about our community’s past uses of the name) carries weight in our reference determination.

(2) Satisfying certain pieces of information associated with the name carries weight in our reference determination.

(3) Regarding reference determination, ordinary members in the community defer to the experts, and sometimes the experts need to defer to the world.

(4) We need a notion of “dominance” in reference determination.

Suppose that multiple objects are involved in the causal network of name “N.” A typical community use of “N” will be like this:

(S) \[ N \text{ is F.} \]
Let’s call an object that actually satisfies (S) the truth bearer of this community use of “N.” Let’s call an object that is the causal source of this utterance (S) (via the causal encounter with the speaker which causes the speaker’s belief of (S)) the causal bearer of this community use of “N.”

So each object involved may be the truth bearer of certain community uses of the name and at the same time it may be the causal bearer of certain other community uses of the name. Both factors count in the process of weighing.

Taking into account all the community uses of the name, if there is an object that stands out as the dominant bearer of all these community uses of the name, then that object is the reference of the name.

In sum, my proposal is this. If there are multiple objects involved in the Kripkean causal network of a name, then the dominant bearer (only in the foregoing specific sense) of all the community uses of the name is the reference of the name. Can this proposal provide a satisfactory answer to The Question of this chapter? In the next section, I will show that there is one more factor in our reference determination that should not be neglected.

1.7 The Phenomenon of Our Conditional Deference to the World

Let’s look at the case of “Aristotle.” Most likely there have been multiple objects involved in the Kripkean causal network of “Aristotle,” because it is highly probable some ancient producers of the name occasionally misidentified various objects as “Aristotle.” Suppose that there is a dominant bearer of all the community uses of the
name, call it A. A may actually satisfy some pieces of information we currently associate with “Aristotle” concerning the great philosophical achievements and other significant events. But A may satisfy none of the things our community (ancient or current) has ever associated with the name. Nevertheless A may still be the dominant bearer of our community uses of the name via being the dominant causal source of these uses. That is, most of the ancient producers of the name, when they used the name “Aristotle,” they had causal contacts/encounters with A, and so A caused their false beliefs/claims.

Can we conclude that A should be picked out as the reference of “Aristotle” in the actual world and consequently claim that we have a solution to our central question of this chapter? Before we do that, let us consider the following two scenarios.

The Case Of Aristotle The Alien Robot
Suppose that A was actually an exquisite robot sent to the earth by advanced aliens from another planet. They managed to plant a zygote-like device in Aristotle mother’s womb. The device had all kinds of chips and programs in it. From then on, everything was done via remote control from the alien planet. The robot was designed to be able to evolve exactly like a normal human being. All the great philosophical achievements were “carried out” by the robot via computer instructions. Let’s further idealize the situation and assume that the producers in our ancient community had never misidentified any other object as “Aristotle.” Thus there was only one object, the robot, involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name. Evidently the robot is the dominant causal source and thereby the dominant bearer of all the community uses of the name “Aristotle.”

Should we pick out this robot as the reference of “Aristotle” in the actual world? In seems to me that people’s intuitions may diverge in such a case. Some people may
take that “Aristotle” refers to Aristotle the robot. They may say something like: “OK, so it turns out that Aristotle is actually a robot, not a great philosopher at all.” On the other hand, some people may insist that in such a scenario, “Aristotle” doesn’t refer to anything. They may insist that the thing they meant by “Aristotle” has never existed. Instead there is this robot that folks have mistakenly believed to be Aristotle. What underlies the difference of people’s intuitions is an interesting and important issue. I will have to leave it to future studies.

The immediate issue is this. In some cases, it is at least controversial or indeterminate whether the dominant bearer of our community uses of a name should be picked out as the reference of the name in the actual world. When we claim that the dominant causal source of the body of information we associate with “Aristotle” is the reference of the name, we leave it to the world about what exactly the object as the dominant causal source is. Namely, we defer to the world regarding whether the object comes from this human zygote or that human zygote, or whether the object has this human genetic structure or that human genetic structure, this much we are perfectly willing to defer to the world. But if it turns out that the object does not even come from a human zygote or it does not even have a human genetic structure, then we may hesitate to defer to the world and some of us may even refuse to defer to the world anymore. Instead we may say that even though there was a dominant causal source of the body of information we associate with “Aristotle,” it was nonetheless not Aristotle but something else.

Therefore, in determining the reference of a name, we do defer to the world, but only to certain extent. In other words, we only defer to the world conditionally. Our
conditional deference to the world seems to be an important phenomenon in our reference determination. The next case is designed to illustrate this phenomenon better. It shows that in some scenarios, most people will refuse to defer to the actual world after they have known all the metaphysical facts about it.

The Case Of Aristotle The Alien Device

Suppose that the aliens were so advanced that instead of sending a man-like robot, they simply sent a tomato-like device to the earth. Although the device looks like a tomato, smells, and tastes like a tomato to folks on earth, it is at the same time an elegant and complex device. It can produce certain visual affects that a human body like visual appearance will be surrounding it. It can also produce a magnetic-like field in the shape of a human body around it so that people who have tactile contact with it will feel as if there is a human body.

Now in such a case, when having access to these metaphysical facts in the actual world, most people will likely refuse to take the tomato-device as Aristotle. We probably will simply say: “There was no Aristotle, those damn aliens just sent a ‘tomato’ to fool us.”

These two examples are certainly artificial. But parallel cases might exist in ordinary life. Suppose that John has been dating his lovely girlfriend Mary for a couple of months. Mary is beautiful, kind, gentle, and smart and John is deeply in love with her. Now if it turns out that this Mary is actually a man in disguise and this man not only has the ugliest look like a monster in the horror movies, he acts like an evil person. He has committed a serial of heinous murders. After John has access to all these metaphysical facts in the actual world, must he still defer to the world and pick out that object as the
reference of “Mary”? Probably not, it is certainly acceptable by the standard of our linguistic community if John says something like this: “There is no Mary in the world, the Mary I loved so much is just an illusion in my mind.”

One might object that in this case John is just saying these things metaphorically, so he doesn’t mean what he says. But the challenge is that John has the linguistic freedom to say these things literally rather than metaphorically. Thus John can insist that there is no Mary at least as far as he uses the name. To illustrate his point, John might say something like this: “Here is a case in which what I say is only meant to be metaphorically. When I see a friend who has just lost a lot of weight, I may say metaphorically to him ‘you are a different person now.’ But when it comes to Mary, I literally mean it that there is no Mary that I know of.”

We can probably employ Quine’s “Web of Belief” metaphor to shed some light on the phenomenon of our conditional deference to the world. For every proper name, we not only rely on the causal network in our community, but also associate the name with a structured web of beliefs. We are willing to defer to the world conditionally regarding the peripheral beliefs such as what kind of human origin the reference of the name has or what kind of human genetic structure that object has, etc. But there are beliefs at the core of the web. For example, in the case of “Aristotle,” beliefs such as “Aristotle is a human being,” or “Aristotle doesn’t become a rock when no one is around him,” or “Aristotle is not a number,” should be at the center of the web. If the world turns out to contradict the beliefs at the core of the web, we may refuse to defer to the world anymore. The reason is probably that in order to change the core beliefs, we need to make adjustments across the web, the resulting web will be a complete distortion of the original web. And it will be
significantly *inconvenient* in our linguistic practice if we still associate this massively
distorted web of beliefs/uses with the same name, and this forges our intuition to refuse to
derfer to the world unconditionally.

   Obviously this is a difficult issue. I hope to explore it later in my future studies.

   For the purpose of this chapter, I only want to emphasize the importance of the
phenomenon of our conditional deference to the world in reference determination.

1.8  A Theory of Reference

   Our focus in this chapter is the following question: How is the reference of a proper name
picked out in the actual world?

   Here is my attempted answer to the question: Within the Kripkean causal network
of the name, the dominant bearer of all the community uses of the name with the
constraint of our conditional deference to the world is the reference of the name.

   The following are some idealized assumptions by the causal picture of reference:

   (1) At the baptism, there is only one object involved which is dubbed with the name
   either via ostension or via an attributive description.

   (2) Along the reference-preserving chain of intentions, nothing can go wrong, everyone
   involved will have the good will or ability to preserve the intended reference.

   (3) Within the entire causal network of the name, speakers (producers) will have causal
   encounter with only one object whenever they use or intend to use the name.

   (4) Although we may have all false beliefs about the reference, the object as the causal
source of our false beliefs will turn out to be something quite close to what we have
expected. So the causal source of our beliefs of “Aristotle” will turn out to be some human being, and the causal source of my beliefs of “Nana” will turn out be some dog.

We have shown that all these idealized assumptions of the original causal picture could turn out to be false. I would like to argue that our attempted answer to the central question of reference determination can be used to provide a refinement for the original causal picture so that all these problems can be accommodated.

Regarding assumption (1), this is the problem with initial baptism. Let’s go back to the case in which the drunk father pointed to the doll and named his newborn son “Jack.” We probably should not understand “baptism” narrowly as just a formal ceremony, but more appropriately as the early stage of the community uses of the name. If so, we can offer an explanation of the situation as follows: in the following days, weeks, months, most of the times when the father and other people used the name “Jack,” they would associate it with the boy via causal contacts, not the doll (though, occasionally they might be wrong again). Nonetheless, it is the boy that was the dominant bearer of the early community uses of the name. Accordingly, “Jack” should refer to the boy, not the doll.

This case shows that sometimes the initial dubbing of a name by ostension at the baptism doesn’t carry much weight in our deciding the real reference of the name. It is the actual uses of the name around or after the baptism that collectively determine the reference, that is, if there is a dominant bearer of the community uses of the name at that early stage.

Regarding assumption (2), this is the problem with receiver’s reference-preserving intention. In the case of the bad historian, we have two objects involved in the
causal network: the real legend and the historian’s ancestor. Although the latter object was the bearer of some of the community uses of the name, but when we get access to the metaphysical facts, it is clear to us that these bearings should carry little weight, thus the real legend is the dominant bearer of the community uses of the name and consequently the real reference.

We can compare this case with the case of “Madagascar.” In that case, there are also two objects involved in the causal network: the portion of the African mainland and the great African island. But here when we get access to the metaphysical facts, we judge that the later uses of the name are much more important, thus, this time, it is the latterly involved object that is the dominant bearer of our community uses of the name and consequently the reference.

Regarding assumption (3), we can see that the case of reference change is just a very special instance in violation of this assumption. That is, we have two objects, one is the sole bearer of the community uses of the name at the early stage of the causal network and the other is the sole bearer of the uses at the later stage of the network. The reference changes when gradually and collectively the importance of the later uses overrides the importance of the early uses of the name. At that stage, the latterly involved object becomes the dominant bearer of the community uses of the name.

Finally, the constraint of our conditional deference to the world should be able to deal with the violation of assumption (4). Accordingly, our proposed answer to the central question of this chapter can provide a refinement for the original causal picture of reference.
Let me summarize. In this chapter I have first presented and examined various important views concerning reference determination contributed by other philosophers. Then, based on their pioneering works, I have proposed a solution to the question about how the reference of a name should be picked out in the actual world. Finally, I have argued that the proposed solution can offer a refinement for the original causal picture of reference.

1.9 Objections and Elaboration

In this final section of the chapter, I would like to consider several questions concerning my account of reference determination. Some of the questions are raised as serious objections or challenges, whereas others may just ask for clarification. I hope that the following discussion of these questions can provide some elaboration of my proposal.

Question 1. Why do we need such a refinement of Kripke’s causal picture just because of certain cases of reference change? Such cases are mainly artificial and rare in real life. Besides, for any theory of reference, we can artificially construct some scenarios as counterexamples to that theory, that doesn’t mean that the theory is not the best theory and hence needs to be replaced by another theory.

Cases such as that of baby switching immediately after baptisms are indeed artificial and rare in real life. But as I have argued before, the origin of troubles facing Kripke’s causal picture is the involvement of multiple objects in the Kripkean causal network as
candidates for the reference of the name. And this phenomenon has important non-artificial, real life examples.

The most recent examples are cases concerning the references of “Saddam Hussain” and “Osama Bin Laden.” We know that there are possibly several doubles for Saddam Hussain and Osama Bin Laden. It is even difficult for the experts in our community to pick out the real Saddam or Osama. But what do we mean by the real Saddam Hussain? It is not merely the baby who was dubbed “Saddam Hussain” many years ago because right now this condition has little weight in our reference determination. We can easily imagine the real Saddam Hussain (the one we are talking about every day in our news media) is not the one who was dubbed “Saddam Hussain” at the end of the causal chain. It is not merely either the man who the producers of the community have had consistent and regular causal encounters with and have identified him as Saddam Hussain, because some of the doubles may have been with the real Saddam for many years. The difference between the real Saddam and his doubles is that the real Saddam is the one who did all those politically important things in the recent Iraqi history, he is the one who has committed all those heinous crimes we associate with the name, and he is the one who has the mental and psychological capacity to do potential damage to the security of the United States and the world.

Hence here is a real life case that shows the need of a refinement of Kripke’s causal picture and Evans’s early and later views.

It is worth pointing out that the traditional descriptivist theorist can give a similar response to Kripke’s semantical argument. That is, cases like that of Gödel-Schmidt are artificial and rare in real life. In most of the real life cases, the traditional descriptivist
theory works very well. So the same question can be raised: why do we need a new theory just because of some artificial cases like the Gödel-Schmidt case?

Kripke says that his causal picture gives a better account of what is going on about reference determination than the traditional descriptivist theory. Why does he say so? My understanding is that it is a better account not just because it can deal with certain rare and artificial cases that the descriptive theory can’t. It is a better account mainly because it exposes certain underlying facts about reference determination that the descriptive theory fails to illustrate. Namely, an object becomes the reference of a name not just because it satisfies the description(s) as sense, but because it is also the object that is dubbed with the name at the beginning of the causal chain with reference-securing intentions. As a result, we can understand the issue of reference determination in a more comprehensive, hence better, way.

Analogously, I believe that my proposal is a needed refinement of Kripke’s causal picture because it highlights some underlying facts in reference determination that are not mentioned by Kripke’s original account. That is, an object becomes the reference of a name not just because it is dubbed with the name in the beginning of the causal chain with reference-securing intentions, but because it is also the object that is the dominant bearer of our community uses of the name. In this way we can hopefully go one step further toward a clear understanding regarding what is going on in our reference determination.

Question 2. Why can’t we take a thoroughgoing externalist position even in the case of Aristotle the tomato-like device? That is, since the device has done all these things to
I would like to respond to this question from three aspects.

First, I take that the task of a theory of reference is to provide an explanation of the linguistic practice in our community concerning the use of the name. My contention is that in the case of Aristotle the tomato-like device, most competent speakers in our community will refrain from accepting the tomato-like device as the reference of “Aristotle.” And the constraint of our conditional deference to the world is meant to capture this phenomenon of our communal linguistic practice.

Here a thoroughgoing externalist is a person who takes the position that whatever object out there in the world that causes our body of information about a name should be picked out as the reference of the name. My point is that this extreme position is problematic because it is contrary to our communal linguistic practice in some cases. Secondly, here is another example that may be helpful in support of the need of the constraint of our conditional deference to the world.

*The Case of Charles the Bug*

In the movie *A Beautiful Mind*, mathematician John Nash suffers from Schizophrenia. As a result, he has had persistent hallucinations about a man named Charles Herman. Charles first appeared as Nash’s roommate at Princeton and became Nash’s good friend. And Nash will have consistent and regular “contacts” with Charles throughout the rest of his life.
Now let’s revise this story to the following hypothetical scenario. Suppose that Nash’s mental images about Charles are caused by a tiny bug that can emit a certain chemical substance that can cause Nash to have coherent mental images about Charles around the bug. We assume that the small bug first met Nash in his room at Princeton and after that it would have consistent and regular causal encounters with Nash. And every time the bug met Nash and emitted that chemical substance, Nash would have coherent hallucinations about Charles around the bug. When the bug left Nash, his delusions about Charles would disappear.

In this hypothetical case, the bug is the dominant causal source of all the information associated with “Charles.” And it is the object that has the consistent and regular causal contacts with the producer of the name. But should we follow the extreme externalist view to pick out the bug (the dominant causal source) as the reference of “Charles”? It seems to me that most competent speakers in our community will say something like this: Charles is just an illusion in Nash’s mind caused by a special bug. Thirdly, let me use a metaphor to explain and highlight my main point.

*The Metaphor of Visual Impression*

In his criticism of the traditional descriptive theory of reference, Evans points out that there is a sense of absurdity in supposing that one might be seeing something one has no causal contact with solely upon the ground that there is a wonderful match between the object and one’s visual impression. The traditional descriptive theorist is certainly mistaken to neglect the need of causal contact in our reference determination. However, in their correction of this mistake, Kripke and Evans go to the other extreme. That is, they only emphasize the causal contact but ignore other factors. The result is also
counterintuitive. It is like a person claims that he has visual impression of a certain object solely based on the fact that he has had causal contact with that object and his visual impression is caused by that object, regardless how distorted his visual impression is of that object.

A moderate non-descriptivist might concede that the distortion of categorical properties (the descriptions at the core of the web) may not be allowed, but insist that the specific descriptions are irrelevant in reference determination. I would like to dispute this position too. Consider the following example. Suppose someone takes a picture of George W Bush, and for some weird malfunction of the equipment, the photo turns out to look exactly like John Kerry. Now this distorted photo has the right causal contact with George W Bush and it gets all the categorical properties right. But can we say that it is still a picture of Bush although it looks exactly like Kerry? I submit it’s very difficult to say so. Thus the specific properties of Bush collectively also play a role in determining whether a picture is a picture of Bush. I would like to contend in this dissertation that likewise the specific properties we associated with a name collectively also play a role in determining the reference and meaning of the name.

The moral we can draw from this metaphor is this. There are two indispensable factors in reference determination. First, the reference must have causal contacts with the producers of our community. Secondly, the reference should match our community uses of the name to some extent, or at least the mismatch cannot be too outrageous.
Question 3. What is the difference between causal factor and causal source?

This question is related to the modified Napoleon case. The worry is that the ordinary man might go around and brag about how he had done those great things and thereby cause beliefs of people around him and thus become a causal source too of the information current historians associate with “Napoleon.”

I use the modified Napoleon case to make the point that lost information about mundane things may also play a role in our reference determination. We may idealize the situation as follows. Whenever the talented man fought and won a great battle, people who witnessed the battle would immediately spread the news throughout the community. And the ordinary man never talked about anything about those great events. In such an idealized situation, the talented man would be the sole causal source of the information about the great events. But the ordinary man still played an indispensable causal role for the members in the community to hold coherent beliefs about “Napoleon” with regard to the great events. It is in this sense we can make a distinction between causal source and causal factor regarding certain community uses of a name.11

Question 4. What exactly is our community?

I do not believe that there is an exact definition of “our community.” It is rather a pragmatic (social, political, etc.) issue. A person can become a member of our community if he/she satisfies certain criteria concerning rationality, linguistic competence, biological/psychological/social connections, etc. So it is obviously a very
difficult notion to clarify. But for our purpose, we can focus on the relevant part of our community within the Kripkean causal network of the name. That is, after the initial baptism, people who have certain causal contacts with the previous uses of the name with the intention to use the name to refer to the same object will become a member of the relevant part of the community.

Question 5. What counts as a community use of the name?

My suggestion is that we can understand community uses of the name as justified beliefs concerning the name. For example, the information we currently associate with names such as “Aristotle” and “Napoleon” are certainly justified beliefs based on the evidence that is currently available to us, but they are not necessarily true.

Moreover, community uses of a name should be understood as justified beliefs from our community point of view. Some individual might hold privately or personally that certain assertions involving the name are justified beliefs, but the community may judge that they are not. In other words, community uses of the name is what the community allows individual speakers to say about the name, or uses involving the name with endorsement from the authority of our community.
Question 6. How should we understand truth bearer and causal bearer?

In an ideal situation, a truth bearer of a use of the name is the object that satisfies the use, while a causal bearer of a use of the name causes our community to endorse that use but it does not necessarily satisfy the use.

In real life cases, there might be partial truth bearers and partial causal bearers. For instance, two people may work together to prove the incompleteness theorem of arithmetic. Had they worked separately, none of them would have been able to prove it. In this case, these two people may be regarded as partial truth bearers of the use “the author of the incompleteness theorem of arithmetic.” In Kripke’s Gödel case, if two people together murdered Schmidt and stole his proof, then later published the proof, then these two may be regarded as partial causal bearers of the use.

Question 7. What is dominance? How is the dominance of a bearer determined?

I will answer the second question first. For each object involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name, the amount of contribution that the object makes to the formation of our community uses of the name either via being a truth bearer/partial truth bearer of some uses or via being a causal bearer/partial causal bearer of some other uses will be measured. The dominance of a bearer means that the bearer makes the most valuable contribution. Therefore dominance is a notion that is closely related to the issue of value. What determines the values we put on various community uses of a name is a difficulty question. My suggestion is that it is determined by various pragmatic (social, scientific,
political, economic, cultural, etc.) factors. For example, with regard to the reference of “Osama Bin Laden,” the huge impact of the event of “9. 11.” makes those uses concerning Bin Laden’s roles in terrorism carry a lot of weight.

Question 8. How should we understand the phrase “our deference to the world”?

The worry is that we usually defer to a person, not to a thing. I borrow the phrase to express the following points: (1) We will accept whatever the world turns out to be. (2) We will rely on the world to tell us about what is hidden out there. (3) It is as if the world had the final and authoritative say in these cases about reference.

Question 9. What is the structure of the web of our community uses of the name?

Take the example of “Aristotle.” Very roughly, I believe that there are three layers in the structure of the web of our community uses of the name. At the core of the web, there are uses concerning logical properties and kind properties such as “Aristotle is not a rock,” or “Aristotle is a person.” In the middle of the web, there are uses concerning socially or personally significant events and characteristics associated with the name. At the periphery of the web, there are uses concerning mundane events or trivial characteristics associated with the name.

Question 10. Why is the Dominant Bearer Account a theory of reference? Or why is it not a trivial theory? Namely, whatever object a speaker will pick out as the reference, the
theory will simply say that *that* object is the dominant bearer for the speaker.
Consequently, the theory can never be wrong.

I will respond to this question from three aspects.
First, the Dominant Bearer Account is an empirical generalization of how competent
speakers practice linguistically concerning the reference of proper names. Just like the
utilitarian theory of ethics claims that as a result of empirical generalization, one can
reduce the right action to the action that brings about the greatest happiness to the society,
this Dominant Bearer Account claims that one can reduce the referent of a name to the
object that is the dominant bearer of the community uses associated with the name.
Second, there are cases that could potentially fail this theory. For instance, if our current
linguistic practice concerning the reference of proper names is such that we will pick out
whatever object in the formal name ceremony (no matter how unusual the situation of the
baptism was, e.g., the dream boat case, the drunk father case, etc.). Then, it is hard to say
that this dominant bearer account is the correct account. It would be much better to adopt
the original causal picture instead. However, we do not linguistically practice in that way.
And my point is that as an empirical generalization of our current linguistic practice, the
dominant bearer theory is a more general and accurate account.
Third, the proponent of this theory can take a stand against certain individual speaker’s
assertion of “dominant bearer.” For example, if a speaker says on the one hand that Bill
Clinton is the dominant bearer of these uses (pointing to the descriptions in the recently
published autobiography *My Life*), but on the other hand this speaker insists that whatever
object that satisfies one property, namely, it is the person who said in front of the
National TV that “I did not have sex with that woman …,” will be the object that is the dominant bearer of all these community uses, then the proponent of the theory can claim that this speaker has a false or flawed understanding of what “dominant bearer” means. Hence in this sense, this is not a trivial theory that will go along with whatever an individual speaker says.  

Question 11. Here is a dilemma for the dominant bearer position. For all the counterexamples posed against the thoroughgoing non-descriptivist externalist position of reference determination, either they are only borderline exceptions or it can be claimed that there are multiple partial referents involved. As a consequence, there is no clear counterexample against the thoroughgoing non-descriptivist theory. So why do we need this dominant bearer theory anyway?

The thoroughgoing non-descriptivist externalist position of reference determination claims that the reference of a name can be determined by regular and consistent causal encounters with the producers of the name. Thus satisfying descriptions, especially satisfying non-categorical, specific descriptions associated with the name is irrelevant in our reference determination.

I have used the cases such as that of Nana and Jemima and that of Osama Bin Laden and his double to contend that Evans’s later position needs to be further developed. To which the non-descriptivist response consists of two points. First, they admit that these are borderline exceptions to the thoroughgoing externalist theory. But they argue that every theory has its own exceptions. My reply is that the fact that the
Dominant Bearer Theory (DBT) can offer a satisfactory explanation of these realistic cases whereas the thoroughgoing externalist theories can’t shows that DBT is making progress in our search of a better understanding of reference determination, even though DBT might have its own borderline exceptions.

Secondly, the non-descriptivist claims that in the cases of Nana and Jemima, and Osama Bin Laden and his double, an individual speaker can always say that there are two Nanas and two Osama Bin Ladens. Thus there is no clear counterexample to show that any object that has regular and consistent causal encounters with the producer of the name is not part of the referent of the name.

I would like to focus on the case of Osama Bin Laden. According to our current community linguistic practice, we do not take the double as another Osama Bin Laden, even though that object has had regular and consistent causal encounters with the producers of the name and has been identified regularly and consistently (but mistakenly) by the experts as Osama Bin Laden. Rather we believe that there is one real Osama Bin Laden and it is very important for us to capture that real one.

The fact that some individual speaker can use the name differently from the way our current community uses the name cannot alter the fact that the thoroughgoing non-descriptivist externalist account as it stands now cannot offer an explanation of our current linguistic practice in such scenarios. From this point of view, we can say that the Dominant Bearer Theory is not redundant.
Conclusion

With the foregoing clarification, let me summarize the main result of chapter one. The question of the chapter is how to pick out the reference of a proper name in the actual world. My proposed answer is as follows. For a given name, there exists a structured web of community uses of the name, within the Kripkean causal network of the name, the dominant bearer of these community uses of the name with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world should be picked out as the reference of the name.
1. For example, all we currently know about many remote Chinese historical figures comes from the one and only authoritative book *Shi Ji* written by an ancient historian named Sima Qian who lived about two thousand years ago. It is fairly easy for him to describe some remote figure in such a way that it resembles one of his ancestors. That is, he could associate with the name a body of information that is true of his ancestor rather than the historic figure. Moreover he genuinely intended to use the name to refer to his ancestor which did historically exist as a different object from the real legend.

2. We can view the historian’s descriptions of the name as a second baptism of the name. But the problem is whether we should choose the object initiated at the first baptism or the object initiated at the second baptism. The original causal picture is silent on this point.

3. I think that there are implicit assumptions here. For example, the referent of “Gödel” is a person who is the causal source of the information. Therefore, although things like newspaper stories can also be causal sources of the information for some speakers, because of the implicit constraint, they cannot be candidates for the referent of the name.

4. From Evans’ solution to the original Gödel case, we can see that Evans focuses only on the body of information our current community associates with the name. I want to emphasize that information unavailable to the current community may also play a role in reference determination.

5. If it is not obvious that M isn’t the referent in the scenario I have described, we can revise it as follows. M murdered K who had been a professor at Princeton for a month and had not published anything. The next day M mailed the manuscript of the proof to a Journal and then died on the same day. As competent speakers, we normally understand a name of a person to mean the object that has such and such properties. These properties include the ones concerning his whole life. In the case that all the community members who were familiar with the person’s past have died and no record has been left, these properties concerning his early stages of life become unavailable to the current community. But they still play a role in our reference determination, because of our implicit deference to the past community experts.

6. In Kripke’s Gödel-Schmidt case, we may say that there is no original causal source for the piece of information that Gödel is the author of the proof of the incomplete theorem of Arithmetic. Because the object that was actually involved in the historical event described by that information did not cause our community
to have the corresponding belief. This is a good counterexample to my attempt to save Evans’s early position. But the later Evans abandoned this approach.

7. For instance, in this modified Napoleon case, the ordinary man, via being the causal source of the lost body of information, becomes a legitimate candidate for the reference of the name ‘Napoleon.’

8. People’s intuitions may diverge in such a case. But the fact that it is at least indeterminate whether L is the reference of the name poses a challenge to the claim that the object that the producers in our community have had consistent and regular causal encounters must be the reference of the name. The role of satisfying information in reference determination can be more clearly seen in the later cases involving two indistinguishable dogs Nana and Jemima and Osama Bin Laden and his double.

9. Namely, in reference determination, even the experts in our community must rely on the metaphysical facts in the world that might be not available even to them at certain times.

10. According to Berger’s definition, this is still a F-type term. Berger also claims that an S-type term may undergo a reference change if (i) its status is changed to that of an F-type term and (ii) its reference is then transmitted by means of a genuine focusing (Berger 1989, 197). It seems to me that (ii) is not true either.

11. It does seem necessary to me that for an object to be a “causal source” and subsequently a candidate for the referent, the community should at least believe that the object satisfies the description.

12. I think that there is in general an independent fix on dominance. In the majority of the cases, rational speakers will agree on which object is the dominant bearer, and one can argue that it is because we have all recognized some independent metaphysical fact. Of course, there are borderline cases in which rational speakers can disagree. But similarly there are borderline cases facing the utilitarian theory in which rational people will disagree about which action will bring about the greatest happiness in the society.
2.1 Introduction

Starting from this chapter, my goal will be to search for a solution to the following question: What is the semantic content or meaning of a proper name? In Naming and Necessity, Kripke offers compelling evidence to show that the traditional descriptive theory of meaning is mistaken, and he proposes that a proper name is a rigid designator that designates its referent in every possible world in which the referent exists.

After Kripke’s work, most philosophers have abandoned the traditional descriptive theory. Instead, the direct reference theory has been widely accepted. Roughly, the direct reference theory states that the semantic content/meaning of a proper name is its referent. Although the direct reference theory successfully avoids the problems faced by the traditional descriptive theory, it has its own difficulties posed by Frege’s puzzle, belief puzzles, and empty names. The direct reference theorists have done ingenious works to cope with these three difficulties. In my dissertation, I will focus on the works by Nathan Salmon and Scott Soames, two prominent champions of the theory.
I aim to show that their defenses of the direct reference theory still face serious challenges.

In this chapter, I present and examine Salmon’s defense of the direct reference theory. Section 2.2 is a review of Kripke’s arguments against the traditional descriptive theory of meaning. Section 2.3 is an introduction to the main theses of the direct reference theory. Section 2.4 is concerned with Frege’s puzzle. I shall challenge Salmon’s strategy of employing the distinction between semantically encoded information and pragmatically imparted information to explain away the informativeness of “a = b” where a and b are two co-referential expressions. In section 2.5, I first argue that Salmon’s account of belief attribution, using a ternary relation $BEL$, leaves the rationality of the speaker unexplained. Namely, why would a rational speaker simultaneously assent to and dissent from the same proposition (which he grasps via two different ways, but he has nevertheless grasped it)? I will then discuss possible responses to this rationality argument. More importantly, I contend that Salmon owes us a clarification of what it is on the direct reference theory for a speaker to grasp/recognize a proposition involving proper names. In section 2.6, I present various objections to Salmon’s abstract object theory of empty names. Finally, in section 2.7, I will discuss other strategies to deal with the empty name problem on behalf of the direct reference theory.
2.2 Kripke’s Arguments Against The Traditional Descriptive Theory of Meaning.

On Frege’s account, every proper name has a sense. The sense of the proper name must satisfy all the following three conditions. First, the sense is the name’s semantically associated purely conceptual “mode of presentation.” Second, the sense provides the mechanism that secures the name’s reference. Third, the sense is the name’s meaning or semantic content.

The sense of a name can be given by a descriptive property. For example, the sense of “Shakespeare” can be given by “the man who wrote Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet.”

There are basically two arguments against this Fregean Descriptive Theory of Meaning.

The Modal Argument

Consider the following statement:

(1) Shakespeare is the man who wrote Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet.

If the meaning of “Shakespeare” is the sense, i.e., “the man who wrote Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet,” then, by substitution, the statement

(2) The man who wrote Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet is the man who wrote Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet

should encode the same proposition as (1) does.

Since (2) is logically true and thus necessary, (1) should be necessary too. But (1) is not necessary. For there could be a possible world in which Shakespeare did not write
any of these works. Therefore the meaning of “Shakespeare” is not the sense expressed by the foregoing description.

Michael Dummett raises an objection to the modal argument. According to Dummett, proper names are descriptions that take “wide scope” in modal contexts. When read with wide scope in modal contexts, (2) is not necessary either. Because the man who wrote *Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet* might not have written any of these works.

Kripke acknowledges that descriptions read with wide scope in modal contexts have the same behavior as proper names in modal contexts. But he insists that that does not mean these descriptions are meanings of proper names. To see this, let us consider non-modal contexts. Look at two simple sentences:

(1’) Shakespears was fond of pets.

(2’) The man who wrote *Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet* was fond of pets.

Neither of these two simple sentences contains modal or other operators, thus there is no room for scope distinctions. However the issue of rigidity can still be applied to both sentences. Kripke points out that “Shakespeare” in (1’) is rigid, whereas “the man who wrote *Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet*” in (2’) is not. No hypothesis about scope conventions for modal contexts can explain this view. It is a doctrine about the truth conditions, with respect to counterfactual situations, of the propositions expressed by all sentences, including simple sentences. There exist possible worlds where Shakespeare was still fond of pets but no one wrote those great works, in
such worlds, (1’) and (2’) have different truth values, therefore (1’) and (2’) encode different propositions. (Cf. Kripke 1980, 10-12)

There is allegedly another weakness in the modal argument. Philosophers such as Linsky and Plantinga have suggested that we use modally indexed properties as senses. For example, the sense of “Shakespeare” can be given by the property “the man who actually writes Hamlet.” Since even in a possible world in which Shakespeare doesn’t write Hamlet, he is still the man who writes Hamlet in the actual world. Hence the modal argument seems ineffective against this kind of modified Fregean senses. However the following epistemic argument is not affected by this modification of the traditional descriptive theory.

The Epistemic Argument

If Frege’s theory is right, then (2), as a logical truth, is not only necessary, but also a priori, consequently (1) should be a priori too. But it is easy to imagine circumstances in which it is discovered that, contrary to common belief, Shakespeare did not write Hamlet, The Merchant of Venice, and Romeo and Juliet. Since this possibility cannot be excluded by reflection on the concepts involved, it follows that statement (1) conveys information that is knowable only a posteriori, i.e., knowable not by conceptual analysis, but by recourse to sensory experience. This shows that (1) is not a priori and therefore Frege’s theory is not right.

Since it is not knowable a priori that Shakespeare actually writes Hamlet, then the Epistemic Argument also poses a challenge to the aforementioned modification of Frege’s theory using modally indexed properties.
It is clear that the modal argument and the epistemic argument can be used to refute Searlean cluster descriptive theory. According to Searle’s theory, the meaning of a name is given by a cluster of properties. For example, the meaning of “Shakespeare” is given by the cluster of properties concerning the great achievements we commonly associate with the name. Shakespeare would be the object that satisfies sufficiently many of these properties.

There could be a possible world in which Shakespeare didn’t do any of the great things we commonly associate with the name. Also it is not knowable a priori that Shakespeare did sufficiently many of those great things.

In conclusion, these two arguments together show that various versions of the traditional descriptive theory of meaning concerning proper names are mistaken.

2.3 Information Content and The Direct Reference Theory

Each of the above arguments against the traditional descriptive theory of meaning seems to imply two lessons. First, a name is not synonymous with any kind of description. Secondly, a name denotes/designates rigidly its reference in every possible world in which the reference exists. The direct reference theory that Salmon advocates and defends embraces these two points and the theory goes one step further to claim that the semantic content/meaning of a proper name is the object that is the reference of the name.

In his 1986 work Frege’s Puzzle, Salmon develops the foregoing Millian insight into a theory of semantic content. The following are the main theses of Salmon’s account.
(I) Thesis Concerning Information Content: Declarative sentences encode pieces of information, called propositions. The proposition encoded by a sentence, with respect to a given context and time, is its information content with respect to that context and that time.

(II) Thesis Concerning Compositionality: The information content, with respect to a given context and time, of a sentence is a complex, ordered entity (e.g. a sequence) whose constituents are semantically correlated systematically with expressions making up the sentence, typically the simple (non-compound) component expressions.

(III) Thesis Concerning the Main Idea of The Direct Reference Theory: The information value (contribution to information content), with respect to a given context c and time t, of any simple singular term (e.g. a proper name) is its referent with respect to c and t (and the world of c).\(^1\)

(IV) Thesis Concerning the Information Value of a Sentence: The information value, with respect to a given context and time, of a sentence is its information content, i.e., the encoded proposition. (Cf. Salmon 1986, 41-42)

We can see that the direct reference theory successfully avoids the difficulties posed by the arguments against the traditional descriptive theories. For example, even in a possible world in which Shakespeare didn’t do any of the great things we commonly attribute to him, he would still be the reference of the name. For the epistemic argument, we will see later that on the direct reference theory, a competent speaker can simply use a name without knowing a priori any descriptions associated with the name, because these descriptions are not part of the semantic content of the name. Finally, with regard to the
semantic argument, since on the direct reference theory, the meaning of the name is the reference of the name, then it becomes a matter of logic that the meaning of the name determines/secures the reference of the name.

Although the direct reference theory has the above merits, as a proposed theory of meaning for proper names, it faces its own problems posed by Frege’s puzzle, belief puzzles, and empty names. In the following three sections, we will examine one by one the nature of these difficulties, Salmon’s solutions, and whether Salmon’s solutions are successful.

2.4 Salmon on Frege’s Puzzle

In his celebrated work “On Sense and Reference,” Frege poses the following challenge to any theory of meaning. For two names “a” and “b,” how can “a=b,” if true, differ in “cognitive value,” that is, in cognitive information content, from “a=a”? It is clear that they differ, since the first statement is knowable a posteriori and hence informative whereas the second statement is knowable a priori and thus uninformative. However, supposing that “a=b” expresses the relation of identity between the referent of “a” and the referent of “b,” and that “a=a” expresses the relation of identity between the referent of “a” and the referent of “a,” then if “a=b” is true, it expresses the same relation between the same pair of objects as “a=a” does. It would seem to entail that “a=b” and “a=a” ought to convey the same piece of cognitive information. But clearly they do not. Consequently we have a puzzle.
Frege proposes his theory of sense to solve the above puzzle. On Frege’s theory, although “a=b” and “a=a” express the same relation of identity between the same pair of objects, this does not entail that they encode the same piece of cognitive information. The first statement is informative because it is made up of the different senses of “a” and “b.” The second statement is uninformative because it is made up of the same sense of “a.” As a result, these two statements convey two different pieces of cognitive information.

As a direct reference theorist, Salmon cannot adopt Frege’s solution. For on the direct reference theory, the only semantic information that a name contributes is its referent, therefore the Fregean sense as a purely conceptual mode of presentation cannot be part of the semantic information contributed by the name. Thus Salmon needs to provide a different kind of solution to Frege’s puzzle on behalf of the direct reference theory.

Let us first look at Salmon’s very helpful diagnosis of the structure of Frege’s puzzle. According to Salmon, Frege’s puzzle consists of the following three key elements.

**The Principle of Compositionality:** If pieces of information are complex abstract entities, and two pieces of information p and q having the same structure and mode of composition are numerically distinct, then there must be some component of one that is not a component of the other. Otherwise p and q would be one and the very same piece of information.

**Frege’s Law:** If a declarative sentence S has the very same cognitive information content as a declarative sentence S’, then S is informative (or contains an extension of our knowledge) if and only if S’ is (does).
A Minor Premise: Given two names “a” and “b,” “a=b” is informative and a posteriori whereas “a=a” is not. (Cf. Salmon 1986, 55=57)

Salmon argues that there is nothing to be gained by challenging the principle of compositionality, and that Frege’s law as a special instance of Leibniz’s law is beyond challenge. So Salmon’s strategy to solve Frege’s puzzle on behalf of the direct reference theory is to challenge the seemingly trivial minor premise that “a=b” is informative and a posteriori.

In Salmon’s view, it is very important in dealing with Frege’s puzzle to distinguish two notions. The first is the notion of the information content of a sentence on a particular occasion of its use. This is a semantic notion. The second is the notion of the information imparted by the particular utterance of the sentence. This is a pragmatic notion. When we claim that it is a basic function for a sentence to encode information, we invoke the notion of semantically encoded information. To illustrate the quite different notion of pragmatically imparted information, Salmon offers three concrete examples. First, under certain circumstances, one can learn that Smith has a cold by simply observing Smith sneeze and then blow his nose. In this sense, Smith’s action may thus impart certain information, Salmon contends that it would be utterly ridiculous to suppose that sneezing and nose blowing has any semantic content.

Second, Salmon suggests that Frege himself was aware of the distinction between semantically encoded and pragmatically imparted information. Frege drew a distinction between the thoughts that are expressed (supposedly semantically encoded information) and those which the speaker leads others to take as true although he does not express them. For example, a commander conceals his weakness from the enemy by making his
troops keep changing their uniforms. The commander is not expressing any thoughts, although his actions are calculated to induce thoughts in others (supposedly pragmatically imparted information).

Third, consider the numerical equation “5=V,” using both the Arabic and the Roman numeral for five. To someone familiar with one but not both of those numeral systems, this equation pragmatically imparts nontrivial information that the numeral he doesn’t know is a numeral for the number five. But the information semantically encoded by “5=V” is precisely the same as that encoded by “5=5.”

With the foregoing clarification of the key notion of pragmatically imparted information, Salmon observes four significant points in his defense of the direct reference theory against Frege’s puzzle.

(a) Usually the information semantically encoded by a sentence will coincide with the information pragmatically imparted by utterances of the sentence. But the two notions often diverge. In addition to the information semantically encoded by a sentence, an utterance of the sentence may impart further information concerning the speaker’s beliefs, intentions, and attitudes, information concerning the very form of words chosen, or other extraneous information.

(b) It is clear that “a=b” seems informative, whereas “a=a” does not. Actually, an utterance of “a=b” imparts information that is (pragmatically) more valuable than that imparted by an utterance of “a=a.” For example, it imparts the nontrivial linguistic information about the sentence “a=b” that it is true, and hence that the names “a” and “b” are co-referential. But this is pragmatically imparted information, and presumably not semantically encoded information.
Abstracting from their strikingly distinct pragmatically imparted information, one can see that the two sentences, “a=b” and “a=a,” may well semantically encode the very same piece of information that the referent of “a” is itself. At the very least, it is by no means certain, as Frege’s puzzle pretends, that the difference in “cognitive significance” we seem to feel is not due entirely to a difference in pragmatically imparted information.

In effect, Frege’s puzzle begs the question against the direct reference theory. Because on that theory, “a=b” semantically encodes the piece of information that the reference of “a” is identical with itself. Thus semantically the sentence is noninformative and knowable a priori. The seeming informativeness is due to the pragmatically imparted information. If Frege’s puzzle is ultimately to succeed, one must make a further argument to show that the information imparted by “a=b” that makes it sound informative is, in fact, semantically encoded. (Cf. Salmon 1986, 59, 78-79)

Here is my worry about Salmon’s strategy. In (a), Salmon implies that all information concerning the speaker’s beliefs, intentions, attitudes, etc. is pragmatically imparted information. Then in (b), Salmon claims, without an argument, that “a=b” only imparts pragmatic information that the sentence is true and names “a” and “b” are co-referential.

It seems to me that typically “a=b” conveys more information than Salmon alleges. A competent speaker usually understands “a” as the object that has properties p₁, p₂, …; and “b” as the object that has properties q₁, q₂ …. Consequently she understands “a=b” as expressing that the object that has properties p₁, p₂, … is the object that has properties q₁, q₂, …. In this sense we can say that this sentence, if true, extends the
knowledge of the speaker. That is, in the future, the speaker will understand “a” (and “b”) as the object that has properties $p_1, p_2, \ldots$ and $q_1, q_2, \ldots$. Therefore “a=b” imparts more information than merely that “a” and “b” are co-referential. Now the question is whether this extra information is only pragmatically imparted information, if it indeed is, then it will pose no problem for Salmon’s account.

Since this extra information is about the beliefs a speaker has concerning the names, then what about Salmon’s suggestion that all information concerning speaker’s beliefs, intentions, attitudes, etc. is pragmatically imparted information? To investigate this question, let us look at a concrete example. Suppose that a father is teaching his two year old son the word “Hesperus.” Pointing to the evening sky, the father says: “Hesperus is *that* thing which is a planet.” Having just learned that two plus three equals five, the son asks: “Does Hesperus know that two plus three equals five?” “No!” The father replies and continues: “Hesperus is the planet that appears at *that* position in the evening sky every day. But we couldn’t see it yesterday evening because it was raining here.” In the end, the father mentions that Hesperus is uncle John’s favorite planet.

So now the little son has five beliefs associated with “Hesperus.”

(b₁) Hesperus is *that* thing which is a planet.
(b₂) Hesperus does not know that two plus three equals five.
(b₃) Hesperus is the planet that appears at *that* position in the evening sky everyday.
(b₄) Hesperus couldn’t be seen last night because it was raining here.
(b₅) Hesperus is uncle John’s favorite planet.

It seems that (b₁) and (b₂) are pieces of information that are *semantically relevant*, because if a speaker believes that Hesperus is not a planet but a rabbit, or a speaker
believes that Hesperus knows that two plus three equals five, then we can say that this speaker’s understanding of “Hesperus” is *semantically defective*. On the other hand, (b₄) and (b₅) are pieces of information that are *semantically irrelevant*, or indeed they are pragmatically imparted information. Therefore Salmon’s implication that *all* information concerning speaker’s beliefs, intentions, attitudes is pragmatically imparted information is problematic. Consequently Salmon needs a further argument to support his contention in (c) that the difference in “cognitive significance” between two sentences “a=b” and “a=a” may be due *entirely* to a difference in pragmatically imparted information. For as I have argued, “a=b” may extend a speaker’s beliefs associated with the names, and intuitively certain beliefs are semantically relevant and hence are not pragmatically imparted information.

In the following, I will offer three arguments/reasons in support of the intuition that pieces of information such as (b₁) and (b₂), although they are information about an individual speaker’s beliefs concerning a name, are semantically relevant information.

*The Argument From Reference Identification*

Suppose that the little son, Johnny, does have the false belief that Hesperus is not a planet but a flying super rabbit that was floating in the sky that night, and he holds on to this belief throughout his childhood. One consequence will be that whenever little Johnny is presented with the object (Hesperus) itself or a correct description of Hesperus, he will always refuse to identify it as the referent of the name, because little Johnny will only identify some rabbit as the referent of Hesperus. Thus this kind of false beliefs will result in *massive* (consistent and regular) mistakes in reference identification. Since reference
identification is a *semantic* issue, therefore this is one reason that we should treat (and we do intuitively feel this way) this kind of false beliefs as semantically relevant.\(^2\)

*The Argument From Linguistic Moves/Inferences*

Suppose that this time little Johnny has the false belief that Hesperus *knows* (not in a sense of a computer, but a conscious being) that two plus three equals five and holds this belief throughout his childhood. Later in his childhood, Johnny learns that a conscious being who knows math can also feel pain, hungry, happy, sad, etc. As a consequence, Johnny will insist on making the following linguistic moves in the space of giving and asking for reasons involving the name: Hesperus will be in pain when someone hurts her. Hesperus will be hungry if she can’t find things to eat for days. Hesperus will be sad if her loved ones die, etc.

Thus this kind of false beliefs will result in *massive* (consistent and regular) mistakes in linguistic inferences. Presumably linguistic moves in accordance with *normative* requirements imposed by our linguistic community is a *semantic* matter, hence this is another reason that we should treat this kind of false beliefs as semantically relevant mistakes, rather than pragmatically imparted ones.

*The Argument From Web of Beliefs*

We can see from the above analyses that if a speaker holds false *categorical* or *core* beliefs with regard to a name, then as a result, his web of beliefs associated with the name will be *massively* mistaken. It will be massively distinct from the correct web of uses our community associated with the name. Since his web of beliefs of the name is so massively and fundamentally different from the web of our community uses of the name, then it is *pragmatically inconvenient* for us to treat him as a competent speaker/user of
the name. And it will be pragmatically inconvenient for us to treat his mistake as semantically irrelevant.

On the other hand, a speaker who only holds false peripheral beliefs such as (b₃) can still have a web of beliefs of the name that is close enough to the web of community uses of the name. This kind of mistake will not bring about massive mistakes in reference identification or linguistic moves concerning the name, and this explains why we intuitively feel that such peripheral mistakes are not semantically relevant.

I certainly agree with Salmon’s point in (d) that for Frege’s strategy to be ultimately successful in the cases of names against the direct reference theory, one must make a further argument to show that information imparted by “a=b” that makes it sound informative is, in fact, semantically encoded. I believe that this challenge can indeed be met, and I will argue for it in chapter 5 when I offer my own solution to Frege’s puzzle based on the meaning theory of names that I intend to defend.

For the purpose of this section, let me conclude that Salmon’s task of defending the direct reference theory against Frege’s puzzle is at least unfinished. For Salmon needs to show that the information conveyed by “a=b” is indeed semantically irrelevant and thus is entirely pragmatically imparted information.

2.5 Salmon on Belief Puzzles

Closely related to Frege’s puzzle, there are problems of the apparent failure of substitutivity of co-referential proper names in propositional attitude attributions, namely, the Belief Puzzles. Suppose that S (a) is a declarative sentence containing proper name a,
a and b are two co-referential names, then in S (a), let us substitute b for a and denote the resulting sentence by S (b). According to the principle of compositionality and the direct reference theory, S(a) and S(b) semantically encode the same piece of information, i.e., they encode the same proposition.

Here are two minor premises:

**Premise I** If two sentences S and S’ encode the same piece of information, then someone believes that S if and only if he or she believes that S’.

**Premise II** If two sentences S and S’ encode the same proposition, then S and S’ have the same truth value.

But often in belief contexts, these two seemingly trivial premises will be violated. Look at the following examples.

(3) Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly.

(4) Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly.

(5) The ancient astronomer believes that Hesperus is Hesperus.

(6) The ancient astronomer believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus.

It seems clear that Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly, but she doesn’t believe that Clark Kent can fly. Consequently, (3) and (4) have different truth values, although by the direct reference theory, they encode the same proposition. (5) and (6) pose a similar problem.

Salmon’s defense of the direct reference theory against Belief Puzzles consists of two main ideas. First, Salmon proposes that a belief relation is not a binary relation between the believer and the proposition encoded by the sentence. Rather, a belief relation is a ternary relation...
that involves the believer, the proposition, and something else, e.g., the way in which the proposition is presented to the believer. Salmon denotes this ternary belief relation \( \text{BEL} \).

With this new notion \( \text{BEL} \), Salmon explains that “A believes P” may be analyzed as \( (\exists X) [\text{A grasps P by means of X} \land \text{BEL (A, P, X)}] \); while “A withholds belief from P” may be analyzed as \( (\exists X) [\text{A grasps P by means of X} \land \neg \text{BEL (A, P, X)}] \). Thus understood, A may indeed stand in BEL to P and some X by means of which A grasps P, without standing in BEL to P and some other \( X' \) by means of which A grasps P.

But this explanation of the belief relation seems to face the following problem with regard to the rationality of the believer. Namely, on Salmon’s account, although via two different ways, A does grasp the \textit{same} proposition P each of the two times. The problem is: how can a rational believer simultaneously assent to and dissent from (or withhold belief from) the very same proposition which he grasps both times?

A possible response on behalf of Salmon would be like this: because the speaker does not recognize that it is the same proposition. Let us analyze this reply carefully.

Let’s ask: why doesn’t the speaker recognize that it is the same proposition? In the case of Superman and Clark Kent, I submit that Lois Lane actually grasps something like this:

\begin{align*}
(3') & \text{ a (Superman) can fly.} \\
(4') & \text{ b (Clark Kent) can fly.}
\end{align*}

Here is my question to the foregoing response: why can’t the speaker insist, quite plausibly, something like this? “I cannot grasp the \textit{same} proposition via these two sentences. I thought that Superman and Clark Kent are two \textit{different} objects and thus a and b are two different objects in my mind. Consequently, I thought that (3’) and (4’) are
two different propositions. Yes, I made a mistake because I lacked some crucial piece of information. I didn’t know what I was referring to.”

Salmon might reply that there is only one proposition in the world for her to grasp, at least on the direct reference theory. But the question persists. Why, in a belief context, is only that one proposition in the world semantically relevant? If what the speaker S grasps is related to the truth conditions of belief sentences concerning S’s mental state, then why shouldn’t the fact that S’s grasping of two different propositions in her mind semantically relevant? Here in the belief contexts we are talking about the truth conditions of something that happens in her mind, not something that happens in the world and independently of her mind.

Thus Salmon at least owes us an account on what it is, on the direct reference theory, for a speaker to grasp/recognize the propositions encoded by sentences such as (3)-(5). And why can’t the speaker say that she does not grasp the same proposition via these two different sentences?

Even if Salmon can explain these issues successfully. There is the counterintuitive consequence of his theory that the same proposition encoded by (3) and (4) is both true and false. Isn’t such a theory of proposition too coarse-grained? Wouldn’t it be nice if we can have an account of semantic content of proper names according to which (3) is true while (4) is false?

Secondly, Salmon argues that, contrary to our mistaken intuition, sentences such as (5) and (6) do have the same truth value. Particularly, he argues that sentence (6) is actually true. Salmon writes: “In the ‘Hesperus-Phosphorus’ and ‘Superman-Clark Kent’ cases, however, the believer in question is favorably disposed toward a certain singular
proposition when taking it one way, but fails to recognize this proposition and is not favorably disposed toward it when it is encountered again (in another way) … The ancient astronomer agrees to the proposition about the planet Venus that it is it when he takes it in the way it is presented to him through the logically valid sentence ‘Hesperus is Hesperus’, but he does not agree to this same proposition when he takes it in the way it is presented to him through the logically contingent sentence ‘Hesperus is Phosphorus’. The fact that he agrees to it at all is, strictly speaking, sufficient for the truth of both the sentence ‘The astronomer believes that Hesperus is Hesperus’ and the sentence ‘The astronomer believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus’.” (Salmon 1986, 115-116, my emphasis)

The last point Salmon wants to explain is why we speak the way we do. That is, why do we normally say that the sentence “The ancient astronomer believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus” is false whereas on Salmon’s account the sentence is actually true? Salmon says that we speak the way we do because we need to express the following implicature: The astronomer believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus, although he does not agree that Hesperus is Phosphorus when he takes this information the way he does when it is presented to him through the very sentence “Hesperus is Phosphorus.” Thus we speak falsely, but the point is well taken and the phenomenon is well explained.

I would like to contend that contrary to what Salmon claims, we have not spoken falsely. That is, if a competent speaker points to the morning star and says that this object is not that object, pointing subsequently to the evening star, then why isn’t this enough for us to say correctly that he doesn’t believe that Phosphorus is Hesperus?
I understand Salmon’s De Re argument: If S believes that Hesperus is Hesperus, and since Hesperus is Phosphorus, then S believes that Phosphorus is Hesperus. But it seems to me that this kind of argument should go both ways. That is, if S does not believe that Phosphorus is Hesperus (from the speaker’s above described behavior, we can conclude that), and since Phosphorus is Hesperus, then S does not believe that Hesperus is Hesperus. Accordingly, on Salmon’s account, the conclusion should be that belief sentences (5) and (6) are both true and false just as (3) and (4).⁶

Again these are quite counterintuitive consequences. Even if they can be logically explained away on behalf of the direct reference theory, the challenge still remains. That is, if there is a theory that can match our intuitions concerning belief ascriptions well and does not have the awkward consequence that a proposition is true and false at the same time,⁷ wouldn’t it be an advantage of that competing theory over the direct reference theory? In chapter 5, I will argue that such a theory does exist.

2.6 Salmon on Empty Names

A singular term is nonreferring with respect to a context c, a time t, and a possible world w, if and only if there does not exist anything to which the term refers with respect to c, t, and w. Consequently, according to the direct reference theory, a nonreferring/empty proper name does not have semantic content.

In his 1998 paper “Nonexistence,” Salmon considers two kinds of nonreferring/empty names. There are names concerning historical figures such as Plato and Aristotle. These names once had references. But since their references are long gone,
they currently do not have references, or they currently do not refer to anything. Why do these currently nonreferring names pose a problem for the direct reference theory?

Consider the following two sentences:

(7) Socrates does not exist now.

(8) Socrates is a great philosopher.

Clearly, these sentences are meaningful now, and they should semantically encode some propositions currently, even though the reference of “Socrates” does not exist now. But on the direct reference theory, the propositions expressed by these sentences do not exist now. Thus the challenge is: how can these sentences still be meaningful now if their propositions do not exist anymore?

Here is Salmon’s answer. The singular proposition encoded by sentence (7), which once existed, no longer exists now. Let us dub this no-longer-existing proposition that Socrates does not exist now, “Soc.” The first key idea in Salmon’s reply is this. Soc is a definite proposition. Its current lack of existence does not prevent it from currently being true. Nor does its present nonexistence prevent it from being semantically expressible in English now. Today the sentence “Socrates does not exist now” expresses Soc with respect to the present time. It does not follow that there must exist a proposition that this sentence expresses with respect to the present time. The sentence “Socrates does not exist now” currently expresses Soc, a past thing, and Soc is currently true and that is why the sentence is currently true in English, even though Soc does not currently exist.

A possible objection to Salmon’s foregoing proposal might be that it contradicts the metaphysical principle that any object must exist in every conceivable circumstance in which that object has any properties. The crux of Salmon’s reply is to show that this is
a confused and misguided prejudice. Salmon admits that existence is a prerequisite for a broad range of ordinary properties such as being red in color, having a certain mass, and playing a soccer game. But he rejects the sweeping doctrine that existence must universally precede having any properties. The reason is that there exist counterexamples in which an object from one circumstance can have properties in another circumstance in virtue of the properties it has in the original circumstance. Salmon offers two such counterexamples. First, Socrates does not exist in our present circumstance, however he has numerous properties here because of the properties he had in the past circumstance. For instance, Socrates has the property of being mentioned and discussed by us in our current circumstance. Secondly, Walter Scott, who no longer exists now, currently has the property of having written *Waverley* in virtue of the property he had in the past circumstance that he wrote *Waverley*.

My concern regarding Salmon’s defense of the direct reference theory against the problem of the currently nonreferring names consists of two points. First, on Salmon’s account, one needs to say that a sentence S currently encodes/contains a *physical* thing (as part of the proposition) that does not currently exist. Does this sound false? What is the difference between this claim and a claim such as this box currently contains a *physical* thing (say, a basket ball) that does not currently exist?

Secondly, Salmon’s defense appeals to this thesis:

(T) A sentence that encodes no currently existing meaning is nonetheless currently meaningful.

This thesis contradicts the following widely accepted metaphysical doctrine:
(MP) Any object must exist in every conceivable circumstance in which that object has any properties.

Salmon wants to deny this general doctrine in order to defend his semantic theory. But whenever someone wants to deny such a highly plausible doctrine, we must ask him to provide us with some good reasons. The only reasons that Salmon offers are the following facts:

(F) Things that currently do not exist, such as Socrates and Walter Scott, can nevertheless have the properties of being mentioned and discussed by us in current circumstances or have the property of having written *Waverley*.

But if we analyze (F) carefully, we can see that the reason we can say that Socrates, who does not exist now, still has the property of being mentioned and discussed by us currently is this. Currently we can still say things about Socrates such as “Socrates is a wise man” that are currently meaningful. However, this linguistic fact/phenomenon alone does not necessarily need to deny (MP). Only when this fact combines with the direct reference theory (that will result in thesis (T)) will (MP) be contradicted.

Now we can see the structure of Salmon’s argument. In order to defend thesis (T), Salmon needs to deny (MP). In order to deny such a highly plausible metaphysical doctrine, Salmon needs to offer us some good reasons other than his need of defending (T). The reason Salmon provides, namely (F), will not be a problem for (MP) except when one assumes the direct reference theory and then results in (T).

In other words, the only reasons that Salmon offers to deny a highly plausible doctrine (MP) is his own theoretical need. I submit that this is not sufficient for us to abandon (MP). Instead, if Salmon’s own theoretical need is the only reason to deny an
otherwise universally held metaphysical principle, then it seems that this fact itself poses a challenge to Salmon’s theory.

The second kind of nonreferring/empty name is concerned with fictional names such as Sherlock Holmes and Santa Claus. These names do not have reference in the sense that they do not refer to anything in the natural/physical world. On the direct reference theory, these names are devoid of semantic content. Nonetheless, the following sentences are meaningful:

(9) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

(10) Sherlock Holmes plays the violin.

Salmon first introduces and criticizes Kripke’s work concerning fictional names. On Kripke’s account, when Conan Doyle initially introduced and employed the name “Sherlock Holmes,” the name had no reference. It is a name in a game of pretense, in the make believe world of storytelling. In Kripke’s view, our linguistic practice allows a certain kind of metaphysical move. It postulates the fictional character as an abstract artifact. But it does not follow that the name “Sherlock Holmes” thereby refers to the fictional character or anything else. In the process of creating the novel, the sentences involving “Sherlock Holmes” express no proposition about the fictional character or anything else. These are all part of the game of pretense, just like the actors’ lines in the performance of a movie.

It is only at a later stage when we discuss the fictional character form a standpoint outside of the game of pretense, that our linguistic practice makes a second move, this is a semantic rather than metaphysical move. This move gives the name a new and non-pretend use as a name for the fictional character. This is a grammatical transformation of
a fictional name for a person into a name of a fictional person. So to be specific, there are
two names: Holmes\textsubscript{1} and Holmes\textsubscript{2}. The former names the person in the fiction and hence it actually names nothing at all. The latter names an abstract artifact. Kripke takes abstract artifacts as real things. They are neither physical objects nor mental objects, they are abstract entities. They are not eternal entities like numbers, they are man-made artifacts created by the writers.

Before we look at how Kripke’s theory analyzes the truth value of sentences (9) and (10), let us follow Salmon to make the distinction between object-fictional sentences and meta-fictional sentences. Sentences from fiction and myth, such as “Holmes plays the violin” and “Pegasus has wings,” when viewed from within the pretense, are object-fictional sentences. Sentences, such as “according to the novel, Holmes plays the violin” or “according to the myth, Pegasus has wings,” are meta-fictional sentences.

According to Kripke, object-fictional sentences are multiply ambiguous, as a result of the two uses of the names and of different perspectives from within and without the fiction or myth. In sentence (10), if the name is used as “Holmes\textsubscript{1},” i.e., as the pretend name of a pretend person, and if the sentence is used to make a statement not within the pretense but about the real world, then (10) expresses nothing and is therefore literally false. But the object-fictional sentence may also be used from within the fiction, as part of the pretense of an accurate, factual account of real events. Understood this way, (10) is correct depiction, part of the pretense game. So used, the sentence may be counted as “true” in an extended sense that it is truth in the fiction or according to the fiction.

Alternatively, the name in (10) may be used as “Holmes\textsubscript{2}” to denote the real abstract artifact. When the name is thus used and the sentence is used as a statement not
about the fiction but about reality, then it is false, because no abstract entity can play the violin. On the other hand, we can also have an extended use of predicates, on which “plays the violin” correctly applies to an abstract entity when it is a character from a fiction according to which the corresponding fictional person plays the violin. Giving the name its use as a name of the fictional character, and understanding the predicate “plays the violin” in this extended sense, we can say that sentence (10) is true.

Let us turn to the truth value of the negative existential sentence (9): “Sherlock Holmes does not exist.” First, interpreting (9) as “Holmes₁ does not exist,” it is false from the perspective within the pretense; however it is true when we take it not as a statement within the fiction but as a statement about the real world. Second, interpreted in the sense of “Holmes₂ does not exist,” the predicate “exist” may be understood in its literal sense, or it may be understood in the extended sense on which it applies to fictional character if and only if according to the relevant fiction the corresponding person exists. In either sense, the sentence is false.

These are the main points of Kripke’s work on fictional names. Here is Salmon’s criticism of Kripke’s theory. On Kripke’s account, object-fictional sentences such as “Holmes plays the violin” have no genuine semantic content in their original uses. Salmon contends that this makes the meaningfulness of true meta-fictional sentences like “according to Conan Doyle’s novel, Holmes plays the violin” mysterious and thus problematic. In Kripke’s view, it is true that according to the novel Holmes₁ plays the violin. But how can this be if there is no proposition that Holmes₁ plays the violin? What do we mean when we say that is the case according to the novel if there are no propositions there? If object-fictional sentences like “Holmes₁ plays the violin” express
nothing and only pretend to express things, how can they be true with respect to the fiction, and how can meta-fictional sentences involving object-fictional subordinate clauses express anything at all, let alone something true?

Salmon is worried about the fact that Kripke’s account, as it stands, needs to invoke some sort of intensional use of “Sherlock Holmes.” That is, when we say “according to the novel, Holmes plays the violin,” the name refers to a particular concept/description, something like: the brilliant detective who performed such and such exploits. Thus the account itself ultimately involves an intensional apparatus. Salmon believes that it is the sort of intensional machinery that is spurned by the direct reference theory. Kripke acknowledges that his theory needs a special sort of “quasi-intensional” use of a fictional name and he expresses misgivings about it.

Based on Kripke’s work and his criticism of Kripke’s work, Salmon submits his own theory concerning fictional names. For Salmon, the matter should be viewed as follows. In the beginning Conan Doyal decided to write a novel. In the process he created a fictional character as the protagonist along with other characters, each playing a certain role in the story. Like the novel itself, these characters are man-made abstract artifacts.

In writing the novel, Conan Doyle pretends to use the name “Sherlock Holmes” to refer to its fictional referent. But he does not really use the name. At the early stage, “Sherlock Holmes” does not really have any such uses (as uses to refer to its supposed fictional referent, because there was nothing to refer to yet). Only at a later stage, use of the name is imported from the fiction into reality, to name the very same thing that it was set to refer to. That thing, now the real as well as fictional bearer of the name, is
according to the story a human being who is a brilliant detective, and in reality an artifactual abstract entity created by the author.

On Salmon’s account, there is no literal use of “Sherlock Holmes” that corresponds to “Holmes₁.” The alleged thoroughly nonreferring use of the name is only pretense of a use, not a genuine use of the name at all. After the abstract artifact has been created at the later stage, all uses of the name, in the story and outside the story, refer to this very abstract entity. And these are genuine uses of the name with a genuine referent, and hence on the direct reference theory, with genuine semantic content. Salmon insists that the only genuine, nonpretend use that we ever give the name is as a name for the fictional character (after it comes into existence as an abstract entity). And that use, as a name for that very thing, is the very same use it has in the novel, though according to the novel, that very thing is a brilliant detective not an abstract entity. Using Kripke’s term, all genuine uses of “Sherlock Holmes” are uses of “Holmes₂.” Salmon summarizes his view in this way: “Following Kripke’s lead in possible-world semantics for modality, we say that ‘Sherlock Holmes’ is a rigid designator, referring to the fictional character both with respect to the real world and with respect to the fiction.” (Salmon 1998, 303)

Regarding the truth value of sentence (10), Salmon says that this object-fictional sentence is not true with respect to the real world, because abstract entities can’t play musical instruments. But Salmon agrees that the sentence is true with respect to the fiction by virtue of being entailed by the propositions, themselves about fictional characters (as abstract entities), that comprise the fiction, along with supplementary propositions assumed as the background against which the fiction unfolds.
Concerning the truth value of sentence (9), it seems to pose a problem for Salmon. On Salmon’s theory, sentence (9) should be false with respect to the real world, because Holmes the abstract entity does exist in the real world. Nonetheless, one can say things like “Sherlock Holmes does not really exist, he is only a fictional character.” Taken literally, this sentence almost expresses a contradiction that Holmes is a fictional character that does not exist. Salmon believes that there is a reasonable explanation for this kind of misconception. We often use ordinary names, especially names of famous people, in various descriptive manners. For example, we can say that so-and-so is a Shakespeare, or an Einstein. Salmon submits that, in the singular existential statements, we sometimes use the name of a fictional character in an analogous way. Thus we may use “Sherlock Holmes” to mean something like: Holmes more or less as he is actually depicted in the novel, or Holmes replete with these attributes—the principally salient ones ascribed to Holmes in the novel, or best, the person who is both Holmes and Holmesesque. Consequently in uttering (9), one would mean that Holmes as depicted in the novel does not exist in reality, that is, there is in the real world no such person who is both Holmes and sufficiently like that (as depicted in the novel). When our misconception is explained away, Salmon concludes that sentence (9) is actually false with respect to the real world.

I have the following worries (as potential objections) about Salmon’s theory. First, on Salmon’s account, the abstract entity as the reference of the fictional name did not exist at the early stage of the author’s writing. Only at a later stage, the abstract entity comes into existence. Now all of the author’s work is done in the physical world and in his mind, it is rather puzzling that some physical/mental activities can causally bring a
non-physical, non-mental, non-spatial entity into existence. Salmon probably should say something to explain this quite queer causal relation. Wouldn’t it be better if we can explain our linguistic practices involving empty names without positing queer entities like this?

Secondly, Salmon again is proposing an atomistic view concerning semantic content of empty proper names. On this view, all the descriptions associated with the empty name is semantically irrelevant, or they are pragmatically imparted information. But this view will have counterintuitive consequence. For example, if a speaker takes the right causal deferential attitude regarding the empty name Sherlock Holmes, but somehow has the massive false beliefs that this fictional character has all the properties that the linguistic community associates with another empty name, say, David Copperfield, then this speaker will commit massive false linguistic moves involving this empty name, and intuitively we will feel that this speaker’s understanding of the empty name is semantically flawed.

These are my critical comments/questions concerning Salmon’s specific version of the abstract object theory of fictional names. In addition, I will present and discuss some additional objections to the abstract object theory in general that I think can also apply to Salmon’s version of the theory. In her review of Amie Thomasson’s book *Fiction and Metaphysics*, Stacie Friend raises three objections to the abstract object approach to the problem of fictional names.

First, in Thomasson’s view, there are two kinds of claims that must be reinterpreted. A statement such as “Holmes does not exist” is literally false unless understood to mean “Holmes is not a real human being.” And “Holmes is confident” becomes “according to
the novel, Holmes is confident,” since abstract entities cannot literally be confident. For Thomasson, only statements from an external standpoint outside the fiction, such as “Holmes is a fictional character” and “Holmes was created by Conan Doyle,” are straightforwardly true or false.

However, Friend points out that relying on a sharp distinction between the internal or “fictional” context, and the external or “real” context, cannot deal with the more problematic kinds of utterance, those that mix aspects of the real and the fictional. For example, consider the utterance “I pity Anna Karenina because she loses her children.” It cannot be literally true that I pity an abstract object. And though Anna loses her children only according to the story, “I pity Anna” cannot be prefixed since I am not part of Tolstoy’s novel. In general, statements that assert cross-realm relations pose a serious problem for the abstract object theory.

Second, on Thomasson’s theory, to be able to refer to the abstract object Holmes, one must be causally connected in the right way to the textual foundation of the character. Whether the right causal connection is there is a question that cannot appeal to the identity of the character that in turn depends on the text. So even if we posit the abstract object, the explanation of intentionality still depends solely on the facts about the literary work. Naturally Friend questions what *explanatory work* the fictional character as an abstract entity does with regard to our linguistic practice concerning the fictional work. If the abstract object can do very little, if any, explanatory work, then why should it be postulated?

Third, Thomasson claims that once we admit literary works, the fictional characters in them come along at no ontological cost. But Friend is concerned about the limitations of
such postulation. Should we accept the posits of failed scientific theories and the creations of discredited myths alongside fictional characters? Friend submits that if there is no element phlogiston and no planet Vulcan, then it seems that we should not say that there are two contingent artifacts. If we posit an abstract object whenever we seem to be talking or thinking “about the same thing,” we end up with many more objects than we might be willing to accept.\(^9\)

With these difficulties faced by the abstract object theory in mind, let us turn to some recent and different kinds of defenses of the direct reference theory in coping with the problem of empty names.

2.7 Other Theories on Empty Names

When facing the difficulty caused by empty names, there are generally three ways to defend the direct reference theory:

**Strategy 1** Deny that utterances of sentences containing empty names express complete semantic propositions, and accept that they do not have a definite truth value.

**Strategy 2** Deny that empty names do not stand for anything in reality, instead claim that they stand for various kinds of real things, e.g., abstract object, or Meinongian non-existent objects, or some “deflationary” objects.\(^10\)

**Strategy 3** Affirm that there are names that stand for nothing in the real world, accept the thesis of direct reference, and grant that utterances of sentences involving empty names have truth values, but contend that these claims are compatible.
In the following I will introduce and discuss one representative work for each of these three options.

**Taylor’s Theory**

In his 2000 paper, “Emptiness without Compromise: A Referentialist Semantics for Empty Name,” Kenneth Taylor endorses the first strategy. Taylor insists that the direct reference theory is true even in the case of empty names and empty names do not refer to anything in reality and hence they do not have semantic content. So he considers his burden to be able to explain why the following sentences seem clearly to be true:

(11) Santa Claus doesn’t exist.
(12) Santa Claus isn’t coming tonight.

The crux of Taylor’s theory is to draw a distinction between the *compositionally determined propositional content* (this is a semantical notion) and the *pragmatically determined utterance content* (this is a non-semantical, pragmatic notion). According to Taylor, propositions-in-waiting are compositionally determined semantic properties of sentence types containing empty names. A proposition-in-waiting contains an unfilled object slot. More importantly, each such slot is associated with a rule for filling that slot with an object.

There is a *pragmatic* process of “saturation” which fills the unfilled object slots in a proposition-in-waiting. Even with respect to nonempty singular terms, it takes such a pragmatic process to get us from the context-independent meaning of a sentence such as “I am angry now” or “Lincoln was a great president” to the determinate proposition expressed by an utterance of that sentence in context. But in the case of an empty name, the pragmatic process of saturation fails. It ends up with a pseudo-saturation. A pseudo-
saturation “fills” the unfilled object slots in a proposition-in-waiting not with an object, but with descriptive contents drawn from our conception of the name. Hence a speaker who utters the sentence “Santa Claus isn’t coming tonight” does not assert any compositionally determined proposition at all. Instead she does pseudo-assert a pragmatically determined proposition which is close to something like this: no jolly, white-bearded, red-suited fellow, who lives at the North Pole and delivers toys via a reindeer-drawn sleigh is coming tonight. Taylor argues that such a pragmatically determined proposition is truth-evaluable and it happens, as a matter of fact, to be true.

Thus Taylor adduces the descriptions we associate with the empty name to explain our intuitions that sentences like (11) and (12) are truth-evaluable. But he maintains that these descriptions belong to a pragmatic category, in other words, they are semantically irrelevant. I want to take issue with Taylor’s latter point. Imagine a speaker who knows nothing about the descriptions we associate with “Santa Claus,” he only knows it refers to some fictional thing. So the speaker defers to the experts of the community and says: “This name means whatever fictional entity the experts in my community refer to, whether a fictional animal, or a fictional planet, or a fictional building.” What will we say about the speaker in our ordinary linguistic practice? It seems that we will ordinarily say that this speaker doesn’t know the meaning of “Santa Claus.” Unless we have a direct reference agenda in mind, we will not ordinarily say that this speaker lacks certain pragmatic information about “Santa Claus.”

Moreover if someone happens to associate incorrect descriptions with the name and believes that Santa Claus is a monster that always appears in black on New Year’s Eve and does such and such horrible things to kids, then we will ordinarily say that this
speaker has got the meaning of “Santa Claus” wrong, even if the speaker willingly defers to the experts concerning the fictional name. It is unlikely we will say that this speaker has false pragmatic information about the name. Therefore, my contention is that the descriptions we associate with an empty name are collectively semantically relevant, they are not merely pragmatic information.

Zalta’s Theory

Edward Zalta proposes a deflationary version of the second strategy in his 2000 paper “The Road Between Pretense Theory and Abstract Object Theory.” Zalta aims to reconcile two different theoretical approaches to the problem of empty names, namely, the abstract object theory and the pretense theory. We have seen the main insight of the former theory from Salmon’s work. In contrast the pretense theory tries to dispense with abstract objects. According to the pretense theory, when we engage with a fictional work we engage in the pretense that what it represents is really the case. We make believe that it is true. For example, when we read Romeo and Juliet we make believe that what the story claims to be true is in fact true. We do not believe that Romeo and Juliet died. However we make believe that they did. When the object theorist sees there as being a non-standard object, the pretense theorist sees us as pretending that the relevant object exists. What, for the object theorist, is true in virtue of the status, nature, or qualities of an object, is not literally true for the pretense theorist. Rather it will only be true within the scope of a game of make believe.

The key idea in Zalta’s work to reconcile these two theories is to appeal to a Wittgensteinian approach to the meaning of fictional names. On Wittgenstein’s account, the meaning of a fictional name is constituted by its pattern of use. Although such an
account typically does not allow us to get precise about the patterns in question, it at least quantifies over, and thus is committed to the existence of *patterns* of behavior. And unlike non-physical, non-mental, non-spatial, abstract objects, these patterns of behavior do exist in our natural, spatial and temporal world.

Zalta shows that the *formalism* of object theory, in its application to fictional names, can be interpreted as systematizing such patterns. The deflationary “abstract objects” of the formal metaphysical theory are reconceptualized as patterns of use and patterns of behavior. And these deflationary formal “abstract objects” will denote entities that the pretense theorist already accepts.

Although I embrace and support Zalta’s project, I feel that we should investigate a further question. Namely, why do there exist such patterns of use and patterns of behavior in our linguistic practice with regard to a fictional name? I believe that the answer lies in the fact that we normally associate a structured web of descriptions /properties/beliefs with a fictional name. Patterns of use and patterns of behavior have their *mental causes*. Thus the descriptions associated with the fictional name collectively play a semantic role.

**Everett’s Theory**

Anthony Everett takes the third strategy to defend the direct reference theory in his 2000 paper “Referentialism and Empty Names.” Consider the following sentences:

(13) Santa Claus does not exist.

(14) Father Xmas does not exist.

Everett intends to explain two things. First, why are these sentences true? Second, why do these sentences talk about the same thing (i.e., Santa, which nevertheless is nothing)?
Concerning the first question, Everett suggests that we should hold that empty names make a form of *degenerate* semantic contribution to the sentences in which they occur in virtue of their referring to nothing. It is reasonable to suppose that sentences (13) and (14) are true in virtue of the fact that the names which they contain fail to refer to anything. For it is precisely the fact that empty names fail to refer that makes negative existential claims containing them true.

To answer the second question, Everett applies the Kripkean social, causal network/framework to the case of empty names. On Everett’s account, each use of a name will be associated with referential framework of name utterances, notions, and notion-introducing perceptions or descriptions. The notion-introducing acts of perception or description, together with the notions they introduce, lie at the *base* of the framework. The *referential source* of the framework will be whatever, if anything, the base notions refer to. In cases where the base notions are not introduced directly but are rather introduced via some mediating descriptions, these mediating items will form the *referential-fixing source* of the framework. (Everett 2000, 56)

Everett then introduces two senses of aboutness. Two utterances of names u and v are about the same thing in a *thick* sense if the referential frameworks of u and v share a common referential source. The two sentences are about the same thing in a *thin* sense if (i) they are not about the same thing in the thick sense, (ii) the referential frameworks of u and v share a common referential-fixing source.

Everett’s point is that utterances involving empty names such as (13) and (14) are about the same thing not in the thick sense because there is no object as referential source at the bases of their frameworks. Nonetheless they are about the same thing in the thin
sense. That is, in the very beginning, our ancestors came to have Santa-notions. They employed these Santa-notions in various games of make believe and they associated various descriptions and stories with them. As a result, a referential framework grew up from this early practice. At some point in history, the names “Santa” and “Father Xmas” became associated with this framework. However at this point the framework came to split into two branches, with speakers of British English using “Father Xmas” to express thoughts involving their Santa-notions, and the speakers of American English using the name “Santa” to express thoughts involving their Santa-notions.

I agree that Everett’s causal picture sheds light on the issue. But it must be emphasized that sharing a causal framework is not enough for two empty names to be about the same thing. As Everett himself points out, at the base of the causal/referential framework, they must also share the referential-fixing source, that is, they must share the mediating descriptions/notions that were supposed to fix the object but nevertheless failed. If our ancestors had associated two totally different sets of descriptions with “Santa” and “Father Xmas,” then these names would not have been about the same thing. Moreover, even if our ancestors did associate one set of descriptions with the two names, if after the split of the original framework into two branches, the uses of the names had evolved to the extent that currently the speakers of British English associate a set of descriptions with “Father Xmas” that is completely different from the set of descriptions the speakers of American English currently associate with “Santa” (for example, the British English speakers might associate the descriptions of “Spiderman” with the term), then these two names wouldn’t be about the same thing either.
My point is that the descriptions associated with an empty name play an indispensable role in determining what the name is about. Consequently, empty names make *more semantic* contribution than just indicating that they refer to nothing.

In my discussion of these new strategies of defending direct reference theory against the problem of empty names, I have contended repeatedly that these authors, as illuminating and ingenious as their works are, have not shown that descriptions we normally associate with an empty name are *semantically irrelevant*. How to capture the semantic contribution of these descriptions is a challenge I will attempt to meet in chapter 5.
1. In general, *singular terms* are expressions that denote or stand for a single object. Thus “Aristotle,” “the tallest basketball player in the world,” and “that” are typical examples of singular terms.

2. In this case it is not necessary that little Johnny will fail to refer to Venus with “Hesperus.” For example, if he is given a specially designed instrument and through which Venus looks exactly like a floating rabbit to him, then little Johnny will refer to that object (Venus) as Hesperus. So it seems that what makes a semantically relevant difference in this case is that his beliefs associated with “Hesperus” put him in a position to make massive (consistent and regular) mistakes in reference identification.

3. In his own defense of the direct reference theory, Soames does offer such an account. We will examine Soames’s account in the next chapter.

4. Salmon might reply that he has a theory about the ontology of proposition. On that theory, there is only one proposition in the world and the speaker grasps that same proposition via two sentences. This is a coherent response. But then we can ask a further question. What are the *good reasons* for us to accept this ontology of proposition, especially in the belief contexts? Intuitively it seems quite plausible for the speaker to insist that she grasps two propositions in her mind via two sentences. If we have two coherent but competing theories about the ontology of proposition, what makes one theory better than the other is a complex issue, I am not able to discuss it here.

5. In a possible world/context where Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly and Clark Kent can’t fly at the same time, isn’t it true that the proposition encoded by (3) is true whereas the proposition encoded by (4) is false in that same world/context? On Salmon’s ontology of proposition, (3) and (4) encode the same proposition, therefore it seems to follow that that same proposition encoded by (3) and (4) is both true and false in the same world/context.

6. Salmon may have good reasons to show that, unlike the case of (3) and (4), (5) and (6) constitute a different *kind* of case of belief puzzle. But Salmon himself didn’t offer an argument supporting this position. As I have just argued, I think that they are not different in a significant way.

7. Salmon didn’t say this, neither did Soames. My reasoning in the above footnote 5 may be false, but I would like to see them address this issue explicitly.

8. Salmon says that his presentation of Kripke’s view is based on Kripke’s unpublished work and the notes he took in Kripke’s seminar on empty names. I
have no access to either of these items, so my introduction to Kripke’s work is
based solely on Salmon’s 1998 paper.

9. Salmon realizes this problem. In his paper, he describes two scenarios in which he
believes the posited abstract objects should be rejected (Cf. Salmon 1998, 305-
306). But he doesn’t give any principled reasons to explain why there is such a
difference. For example, if there are characters in a novel that the author only
describes in one or two lines, should we accept that there are corresponding
abstract objects?

10. Obviously Salmon adopts a robust version of this strategy, namely, empty names
refer to robustly existent abstract objects. Later in this section, we will look at a
deflationary version of this strategy. According to this approach, empty names are
not really empty because they do refer to real things in the world. But these real
things are only “objects” in a deflationary sense.
CHAPTER 3

SOAMES’S DEFENSE OF THE DIRECT REFERENCE THEORY

3.1 Introduction

One unfinished task from *Naming and Necessity* that Soames intends to fulfill is to propose and defend a positive account of the semantic content of proper names. Soames’s project is twofold. First, Soames considers some new defenses of descriptivism and he offers several sophisticated arguments to refute these new proposals. Secondly, Soames gives a positive account of the meaning of proper names by presenting a novel defense of the direct reference theory.

My goal in this chapter is to examine these two aspects of Soames’s work so that a better understanding of proper names can be reached. More specifically, in section 3.2, I will introduce Soames’s challenge to descriptivism in general and his detailed criticism of two strategies to defend descriptivism, namely, the analysis of proper names as wide-scope descriptions and the analysis of proper names as rigidified descriptions. This is important to my own project because in chapter 5 I will promote a positive account of the meaning of proper names. On that account, the semantic content of a name has a descriptive component. I shall show then that my account can survive Soames’s various
attacks on descriptivism. Section 3.3 is the crucial segment of this chapter where Soames’s positive account of the meaning of proper names will be carefully presented and analyzed. I will adduce concrete examples to criticize the major theses in Soames’s account. In section 3.4 Soames’s theory is elaborated and extended to the cases where a name has multiple bearers. Section 3.5 is a discussion of Soames’s theory concerning partially descriptive names, it will help me promote my own account in chapter 5. Finally, in sections 3.6 and 3.7, I will examine Soames’s solutions to Belief Puzzles and Frege’s Puzzle. I will argue that Soames’s solutions, though more advanced than Salmon’s solutions, still face serious difficulties.

3.2 Soames’s Criticism of Descriptivism

Descriptivism is the doctrine that treats the meaning of a proper name as given by definite descriptions associated with the name by speakers. As we have seen in chapter 1, Kripke offers three types of arguments, i.e., modal arguments, epistemic arguments, and semantic arguments, to refute the traditional descriptive theories. Soames believes that these arguments together can show that descriptivism in general is false.

Soames considers a possible objection from descriptivists in response to the semantic argument. Their idea is that though the semantic argument shows that the reference of a name is not fixed by the descriptions given by the speaker, there might exist other descriptions that could do the job. For instance, consider Kripke’s own theory about the historical and causal transmission by which reference is normally fixed. Certainly that theory can be put in the form of a description. Thus if Kripke’s theory is
right, then that description will fix the reference, and descriptivism can be defended after all.

Soames raises three challenges to this descriptivist approach. First, Kripke’s historical, causal transmission picture of reference leaves many questions unsolved. Particularly, there is the problem of reference change. There is nothing in Kripke’s work that explains precisely how this phenomenon happens. Hence Kripke’s causal picture does not amount to a fully explicit theory that accounts for all instances of reference determination. Consequently, no description derived from Kripke’s picture can provide a complete mechanism by which the reference of a name can be definitively determined.

Second, suppose that the descriptivist could somehow develop Kripke’s picture to the extent that a complete and definitive reference-fixing description could be reached. In order to vindicate descriptivism, one would still need to show that ordinary speakers possess this description and use it to determine the reference of the name. However, ordinary speakers usually cannot provide an accurate and complete description that covers all scenarios. Moreover, different speakers often have different descriptions associated with a name they use. What makes one of these descriptions privileged to play the central role in determining the reference of the name? Soames insists that until the descriptivist can answer this question, there is no vindication of descriptivism.

Third, the question of how the reference of a name is determined is semantically less important than the question about the meaning of the name. If one wants to propose that the description extracted from a complete account of how the reference of a name is fixed
can give the meaning of the name, then one must answer the challenges from the modal argument and the epistemic argument. (Cf. Soames 2002, 20-21)

Soames raises the foregoing questions to challenge the suggestion that descriptivism might be defended using Kripke’s causal picture. These questions should also be viewed as challenges to descriptivism in general. Namely, any theory that proposes certain descriptions as the meaning of a proper name must face the following challenges: (1) How can one use the descriptions to determine the reference of the name? How can the theory explain the phenomenon of reference change? (2) What is the relationship between the proposed descriptions as the meaning of the name and various distinct descriptions associated with the name by speakers? (3) How can this descriptive account of meaning survive the attacks from the modal argument and the epistemic argument? In chapter 5, I shall explain how the positive account of the meaning of names I propose can meet these challenges.

Next let us turn to Soames’s criticism of two specific strategies of defending descriptivism.

*Proper Names as Wide-Scope Descriptions*

The basic idea of this strategy is to analyze a name (e.g., Aristotle) as a nonrigid description, the G (e.g., the teacher of Alexander). More importantly, the description denotes the man Aristotle in the actual world, and it is required to take wide scope over all modal predicates, operators, and quantifiers in the same sentence.

This substitution of the name “Aristotle” by a wide-scope description gives us a principle of rigidity as follows.

(PR) There is a certain individual x, such that for every possible world w, the
proposition that the G was a philosopher is true at w iff x was a philosopher at w, and this is also true for other propositions expressed using the name “Aristotle.”

(Soames 2002, 26)

As we have seen in chapter 2, this strategy can circumvent the modal argument only with respect to the modal contexts. Soames offers a series of new arguments to show that this is a mistaken analysis of proper names. The following is his basic argument.

If the wide-scope analysis is correct, then the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence “if n is F, then something is both F and G” is the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence “if the G is F, then something is both F and G.” From this we draw the first premise of our argument.

(P1) The proposition that if n is F, then something is both F and G = the proposition that if the G is F, then something is both F and G.

The following second premise (P2) is evidently true.

(P2) The proposition that if the G is F, then something is both F and G is a necessary truth.

Clearly, we can draw the following conclusion from (P1) and (P2).

(C) The proposition that if n is F, then something is both F and G is a necessary truth.

Nonetheless, on the wide-scope analysis, (C) does not follow. For on that analysis, (C) should be understood as (C’).

(C’) The G is such that the proposition that if it is F, then something is both F and G is a necessary truth, i.e., (the x: G x) \[(Fx \supset \exists y (Fy & Gy)].\]
Since the inference from (P1) and (P2) to (C) is clearly valid, but the wide-scope analysis characterizes it as invalid, therefore this analysis of the name is false (Cf. Soames 2002, 29-30).

My complaint about Soames’s foregoing argument is this. It may be a technically correct argument, but it is hard to see from this argument itself what exactly is wrong with the wide-scope analysis. That is, if we follow Soames’s argument, we can see that the assumption of the wide-scope analysis will lead us to a contradiction, so the wide-scope analysis must be wrong for some reason. However, the argument itself does not shed light on why it is a wrong analysis of proper names.

From our discussion of the wide-scope analysis in chapter 2, we can see that Kripke’s own criticism of this analysis is much clearer. It shows that although the wide-scope analysis can deal with rigidity in modal contexts, it cannot accommodate rigidity in non-modal contexts, such as rigidity concerning simple sentences. It shows that the wide-scope analysis cannot deal with the problem of rigidity in its entirety and it explains why the wide-scope analysis cannot overcome the modal argument completely.

We now turn to the other major descriptivist strategy to overcome the modal argument.

*Names as Rigidified Descriptions*

On this analysis, ordinary proper names are synonymous with rigidified descriptions. For example, the name “Aristotle” is synonymous with the description “the actual teacher of Alexander.” Thus the meaning of “Aristotle” should be understood as the $x$: actually $x$ taught Alexander.
Soames first introduces four challenges to this analysis that have been discussed in the existing literature. Then Soames presents his own objection.

The first criticism comes from the view that proper names designate their referents even with respect to worlds and times at which those individuals don’t exist. David Kaplan and Nathan Salmon have argued convincingly that proper names should be understood in this way.\(^1\) If they are correct, then proper names are not equivalent to rigidified descriptions with the actuality operator, because these descriptions designate an object at a world and a time only if the object exists at that world and that time. For example, the sentence “Socrates is dead” is true now. If, according to the analysis of rigidified description, the name “Socrates” is synonymous with “the x: Gx,” then in order for the sentence to have truth value now, the referent x must exist now. Nevertheless, the referent of “Socrates” does not exist now, therefore this analysis faces a difficulty similar to that of empty names.

The second criticism is originated from Kripke’s epistemic argument. According to the epistemic argument, normally the description G associated with the name n by a speaker is such that the proposition “if n exists, then n is G” is not knowable a priori, whereas the proposition “if the G exists, then the G is G” is knowable a priori. This epistemic argument can be applied to the analysis of rigidified description, because the proposition “if the x (actually Gx) exists, then the x is G” is knowable a priori too.

The third criticism is based on Kripke’s semantic argument. The semantic argument has shown that for ordinary proper names, the descriptions (rigidified or not) that speakers associate with the name cannot secure the reference of the name. In light of this difficulty, some descriptive theorists have suggested that we should employ
metalinguistic descriptions that incorporate the insights of Kripke’s historical causal picture of how reference is fixed. Accordingly, the content-giving description associated with the name n could be a description of the following form: **The x: actually x stands at the beginning of a historical chain of transmission of such and such type ending with this use of the name n.** Here “such and such type” should be filled out with the correct account of the way reference is determined in the actual world.

Soames contends that proposals like this will not work, because descriptions of this sort do not normally give the contents contributed by names to propositional attitude ascriptions. Soames writes: “If they did, then when I attributed to someone the belief that Venus is a star, I would be attributing to that person a belief about a certain one of my uses of the name *Venus*, as well as a belief about the specific sorts of historical chains that connect uses of names to their bearers. Clearly no such beliefs are being attributed to the ancient Babylonians when I say that they believed Venus was a star.” (Soames 2002, 42)

Soames’s remarks are particularly important because they touch issues concerning the relation between the semantic content of a name and the mental content of a speaker when she grasps the name and whether the semantic content of a name *evolves* when nature and history evolve. Later in this chapter and in chapter 5, I will examine these significant issues closely.

The fourth criticism can be drawn from Keith Donnellan’s observation that names, unlike definite descriptions (rigidified or not), can be normally exported from positions within the scope of propositional attitude verbs.² For example, if t is a name, then (b) is entailed by (a) (together with the premise that there is such a person as t).
However when $t$ is an arbitrary description, such as *the strongest golfer* or *the person who is actually the strongest golfer*, there is no such entailment.

(a) Jones believes that $t$ is a golfer.

(b) There is someone $x$ such that Jones believes that $x$ is a golfer.

Soames thinks that Donnellan’s point can be put in this way. If $t$ is a name, knowledge of the proposition expressed by “$t$ is $F$” is always *de re* knowledge of the referent of $t$ that it is $F$, whereas it is not true when it is a definite description (rigidified or not).

Consequently, no name is synonymous with any description (rigidified or not).

This argument seems questionable to me. If $t$ is an ordinary definite description, then the point is well taken. However, if $t$ is a rigidified description, say, $t$ is “the $s$ that $s$ is actually the strongest golfer,” then together with the premise that there is such a person $s$, (b) is also entailed by (a). This is because one can argue that $s$ is part of or contained in the rigidified description since the rigidified description will pick out $s$ in every possible world.\(^3\)

Soames submits that the above criticisms are strong reasons to believe that the names are not semantically equivalent to actually-rigidified descriptions. Moreover, Soames offers his own objection and claims that it alone is sufficient to show that the semantic contents of names are not given by rigidified descriptions of the form *the $x$: actually $Fx$.*

*The Argument From the Interaction of Modal and Propositional Attitude Constructions*

Soames presents his argument with the following three premises and two conclusions.

(P1) It is possible to believe that Aristotle was a philosopher without believing anything about the actual world $Aw$. In particular, there are possible worlds $A'$ in which
speakers believe that Aristotle was a philosopher, without believing of the actual world \( \text{Aw} \) that anything was \( \text{F} \) in it, and hence without believing of \( \text{Aw} \) that the unique thing that was \( \text{F} \) in it was a philosopher.

(P2) Necessarily, one believes that the actual \( \text{F} \) was a philosopher iff one believes of the actual world \( \text{Aw} \), that the unique thing that was \( \text{F} \) in it was a philosopher.

(C1) It is not the case that, necessarily, one believes that Aristotle was a philosopher iff one believes that the actual \( \text{F} \) was a philosopher.

(P3) If the content of “Aristotle,” as used in a context \( \text{C} \), were identical with the content of the actual \( \text{F} \), as used in \( \text{C} \), then (i) the contents of \( \text{Aristotle was G} \) and the actual \( \text{F was G} \) in \( \text{C} \) would be the same; (ii) the propositions expressed by \( \text{a believes that Aristotle was G} \) and \( \text{a believes that the actual F was G} \), in \( \text{C} \), would be necessarily equivalent; and (iii) (C1) would be false.

(C2) The content of “Aristotle,” as used in a context, is not the same as the content of “the actual \( \text{F} \)” as used in that content. (Cf. Soames 2002, 43–44)

The basic insight behind Soames’s argument is this. A speaker in another world does not need to know anything about the actual world. In particular, a competent speaker can grasp/understand the semantic content of a name \( \text{n} \), without believing that the referent of \( \text{n} \) actually satisfies any particular property \( \text{F} \), even though the referent of \( \text{n} \) does satisfy \( \text{F} \) in the actual world. For example, a speaker can grasp/understand the meaning of “Aristotle” via associating the property of being a philosopher and other properties concerning the referent with the name, and even if the speaker is ignorant of the fact that Aristotle was indeed the teacher of Alexander in the actual world, her understanding of the meaning of “Aristotle” does not seem to be flawed semantically.
In sum, Soames has argued that the rigidified description analysis faces the challenges from the empty names, Kripke’s original epistemic argument, Kripke’s original semantic argument, and Soames’s own modal and propositional attitude argument.

In my view, the fundamental question facing the rigidified description analysis is this. Typically we associate *many* properties with a name, and the referent of the name actually satisfies *many* properties. What is it that makes just *one* property stand out as the descriptive component of the meaning of the name (together with the referent)? What happens to all the other properties? It seems natural to think that the descriptive component of the meaning of a name, if there is one, should be given *collectively in a certain manner* by many properties we associate with the name or by many properties that the referent *actually* satisfies. I will pursue this idea in chapter 5 and propose a positive account of the meaning of names as a modification of the rigidified description analysis. And it is my burden to show how that account can overcome various challenges to descriptivism that we have discussed in this section.

3.3 Soames’s Positive Account of the Meaning of Names

In order to develop a positive account of the semantic content of proper names and of simple sentences containing them, Soames first distinguishes two different conceptions of meaning. On the first conception, the information (proposition) a sentence semantically encodes is *invariant* from context of use to context of use. This *constant* information semantically encoded by the sentence must be distinguished from varying nonsemantic
information it is used to convey in different contexts. Moreover, the meaning (semantic content) of an expression such as a name is that which it contributes to the semantic contents of sentences containing it. Soames wants to argue that the semantic content of ordinary proper names are simply their referents.

According to the second conception of meaning, the meaning of an expression is information grasp of which explains speakers’ ability to understand it, and to be able to use it competently. Soames contends that on this second conception of meaning, ordinary proper names have meaning only in a very minimal sense, that is, different names have nearly the same meaning no matter what they refer to.

The above is the gist of Soames’s theory. In the rest of this section, I will present the main ideas of Soames’s account of meaning in six theses. And I will critically examine these theses.

**Thesis I** A proposition p is semantically expressed by a sentence s only if p is included in the information a competent speaker would assert and intend to convey by an assertive utterance of s in any context c in which s is used with its literal meaning by conversational participants who understand s, provided that (i) s is not used metaphorically, ironically, or sarcastically in c, and (ii) the presumption that the speaker intends to commit himself or herself to p is not defeated by a conversational implicature to the contrary. (Cf. Soames 2002, 60)

This thesis spells out Soames’s first conception of meaning. Namely the semantic content of a sentence is the *core, constant* information encoded by the sentence which is *invariant* from context of utterance to context of utterance. Furthermore, the semantic content of a name is the *core, constant* information the name contributes to the semantic
contents of the sentences containing it; this information is also invariant from context of utterance to context of utterance. To see the difficulty this thesis faces, let us look at the following example.

*The Case of Abraham Lincoln*

Consider the following two utterances of the same sentence in two different historical contexts.

(1) Abraham Lincoln is a good person (uttered in 1812 when the future president of the United States was a three year old boy).

(2) Abraham Lincoln is a good person (uttered in 2002 when the 16th president of the United States was widely regarded as one of the greatest presidents).

In 1812, if a speaker understood the name “Abraham Lincoln” as “*that* three year old boy who (i) looks like this (pointing to an accurate portrait of the boy Lincoln, and (ii) satisfies these important properties (deference to the experts of the community in 1812 about the name, such as Nancy Lincoln and Thomas Lincoln, the boy’s parents),” then we can say that semantically the speaker understood the name and thereby the sentence competently and well.

Suppose in 2002, another speaker understood the name “Abraham Lincoln” in exactly the same manner as the aforementioned speaker in 1812, because, say, he got this body of information from a person whom he mistakenly regarded as the community expert in 2002 about the name. Thus the speaker *in 2002* understood the name “Abraham Lincoln” as “*that* person who is (currently) a three year old boy and who (i) looks like this (pointing to the *same* portrait of the boy Lincoln) and (ii) satisfies these important properties (properties Nancy Lincoln and Thomas Lincoln associated with the name *in 1812*...
1812)." Intuitively we feel that this 2002 speaker’s understanding of the name “Abraham Lincoln” is serious flawed, semantically he is not a competent user of the name because he would insist on finding a three year old boy with certain looks as the referent of the name “Abraham Lincoln” in 2002.

The understandings of both the 1812 speaker and the 2002 speaker share the same core, invariant information that Soames proposes to be the semantic content of the name, that is, the object (in an atomistic sense) that is the referent of “Abraham Lincoln.” Both speakers can pick up and then rigidify the object by referring to it as the causal origin of the genuine portrait of the boy Lincoln. However, this example shows that just getting that object right is not sufficient for the speaker to become a competent user of the name. The beliefs and attitudes the speaker associates with the name could be semantically relevant. Moreover, the semantically relevant beliefs and attitudes the speaker associates with the names might vary from one historical context of utterance to another historical context of utterance. Soames’s proposal is questionable because it has not captured these aspects of our intuitions concerning the semantic relevance of a speaker’s understanding of the name.

The strength of Soames’s proposal lies in the fact that it does capture our feeling and belief that normally the meaning of a sentence or a name is the core information that is invariantly shared by various uses of the sentence and the name. For example, after Lincoln’s death in 1865, for more than one hundred years, all the competent uses of the name “Abraham Lincoln” should refer to that object who satisfies such and such properties (deference to the experts in the community). This core and constant
information is invariant from context of utterance to context of utterance for so many years. And it is a merit of Soames’s thesis to reflect this fact about our linguistic practice.

However I believe that it is a mistake for Soames to extend his thesis to all the historical contexts of utterance. Let us go back to the previous example concerning “Abraham Lincoln.” The difference between the contexts of utterance in 1812 and the contexts of utterance after 1865 is this. Between them, there had been a 53 year evolution of that object. And since the purpose of our linguistic practice is to reflect nature, life, and reality, then it is plausible that our linguistic practices involving the name should evolve accordingly along with the evolution of that object during those 53 years. As a result, after 1865, some important information and facts reflecting this historical evolution stand out and become part of the core, constant information shared (via deferential attitudes) by various contexts of utterance ever since. Consequently, these pieces of descriptive information constitute a new component of the meaning of the name.

**Thesis II** The semantic content of a name in a sentence includes very little or no significant descriptive information specifically about the referent of the name, except perhaps some extremely general properties. (Cf. Soames 2002, 63-65)

Here is Soames’s argument for this thesis.

(P1) If a piece of descriptive information is included in the semantic content of the name in the sentence, then that piece of descriptive information must be asserted and conveyed to competent speakers across all contexts of utterance. And these competent speakers in all the contexts of utterance must grasp/understand that piece of descriptive information.
(P2) There is very little or no significant descriptive information about the referent of the name that is shared by all the competent speakers across all contexts of utterance.

(C) Therefore, Thesis II is true.

Premise (P1) is based on the first conception of meaning as stated in Thesis I, plus the underlying assumption that any piece of information included in the meaning of a name must be understood by all the competent speakers across all the contexts of utterance. I have argued that Thesis I can be challenged in the sense that the meaning of a name may evolve accordingly along with the historic evolution of the referent of the name. Consequently, the semantic content of the name may not be invariant across all the historical contexts of utterance.

The underlying assumption can be questioned as follows. If the semantic content is constituted by the referent of the name and a cluster of properties, then it is not necessary for an individual speaker to understand every property in order to be qualified as a competent speaker/user of the name. A speaker can be regarded as “a competent user” of the name if she can either understand sufficiently many properties related to the meaning, or she can sometimes simply adopt the attitude that she will defer to the experts in the community concerning those descriptive pieces of information that constitute another component of the name besides the object as the referent of the name. Therefore, it is not necessarily true that in order for a piece of descriptive information to be included in the semantic content of a name, that piece of information must be understood/grasped by all the competent speakers across all the contexts of utterance.

Certainly premise (P2) is normally right. Soames uses the example of the philosopher Carl Hempel at Princeton University. It is true that various speakers usually
associate different sets of properties with the name and there is little, if any, descriptive information that would be common to all the users. But it is worth noting that all these speakers, in order to be qualified as a competent user of the name, must first know that their knowledge concerning the referent of the name is very limited and they should defer to the community experts on that issue.

Here is a serious challenge to what I have just suggested. If it isn’t what the speaker expresses or the hearer understands, then what makes a piece of information part of semantic content?

Let me answer this question from the following four aspects. First, the position I advocate is this. One component of the semantic content of a proper name is given collectively by the web of community uses associated with the name. Although it is not necessary for an individual speaker to actually know/grasp a particular piece of use in the web or even a particular small set of uses in the web, the speaker does know that the name refers to the object that has such and such properties (deferring to the web of community uses of the name). Thus in a sense the speaker does use the name to express these community uses collectively via deference, even though the speaker herself cannot say specifically what these uses are.

Similarly, the hearer also understands that the speaker intends to use the name to refer to the object that has such and such properties in the web of community uses, although the hearer can only know specifically limited uses herself.

Second, now what makes the web of community uses of a name constitute part of the semantic content of the name? My answer is its significant enough or even indispensable
roles in our social linguistic practice involving the name. More specifically, it plays at least the following three important roles in our linguistic practice involving the name.

(R1) **Reference Identification**: Our community experts of the name must *employ certain descriptive information* in order to regularly and consistently identify some object as the referent of the name. And every time a producer identifies some object as the referent of the name, she *implicitly* assumes that that object should be the dominant bearer of the web of community uses, not just the object that satisfies whatever descriptive information she adduces on that particular occasion. Thus the ever evolving web of community uses of the name is constantly and continuously playing an indispensable role in our community’s reference determination concerning the name.

(R2) **Normative Linguistic Moves/Inferences**: These community uses of the name collectively impose certain normative constraints on how an individual speaker uses the name in the space of giving and asking for reasons. For example, a speaker might be able to talk about Adolf Hitler via her deference to the community. That is, she might be able to use the name to refer to the referent via the correct deferential attitude without knowing many specific uses of the name or even with some mistaken beliefs about the name. However, she is not allowed to make massively false linguistic moves such as: Hitler is the leader of the free world who defeated Nazi Germany in world war II, or Hitler saved millions of innocent lives in world war II, etc. These kinds of massively mistaken linguistic moves are *prohibited* by our community linguistic norms. And our community linguistic norms concerning a name are based on the web of community uses of the name. This kind of normative constraint on linguistic moves is semantically relevant, because if an individual speaker insists on making these massively and
consistently false linguistic moves involving a name, then it is pragmatically very inconvenient for our community to treat her as a competent speaker/user of the name anymore. There is a strong sense that our community will conclude that this speaker’s understanding of the meaning of the name is semantically defective.

Let us look at another example. Suppose that a speaker understands “Carl Hempel” as the referent of the name (secured by the social and historical causal chain) that is a philosopher. With the right deferential attitude, this speaker might be treated as a competent user of the name. But if she associates the name with properties such as “he is the author of the book *Naming and Necessity*” and *all* the other properties our community experts associate with the name “Saul Kripke,” and because of some kind of misunderstanding, she believes that her descriptive information is from the real authority of our society and refuses to defer to anyone else, then, in such a scenario, there is a strong sense that this speaker is not a competent user of the name “Carl Hempel.” Again, the beliefs and attitudes a speaker associates with the name is semantically relevant because they will result in corresponding linguistic inferences.

(R3) **Sharing Specific Structural Information**: Another role that the web of community uses of a name might play can be seen as follows. We use a name to refer to the object that has such and such properties. Implicitly we understand that these are not just categorical properties at the core of the web, but also the *specific* properties in the middle of the web. These properties specific to that particular object are usually characteristic or biographical properties that represent the form of its life. We want to share such specific structural pieces of information of a particular name because we need them in reference determination and normative linguistic inferences specifically concerning that name.
Third, someone might object that I am confusing semantic content with what it takes to secure reference. My response is this. There might exist many things in the world that play decisive or indispensable roles in our reference determination, for instance, causal operations at some deep microphysical level that are currently inaccessible to our community. But these specific properties in the web have the unique status, namely, they are what our community as a whole can have epistemic access to and they are what connect our mind to the world (i.e., the referent). On the traditional descriptive theory, meaning is what we can grasp and adduce to secure reference, if we can develop the traditional descriptive theory to overcome the criticisms of it, then why should we not preserve the link between our mind and the world which is supposedly provided by our language?

Fourth, the underlying assumption of Soames’s Thesis II is that the semantic content of a name is an epistemic notion even at the level of the individual speakers. I contend that we can instead view the semantic content of a name as a metaphysical notion at the level of the individual speakers. On this alternative view the semantic content of a name is a social property. Various individual speakers can talk about the same thing via their deference to the common linguistic community.

In short, Thesis II is questionable because in Soames’s supporting argument, premise (P1) is problematic.

Thesis III The conditions that govern what it is to be a competent user of a proper name are as follows. In order to be a competent user of a name n of an object o, two things are required. (i) One must have acquired a referential intention that determines o as the referent of n. Two ways in which this may be done are by picking up n from others who
used it as a name of o, and intending to use n to refer to the same thing they did, or by being independently acquainted with o and introducing n as a name for o. (ii) One must realize that to assertively utter “n is F” is to say of the referent, o, of n that it “is F.” (Cf. Soames 2002, 65)

Soames dubs these two conditions “Competence Conditions for Proper Names.”

This thesis explicates Soames’s second conception of meaning. When introducing his two conceptions of meaning, Soames says that on this second conception, different names have nearly the same meaning, no matter what they refer to. Thesis III explains why it is so. Given any name n, a speaker can become a competent user of n merely via saying that n is the object that others especially the experts in the community use n to refer to. And according to the second notion of meaning, the speaker understands the meaning of n by doing so.

Here is a flawed argument against Thesis III. Although it is flawed, analysis of this argument can shed light on the issue. According to this argument, there is an implausible consequence of Soames’s second conception of meaning. A speaker can just sit in her room and claim that she knows the meaning of any name for any person in the world. Since Soames also proposes that the meaning of a name is its referent, then this speaker can also claim that she knows any person in the world. But this is not compatible with our ordinary linguistic practice. Normally when a competent speaker is asked whether she knows a person named n, if she has never heard of this name, and she has never met this person named n, and she knows nothing about this person, then although she knows that this name n refers to whichever person others in the community refer to,
she will still say (if she is a competent user under such a circumstance) that she does not know this person.

This argument is flawed because it makes the following problematic move in its reasoning:

(P1) If Thesis III is correct, then with the right referential intention, a speaker knows the meaning of any name for any person in the world.⁵

(P2) On the direct reference theory, the meaning of any person is that person.

(P3) With the right referential intention, the speaker knows any person in the world.

Here is an objection to the move from (P1) and (P2) to (P3). It is flawed because there are two different kinds of uses of the word “know” in (P1) and (P3). In (P1), “know” is used in a semantic sense; while in (P3) “know” is used in a pragmatic sense. For example, even if a speaker knows a lot of information about Bill Clinton, if she has never met Clinton in person, then in our ordinary use of the word “know,” we would still say that she does not know Bill Clinton the person, but she knows a lot about Clinton via reading his autobiography. Since meeting someone in person is certainly not a semantic notion, therefore the word “know” in the phrase “know a person” is used in a pragmatic sense.

To cope with this objection, we can strengthen the original argument as follows. Certainly, in our ordinary use of the phrase “know the person”, the word “know” might have many pragmatic implications, but it might also contain some semantically relevant implications. For example, a speaker can have the right referential intention as described in Thesis III with regard to the name “Bill Clinton.” However if the speaker at the same time has massively false beliefs associated with the name, let’s assume that she associates the web of community uses we associate with “Al Gore” with “Bill Clinton,” and she
subsequently insists on making all kinds of massively false linguistic inferences involving “Bill Clinton.” Then we can say that this person does not know Bill Clinton in the sense that she has got the meaning of “Bill Clinton” seriously wrong.

Consequently, in our ordinary usage of the phrase “know a person,” the word “know” has many implications. Some of them are indeed pragmatic. But some of them are quite plausibly semantically relevant. In many situations, even if the speaker has the right referential intention required by Thesis III, we can still say that that speaker’s understanding of the meaning of the name is serious defective. Soames’s account of the meaning of proper names ignores this aspect of our linguistic practice completely.

In Naming and Necessity, Kripke discusses the phenomenon that an ordinary speaker on the street is still capable of referring to the referent of a name, although she knows little descriptive information associated with the name. For example, a speaker is still able to refer to Einstein, even though she does not know what the description “the author of the relativity theory” really means, or even though she associates a false description with the name “Einstein” such as “the inventor of the atomic bomb.” This speaker is able to do so via correct deferential attitude to the experts in the community.

Soames develops Kripke’s account of how a speaker is able to refer to the referent of a name into an account of how a speaker is able to know the meaning of a name. This move is problematic because Soames does not distinguish two different notions that our ordinary linguistic practice does distinguish, namely, the notion of a speaker’s being able to refer to the referent of a name and the notion of a speaker’s being able to know the meaning of the name. The previous examples show that it is possible that a speaker can be in a position where she is able to refer to the referent of the name via the right
referential intention but at the same time her understanding of the meaning of the name might be semantically flawed.  

**Thesis IV**  The proposition semantically encoded by the sentence “n is F,” where n is the proper name of an object o, is the singular, Russellian proposition that predicates F-hood of the object o. Moreover, the semantic content of n is its referent o.

This is the doctrine of the direct reference theory. The two competence conditions in Thesis III guarantee that this Russellian singular proposition will be among the propositions asserted when a competent speaker assertively utters “n is F.”

Soames claims that this result is supported by the following two observations.

(O1) If n is a proper name of an object, and Jones is a competent speaker who assertively utters the sentence “n is F” in a normal context, then the ascription *Jones asserted that n is F* will be true.

(O2) The ascription *Jones asserted that n is F*, together with the claim *n exists*, entails *There is an object x such that Jones asserted that x is F*, which attributes to Jones the assertion of a singular, Russellian proposition. (Cf. Soames 2002, 65-66)

The following is an alternative interpretation of the ascription *Jones asserted that n is F*, which will pose a challenge to (O2).

(O2’) The ascription *Jones asserted that n is F*, together with the claim *n exists*, entails *There is an object x with such and such properties (deference to the community experts regarding these properties) such that Jones asserted that that object x with those properties is F*. This interpretation attributes to Jones the assertion of a proposition which is not singular Russellian.
This alternative interpretation is based on the following observations: (i) Any competent speaker will understand the referent of \( n \) as an object with certain properties, the speaker herself might only know some of the properties, but as a competent speaker, she must have the right deferential attitude with regard to these properties. (ii) There are two reasons why these properties collectively may constitute another component of the semantic content of the name besides the referent of the name. First, if a speaker causally refers to the right object as the referent, but nevertheless associates a massively or even completely mistaken set of properties with the name, then we have the strong intuition that this speaker’s understanding of the name is semantically defective. For example, one may causally point to the right referent of “Carl Hempel,” but at the same time associate with the name all the properties our community experts collectively associate with “Saul Kripke.” In such a case, this speaker’s understanding of “Carl Hempel” is not even coherent. Because on the one hand, he will refer to Carl Hempel as the referent via causal pointing; on the other hand, he will insist that the referent of the name is the object that satisfies all the properties our community experts associate with “Saul Kripke,” as a result, he will actually refer to Saul Kripke as the referent. Since the speaker’s understanding of the name cannot determine the right referent, then in this sense we can say that his understanding of the name is semantically defective. Secondly, if a speaker causally refers to the right object as the referent, but she knows none of the properties our community associates with the name, then we have the strong intuition that this speaker’s understanding of the name is semantically defective. For example, a speaker may causally refer to the right referent of “Saul Kripke.” But if she knows none of the properties associated with name, then when she is presented with the person who looks
like this (Kripke’s pictures), who is the author of these works (Kripke’s books and papers), who has such a life experience (all the events throughout Kripke’s life), the speaker will still ask: “But who is this person? What is his name?” According to our ordinary linguistic practice, it is quite plausible for us to say that this speaker really doesn’t know the meaning of the name “Saul Kripke.”

On this alternative interpretation, the semantic content of a name n is the object (the referent of n) which has such and such properties (deference to the community experts). In other words, the semantic content of n has two components: the referent plus another component given by the properties associated with n by our community. This is the task of my dissertation to compare this alternative account of the meaning of names with the direct reference theory. The goal is to examine which theory can give a better account or explanation of our ordinary linguistic practice concerning names.

**Thesis V** Although there are good reasons for semantic theorists to abstract a common element (i.e., the singular, Russellian proposition) from the information conveyed to competent language users by utterances of the sentences with coreferential names in all normal contexts, and to treat this information as the common semantic content of the sentences, there is no obvious practical reason why an ordinary competent speaker or hearer of the sentences must always be able to separate out this semantic information and treat it in a special way (Cf. Soames 2002, 70)

This thesis will play a crucial role in Soames’s solution to belief puzzles. According to Thesis III, the competence conditions for most ordinary names are essentially the same. That is, the speaker understands the meaning of n if she can have the right deferential attitude and understands n as the object which is referred to by community experts as n.
Given this, we can see how a speaker can fully satisfy the competence conditions for two different, coreferential names that have the same referent and thus same semantic content, without realizing that they do.

**Thesis VI** Although the semantic contents of ordinary proper names are their referents, speakers and hearers often associate these names with non-semantic descriptive information that varies from context to context.

This thesis is a direct consequence of Thesis I, according to which semantic content is the core, constant information *invariant* from context to context. Therefore any varying descriptive information associated with the name by speakers is non-semantic information. This thesis will play an important role in Soames’s solution to Frege’s Puzzle. I will challenge both Thesis V and Thesis VI when I discuss Soames’s solutions to Belief Puzzles and Frege’s Puzzle.

This concludes my examination of the major theses in Soames’s positive account of the meaning of ordinary proper names.

3.4 Soames’s Account of the Meaning of Names Refined

Soames points out that when he argues that the semantic content of an ordinary name is its referent, he needs the simplifying assumption that names are unambiguous in the sense that each name refers to at most one object. If a name n refers to multiple objects, then the sentence “n is F” cannot be understood as “o is F,” where o is *the* referent of n. Also on Soames’s account, the semantic content is the core information that is *invariant* across
all contexts of utterance, Soames suggests that if $n$ were ambiguous, there would be no such invariant information.

Many ordinary names are ambiguous because they are shared by more than one object. For instance, there are many different people who are named “Larry Brown.” With this problem in mind, Soames relativizes some key theses in his theory of meaning as follows.

(P1) The semantic content of a name, as it is used in a certain context $C$, is that which it contributes to the information asserted and conveyed by sentences containing it in all normal contexts in which it is used with the same semantic content it has in $C$. The semantic content of an ordinary name, as used in a context $C$, is the object to which the name, as used in $C$, refers.

(P2) A speaker can typically acquire competence with a name from hearing the name used by others. In such cases the speaker intends to use the name with the same reference and semantic content that it carried in the remarks made by others which constitute the speaker’s sources for the name.

(P3) When one acquires a name $n$, as it is used with one of its semantic contents, one learns that to assertively utter “$n$ is $F$” is to say of the referent of $n$, as used with that content, that the referent has property $F$.

The general strategy of the above relativized principles concerning ambiguous names is this. We must restrict the contexts of utterance in question to those in which the name, and other expressions in the sentence, are understood in the same way as they are in $C$, that is, to those contexts in which they are used with the same semantic content they have in $C$. This in turn requires us to make explicit the conditions that are necessary and
sufficient for a name to be used with the same semantic content in any two contexts.

Soames proposes the following necessary and sufficient conditions.

(C1) If a name $n$ is used with the same content in two contexts, then it is necessary that $n$ refers to the same thing in these two contexts.

(C2) If a name $n$ refers to the same thing in two contexts, then it is sufficient that $n$ is used with the same semantic content in these two contexts.

With regard to ambiguous names such as “Larry Brown” which is ambiguous because it is shared by many persons, (C1) as the necessary condition certainly seems right. Because if in one context the name refers to one person and in another context the name refers to a different person, then in these two contexts, the name has different semantic contents. This condition also suggests that under normal circumstances, the referent of a name at least constitutes one component of the meaning of the name, whether it can capture the whole meaning as Soames proposes is still an open question.

I do believe that (C2) as the sufficient condition is problematic. For example, in the case of Abraham Lincoln, although the name refers to the same thing in two historical contexts, one can argue that the name has different semantic contents in these two contexts, because the 53 year historical evolution of the referent might have resulted in a change in the descriptive component of the semantic content of the name. In chapter 5, I will develop and defend this view in detail.
3.5 The Meaning of Partially Descriptive Names

Soames uses the following examples to illustrate the notion of Partially Descriptive Names: *Princeton University, Trenton New Jersey, Professor Saul Kripke*. To understand these expressions, one must be able to associate a description with the referent of the term. That is, *Princeton University* means *that thing* which is a university; *Professor Saul Kripke* means *that* person who is a professor, etc. Soames believes that these phenomena motivate the following semantic theory for Partially Descriptive Names in general.

The Partially Descriptive Theory

A partially descriptive name n is semantically associated with both a descriptive property P and a referent o. The referent o is determined in part by having the property P and in part by the same non-descriptive mechanism that determines the reference of ordinary non-descriptive names – for instance, by a historical chain of transmission leading back to o. The semantic content of n includes both o and P. The proposition expressed by the sentence “n is F” is understood as *the object o with property P is F*. This proposition is true at a world w iff o has both properties P and F at w. (Cf. Soames 2002, 110)

This theory is helpful to my project because in chapter 5 I will propose and defend the view that for ordinary, non-partially descriptive, proper names, the semantic content has a similar structure. That is, the semantic content of such a name also has two components, one component is constituted by the referent of the name, whereas the other, a descriptive component, is given by the properties associated with the name by our community.
3.6 Soames on Belief Puzzles

Here are the preliminary notions and principles that Soames promotes for his solution to the propositional attitude problems.

(I) *Propositions* are the kinds of the things that are objects of assertion (and other propositional attitudes) and the bearers of truth value. Although assertion is a relation between speakers and propositions, a speaker usually asserts a proposition p by adducing a certain mediating content-bearing representation that is associated with p, typically a sentence. The semantic content of a sentence uttered in a context is only one of the propositions asserted by a speaker.

(II) The proposition semantically expressed by the attitude ascription *t v’s that s* is true with respect to context c, world w, and assignment f of objects to variables, iff in w, the referent of t (with respect to c, w, and f) bears the relation expressed by the attitude verb v (with respect to c) to the proposition designated by the clause *that s* (with respect to c and f).

(III) The proposition semantically encoded by a clause *that s* with respect to a context c and assignment f of objects to variables in s is the proposition that is the semantic content of s with respect to c and f; it is NOT the proposition that the speaker of c uses s to express in c, in other words, it is NOT what the speaker means by s in c.

Combining (II) and (III), one can get the following principle of the semantically determined truth conditions of propositional attitude ascription.
(IV) The proposition semantically expressed by \( t \, v \, s \) that \( s \) is true with respect to a context \( c \), world \( w \), and assignment \( f \) of objects to variables, iff in \( w \), the referent of \( t \) (with respect to \( c \), \( w \), and \( f \)) bears the relation expressed by attitude verb \( v \) (with respect to \( c \)) to the proposition semantically expressed by \( s \) (with respect to \( c \) and \( f \)). (Cf. Soames 2002, 131-140)

Principle (IV) together with the doctrine of the direct reference theory will result in belief puzzles and more generally problems of propositional attitudes ascriptions. Let \( S(a) \) be a declarative sentence containing proper name \( a \). Suppose that \( a \) and \( b \) are coreferential names. Next let us substitute \( a \) by \( b \) in \( S(a) \) and denote the resulting sentence \( S(b) \). Now consider this pair of belief ascription sentences.

(1) A believes that \( S(a) \).
(2) A believes that \( S(b) \).

According to principle (IV), plus the direct reference theory of names, sentences (1) and (2) should have the same truth value. However, in many cases, we have the strong intuition that (1) and (2) have different truth values, thus the Belief Puzzles. I will borrow a concrete example from Soames to illustrate the main ideas of his solution to Belief Puzzles.

According to Soames’s story, Tom, Dick, and Harry are good friends. They all once met Mr. Hempel at a party, they all call him “Peter Hempel,” and they don’t know that this person is actually a great philosopher. Nonetheless, they have all heard the name “Carl Hempel,” and they all know that the person named Carl Hempel has done brilliant work in the philosophy of science. Suppose that Harry reads an obituary in the newspaper
and forms the belief that *Carl Hempel died last week*, and he expresses his belief to Tom in exactly these words. Later, Tom reports Harry’s belief to Dick by uttering (3).

(3) Harry believes that Carl Hempel died last week.

In such a scenario, Tom will not report Harry’s belief to Dick by uttering (4).

(4) Harry believes that Peter Hempel died last week.

The reason is that in uttering (3), Tom conveys and asserts a proposition whose content is something close to (5).

(5) Harry believes that the philosopher Carl Hempel died last week.

And Tom knows that this is what Harry means when he tells him his belief. Thus by uttering (3), Tom has conveyed and asserted something true.

If Tom utters (4) to Dick, then Tom will convey and assert a proposition whose content can be captured by (6).

(6) Harry believes that the elderly, white-haired gentleman whom we met at that party, Peter Hempel, died last week.

And Tom knows that Harry doesn’t believe (6), and he would convey and assert something false to Dick by uttering (4).

Here is Soames’s solution to Belief Puzzles. When we intuitively feel that belief ascription (3) is true, what we actually feel is that the stronger, richer proposition (5) (which contains the semantic content of (3) as its core, invariant information) is true.

Analogously, when we intuitively feel that belief ascription (4) is false, what we actually feel is that the stronger, richer proposition (6) (which also contains the semantic content of (4) as its core, invariant information) is false. Soames suggests that this is the source of our intuition that substitution of ordinary, coreferential names in belief ascriptions can
change truth value. Nevertheless, Soames insists that this is compatible with the claim that the two original belief ascription sentences (such as (3) and (4) here) have the same semantic content, and hence that the proposition semantically expressed by one is true iff the proposition semantically expressed by the other is true.

In order to evaluate Soames’s solution, let us first recall Salmon’s work regarding Belief Puzzles. Salmon’s main idea is that belief is a ternary relation among believers, (semantically encoded) propositions, and modes of presentation (through which a speaker grasps the proposition). Thus it is possible that a speaker may assent to one proposition p when she grasps p through one mode of presentation, whereas she may dissent from p when she grasps p through a different mode of presentation. Our challenge then to Salmon was concerned with the rationality of the speaker. That is, even if the speaker grasps the same proposition p twice via two different modes of presentation, she has nevertheless grasped/understood p twice, how can she simultaneously assent to and dissent from the same proposition that she grasps/understands?

On the face of it, Soames does not have the same problem, since his solution does not appeal to the notion of “mode of presentation.” However, if we analyze closely, the problem seems to persist. When Harry believes that the philosopher Carl Hempel died last week, he also believes that *that person* (determined via the right deferential attitude to the community experts) died last week. When Harry does not believe that the elderly, white-haired gentleman whom he met at the party died last week, he does not believe either that *that person* (again with the right deference, thus it will be the same person) died last week. Accordingly, even in Soames’s solution, the speaker Harry actually grasps the same core, invariant semantically encoded proposition (i.e. *that person* died
last week) twice through two different ways (modes of presentation), nevertheless Harry simultaneously assent to and dissent from the same proposition that he grasps/understands twice.

Is Harry irrational? I think that one of the merits of Soames’s work is that he sets up his theory of meaning carefully so that at this stage, he can explain to us why Harry is not irrational. On his second conception of meaning, Soames argues that a speaker can become a competent user of a proper name and thus grasps/understands/knows the meaning of the name when she satisfies the following minimal conditions: (i) The speaker has the right deferential attitude to use the name to refer to the same object as the community experts refer to. (ii) The speaker knows that “n is F” should be understood as \(\text{that } x \text{ such that “} x \text{ is F.”} \) In other words, the speaker does not need to know any descriptive information (except perhaps very general ones) in order to know the meaning of the name.

According to the first conception of meaning, the semantic content of a sentence is the core, constant information invariant from context to context. Because of the above competence conditions for names, Soames points out (as we have shown in Thesis V in section 3.3 of this chapter) that an ordinary competent speaker or hearer may not always be able to separate out this core, invariant semantic information. And this is exactly the case for Harry here. Although Harry grasps the same semantic proposition it is not necessary for Harry to know that he has grasped the same semantic proposition. Therefore, Harry is not irrational to assent to and dissent from the same proposition in such a scenario.
Soames’s theory is more elaborated and advanced because he provides an account of what it is for a speaker to grasp/understand a singular, Russellian proposition. Namely, the speaker only needs to have the right referential intention as described in Thesis III. And he can use this account to explain why the speaker is not irrational. But the cost of such an account seems very high. In section 3.3 of this chapter, I have criticized Thesis III (the Competence Conditions For Proper Names). The structure of my argument can be summarized as follows.

(i) Suppose that by Soames’s standard (Thesis III), a speaker t is a Competent User of a name n.

(ii) Since t is a competent user of n, then t knows the meaning of n.

(iii) On the direct reference theory, t knows in the semantic sense the referent of n.

(iv) According to Soames’s standard (Thesis III), t does not need to know any descriptive information of the referent of n.

(v) As a consequence, a speaker can just sit in her room and claim that she knows in the semantic sense every person (or more generally, every individual thing with a name) in the world; or she knows the meaning of every proper name in the world.

(vi) conclusion (v) is implausible because it cannot accommodate our ordinary linguistic practice concerning what it is to know in a semantic sense as we commonly understand, not in a semantic sense that Soames’s own theory specifies, a person or a thing; or what it is to know the meaning of a proper name. Therefore, Soames’s proposal for Competence Conditions for Proper Names is problematic.

In short, although Soames’s elaboration can solve the rationality problem left by Salmon’s solution, new problems emerge from Soames’s account. These are problems
concerning the relation between “competent user of a name” and “competent knower of the meaning of a name,” and what it is for a speaker to know an object such as a person in a semantic sense as we commonly understand. Until these important issues are addressed satisfactorily, the challenge from Belief Puzzles persists for the direct reference theorist.

3.7 Soames on Frege’s Puzzle

Soames’s solution to Frege’s Puzzle consists of two main ideas. First, one must carefully distinguish among identity sentences, the core, invariant propositions they semantically encode, and the varying propositions that are primarily used by the speakers to convey and assert in different contexts. Second, the major thesis is this. Identity sentences involving different but coreferential, ordinary proper names semantically encode propositions that are not only true, but also both necessary and knowable a priori. However, the primary assertions made by utterances of such identity sentences are often neither necessary nor knowable a priori. (Cf. Soames 2002, 237)

For example, consider the following two sentences.

(7) Peter Hempel is Carl Hempel.
(8) The elderly, white-haired gentleman whom we met at the party, Peter Hempel, is the brilliant philosopher of science, Carl Hempel.
Although the proposition semantically encoded by (7) is both necessary and knowable a priori, the proposition it is primarily used to assert and convey in this context is contingent and knowable only a posteriori.

Let us first recall Salmon’s solution to Frege’s Puzzle. On Salmon’s view, the seeming informativeness of an identity sentences such as (7) is due to *pragmatically imported* information such as the information conveyed by (8). In chapter 2, we challenge Salmon’s solution by questioning whether some of the so called “pragmatically imported” information is actually *semantically relevant*, and thus should be included in some manner as part of the semantic contents of the names and the identity sentence.

The similar challenge can be posed to Soames’s strategy. Soames needs the underlying assumption that all the propositions asserted and conveyed by various speakers’ utterances of the identity sentence in different contexts are all pragmatically imparted information and semantically irrelevant. Nevertheless, it is not clear that this assumption is right. As the examples in my discussion of Salmon’s solution to Frege’s Puzzle in chapter 2 show that a speaker may use the identity sentence to assert and convey propositions that intuitively seem to be semantically relevant. This phenomenon suggests that the semantic content of the identity sentence may not be exhausted by the singular, Russellian proposition. It may include certain descriptive information. Until we are clear about what kind of descriptive information is semantically relevant and in what sense it is semantically relevant, Salmon’s and Soames’s solutions to Frege’s Puzzle remain unfinished.
FOOTNOTES


3. I just use “s is part of or contained in the rigidified description” to mean that the rigidified description, unlike an ordinary definite description, picks out the same object in every possible world. As a result, one can have *de re* knowledge of the proposition expressed by “the actual D is F,” provided that s as the *actual* D does exist.

4. That is, given any name N that is actually being used in the community, this speaker can take the right deferential attitude and subsequently take the name to mean the object that stands in the right causal relation with the community experts of the name. According to Soames’s minimal competence condition, this speaker will understand the meaning of N.

5. This is from Soames’s second conception of meaning and his minimal competence condition as explicated in These III.

6. I think that in the above “Clinton-Gore” example, it is not clear which object the person is referring to. On the one hand, he refers to Clinton via his right deferential attitude and subsequently community aid. On the other hand, suppose that this person is so adamant about his massively distorted beliefs associated with “Clinton,” he will keep picking out Gore as the referent of the name. I have adduced the reference determination argument and the linguistic inferences argument to contend that there is more to know the meaning of a name than just being able to refer to the referent via the right deferential stance and hence community aid.

7. Here I don’t mean to include “deference to community experts” in the semantic content of the name. Rather on my account, the semantic content as a social property is a metaphysical fact for an individual speaker. And the speaker’s deference to the community experts shows how the speaker is related to this metaphysical fact.

8. Soames clearly realizes the importance of this point. In his theory of meaning, Thesis II emphasizes that the semantic content of a name contains very little, if any, descriptive information. Then Thesis VI states that speakers and hearers often associate *non-semantic*, descriptive information with names. I have criticized these claims in section 3.3 of this chapter. I will discuss these issues more thoroughly in chapter 5.
9. This concludes my examination of Soames’s defense of the direct reference theory. Soames does not offer new argument with regard to the difficulty posed by the problem of empty names.
4.1 Introduction

In this chapter, my goal is to elaborate and defend a version of two-dimensional semantics that David Chalmers has been advocating recently. My hope is that the elaborated version of Chalmersian two-dimensional semantics can provide a satisfactory account for the semantic content (that is, linguistic meaning) of proper names.

I structure the chapter as follows. Section 4.2 is an exposition of Chalmers’s theory. I will explain and examine the key notions in detail. As a result, we can see the basic ideas and fundamental tenets of Chalmersian 2D semantics. In section 4.3, I will consider several prominent objections to Chalmers’s theory that Ned Block and Robert Stalnaker have raised. I intend to show that Chalmers’s own replies to the majority of the objections are satisfactory, even though his reply to some objections, especially the objection concerning the problem of triviality, needs further clarification or development. In section 4.4, I will explain specifically why in the case of proper names Chalmers’s solution to the triviality objection needs further elaboration. In section 4.5, I will use the result of chapter 1 of my dissertation to show that Chalmers’s version of two-dimensional
semantics can be strengthened to the extent that all the objections from Block and Stalnaker can be answered. Consequently, the strengthened and clarified version of 2D framework can provide a satisfactory account of the semantic content of proper names.¹

4.2 Chalmers’s Account of 2D Semantics

There are many notions and issues within the Chalmersian two-dimensional framework. For the purpose of this chapter, I will focus on the following seven topics.

1. Intensions

An intension of a given expression is a function from possible worlds to extensions. The extension of a sentence is its truth-value whereas the extension of a subsentential expression such as a name or a natural kind term is its reference.

The core idea of two-dimensional semantics is that there are two distinct ways in which the extension of an expression depends on possible states of the world. First, there is the epistemic dependence of extension on the way the actual world turns out to be. Second, there is the subjunctive dependence of extension on counterfactual states of the world, given that the character of the actual world is already fixed. Corresponding to these two sorts of dependence, expressions have two sorts of intensions, associating possible states of the world with extensions in different ways. On the two-dimensional framework, these two intensions can be seen as capturing two dimensions of meaning or content.
2. Epistemic Possibilities & Scenarios

A statement is *epistemically possible* if it cannot be ruled out by a priori reasoning. For example, the statement *Hesperus is Phosphorus* is epistemically possible, so is the statement *Hesperus is not Phosphorus*. And *water is H₂O* is epistemically possible, so is *water is XYZ*.

When a statement is epistemically possible, it is evident that there are various specific scenarios compatible with the statement. A scenario can be thought of as a maximally specific epistemic possibility, namely, one with all the details filled in. For instance, the mere statement that water is XYZ is compatible with many epistemically possible hypotheses about the precise distribution of XYZ in the environment and about everything else that is going on in the world. Each of these maximally specific epistemically possible hypotheses corresponds to a scenario.

Intuitively, a scenario corresponds to a maximally specific way the world might be, for all one can know a priori. Scenarios stand to epistemic possibility as possible worlds stand to metaphysical possibility. Indeed, it is natural to think of a scenario as a sort of possible world, or better, as a centered possible world. A centered world is an ordered triple consisting of a possible world, an individual, and a time. Moreover, the individual and the time mark the center of the world. The space of scenarios constitutes *epistemic space*.

3. Epistemic Intensions & Canonical Descriptions

An expression’s *epistemic intension* is a function from scenarios to extensions. The existence of epistemic intensions is grounded in the fact that given sufficient information about the actual world, we are in a position to know the extension of a given expression.
To consider a scenario W as actual is to consider that hypothesis D is the case, where D is a canonical description of W. According to Chalmers, a canonical description can only consist of the so-called “semantically neutral terms.” Here is why.

If we choose to understand scenarios as centered worlds, we will face two challenges. First, Chalmers explains: “To describe a world, we must choose sentences that are true of it. But will these be sentences true of the world considered as actual, or of the world considered as counterfactual? If we choose the first, there is a danger of circularity, since we need canonical descriptions to define the evaluation of worlds considered as actual. If we choose the second, there is a danger of inconsistency: ‘water is H$_2$O’ is true of the XYZ-world considered as counterfactual, but we need the XYZ-world to verify ‘water is not H$_2$O.’ So sentences such as this need to be disbarred from canonical descriptions.” (Chalmers 2002d, 19)

Chalmers’s solution to this problem is to restrict canonical descriptions to semantically neutral expressions. These are expressions that behave the same whether one considers a world as actual or as counterfactual. Or roughly, these are expressions that are not “Twin-Earthable.” Consequently, most names and natural kind terms are not semantically neutral expressions. However Chalmers suggests that terms such as “consciousness,” “circle,” and “cause” plausibly are semantically neutral. Particularly, if we assume that the phenomenal properties are constituted by what they are like for the subject, then terms describing these phenomenal properties are semantically neutral expressions.

The second challenge to our choice to understand scenarios as centered worlds is this. Some theorists deny the thesis that every epistemically possible statement is verified
by a possible (centered) world. For these theorists, epistemic possibility and metaphysical possibility are two different notions. For example, it is conceivable and thus epistemically possible that a certain conscious state such as pain does not supervene on a corresponding brain state such as the firing of C-fibers, but it might not be metaphysically possible.

Chalmers disagrees with this notion of metaphysical necessity.

More specifically, Chalmers argues against a notion of metaphysical necessity which he dubs as “strong necessity.” According to this notion, a statement S has strong necessity if it is falsified by some positively conceivable situation (considered as actual), but it is nevertheless true in all possible worlds (considered as actual). Positive notions of conceivability require that one can form some sort of positive conception of a situation in which S is the case, whereas negative notions of conceivability hold that S is conceivable when S is not ruled out. Chalmers promotes a position called pure modal rationalism which claims that positive conceivability, negative conceivability, and metaphysical possibility are all equivalent to each other.

Moreover, Chalmers believes that even the aforementioned theorist could preserve the thesis that every epistemically possible statement is verified by a scenario, by understanding scenarios as something other than centered metaphysically possible worlds. To support his view, Chalmers offers a linguistic construction of scenarios. The outline of the construction is as follows.

(1) Let L be an idealized language that is composed of only semantically neutral terms. A sentence D in L is epistemically complete if (i) D is epistemically possible, and (ii) there is no sentence S of L such that both D&S and D&~S are epistemically possible. Let’s say that D is compatible with a hypothesis H when D&H is epistemically possible, and D
implies H when D&~H is epistemically impossible (that is, when there is a priori entailment from D to H).

(2) Two sentences S&T are equivalent when S implies T and T implies S. Any epistemically complete sentence in L will then fall into an equivalence class. We can now identify scenarios with equivalence classes of epistemically complete sentences in L. We can also say that a scenario verifies a sentence S when D implies S, where D is an epistemically complete sentence of L in the scenario’s equivalence class.

(3) Defined in this way, scenarios are tailor-made to satisfy the Plenitude Principle, namely, S is epistemically possible if and only if there is a scenario that verifies S.

The above purely epistemic approach to scenarios seems to me promising. A detailed discussion and defense of it is out of the scope of my project. Even with this purely epistemic account of scenarios, the epistemic intensions are often difficult to characterize in terms independent of scenarios. But Chalmers claims that for some concepts this characterization is straightforward. For example, the epistemic intension of Hesperus picks out the evening star around the center of any scenario. And the epistemic intension of water picks out the dominant watery stuff around the individual at the center of any scenario. However, Chalmers emphasizes that these are just approximations. The true epistemic intensions correspond to the results of considering and evaluating arbitrary scenarios as epistemic possibilities.

4. Subjunctive Intensions

An expression’s subjunctive intension picks out its extension in a world considered as counterfactual, given that the character of the actual world is fixed. For example, if it turns out that the watery stuff around us is H₂O in the actual world, then the subjunctive
intension of “water” picks out H₂O in every counterfactual world. And if it turns out that
the star in the evening sky is Venus in the actual world, then the subjunctive intension of
“Hesperus” picks out Venus (that object) in every counterfactual world.

It should be pointed out that for Chalmers, the subjunctive intension often plays a
central role in matters of semantic/linguistic content across a community; because
different users of a name or natural kind term often have quite different associated
epistemic intensions while sharing the same subjunctive intension.

5. Wide and Narrow Content

Chalmers intends to use the two-dimensional framework to give an account not only for
semantic contents of sentences and terms but also for mental contents of thoughts and
concepts. In the case of mental content, if we call a thought or concept’s epistemic
intension its epistemic content, and a thought or concept’s subjunctive intension its
subjunctive content, then Chalmers claims that epistemic content is narrow whereas
subjunctive content is often wide. A content is narrow if it depends only on the intrinsic
state of the thinker, a content is wide if it does not depend only on the thinker’s intrinsic
state. In section 4.5, I will study whether the parallel claim can be made with respect to
the semantic content of linguistic expressions, especially names.

6. Token and Type Content

One possible objection to Chalmers’s theory might be that epistemic intensions are not
part of language, since they derive entirely from the contents of thought or tokens of
particular uses by a speaker. On this view, it is the speaker’s concept of water that has an
epistemic intension, and it is the conceptual content that varies between speakers, not any
sort of semantic content for linguistic expressions as types. Chalmers’ response is as
follows. We can accept that epistemic intensions are associated with concepts and thoughts, and even that the epistemic intensions of linguistic expressions are derivative in some way from the epistemic intensions of thoughts, but this does not entail that epistemic intensions are not part of the content of language. Chalmers’s basic intuition is that all semantic content is derivative in same way from mental content. In section 4.5, I will try to develop Chalmers’s intuition and propose a notion of epistemic intension for linguistic expressions such as names.

7. Contextual Intensions vs. Epistemic Intensions

The contextual intension of an expression $C$ will return $C$’s extension in worlds with token $C$ at the center. Chalmers takes pains to highlight the difference between contextual intensions and epistemic intensions. The obvious difference is that epistemic intensions give no special role to expression tokens within a scenario, and can be evaluated in scenarios without any such tokens at the center. The deeper difference is that where contextual intensions represent context-dependence, with centered worlds representing contexts of utterance, epistemic intensions represent epistemic dependence, with centered worlds representing epistemic possibilities.

For instance, Stalnaker defines the diagonal proposition of an expression token as a function from a world containing the token to the truth value of the proposition that the token expresses in that world, as evaluated in that world. On Stalnaker’s framework, the diagonal proposition of an expression is defined at worlds where it has a very different meaning. For example, at a world where “water is sofa” means that grass is green, the diagonal proposition of “water is sofa” will be true if grass is green in that world. This is quite different from an epistemic intension. When we evaluate the epistemic intension of
“water is sofa” in a scenario, the use of terms such as “water” and “sofa” in that scenario is irrelevant, it is rather determined by how the speaker or our community uses these terms in the actual world.

With the foregoing presentation of the Chalmersian two-dimensional semantics, next I will turn to objections to Chalmers’s theory.

4.3 Block and Stalnaker’s Objections to 2D Semantics and Chalmers’s Reply

In this section, I will examine five important objections from Block and Stalnaker to the Chalmersian two-dimensional framework and Chalmers’s responses to these objections. I will argue that while Chalmers’s responses to most objections are satisfactory, there is at least one objection left to which Chalmers’s reply is not adequate.

**Objection One: The Problem of Underdetermination**

In *Psychosemantics*, Fodor defines the narrow content of a thought as a function from a context of thought to a thought’s wide content in that context. Block (1991) charges Fodor’s proposal with underdetermination. According to Block, it is simply not clear how to evaluate the function across worlds or contexts of thought/utterance. The main difficulty is to decide what exactly is held constant for the supposed narrow content across worlds. There are three possible answers, but none of them works. First, if only a sort of mental syntax is held constant, the result will be a function that delivers wildly varying results across worlds: in a world where competent speakers all use the term “cow” to refer to snow, then the value of the function (as the narrow content of “cow”) in that world will be snow. This is certainly unacceptable. Secondly, if extension is held
constant, then the function as narrow content will be trivial. For instance, the narrow content of “water” will pick out H₂O in every world. Thirdly, one might think that what should be held constant across worlds is the expression’s narrow content, but this would presuppose what we are trying to capture initially. So it seems quite difficult to set things up so that the Fodorian function can yield a notion of narrow content that can capture what’s in the head of a competent speaker when she understands an expression.

Chalmers claims that epistemic intension does not have this problem of underdetermination. The Fodorian function is a version of contextual intension. For epistemic intension, there is no issue concerning “what must be held constant across worlds,” because there is no need for the original token to be present in different worlds. Rather, Chalmers says, we can simply appeal to the original thought, and to its epistemic relations with the hypothesis that a given world is actual. My understanding of Chalmers’s notion of “original thought” is this. We are trying to get the epistemic intension of the token used by an individual speaker at a time. That speaker is at the center of the scenarios as the centered possible worlds. The original thought is composed of the phenomenal properties concerning the token as they are like to the speaker (for example, the original thought concerning “water” may be captured by the description of colorless, tasteless…liquid, that is, how the phenomenal properties of colorlessness and tastelessness appear to the speaker). Thus the original thought can be expressed by semantically neutral expressions.

I think that Chalmers’s reply is correct and important. The point is that we try to use the notion of narrow content to capture what’s in the head of a competent speaker (or a group of speakers) when she (or they) understands an expression at a certain time.
order to do so, we must fix the use of the expression by the speaker, or more broadly by
the linguistic community. If the members in our linguistic community have always used
the term “water” to refer to the water-ish stuff around them in the actual world, then
when a possible world is considered as actual, the narrow content of “water” should pick
out the water-ish stuff in that world. Whether or not the speakers in that world use the
term “water” to refer to sofa-ish things is simply irrelevant. For we want to capture part
of the meaning of our community’s uses of the term, this has nothing to do with how the
linguistic community in that possible world uses the term.

Thus Chalmers is right to say that if we want to capture the narrow content of a
thought, we can simply appeal to the original thought and fix it across possible
worlds/scenarios. The next question is how narrow content is determined by the original
and fixed thought. Chalmers’s answer is that epistemic intensions are grounded in the
idealized rational judgments of the subject (Chalmers (2002a), 19).

I think that Chalmers’s above account can get around Block’s worry of
circularity. Block argues that the third choice to decide what exactly is held constant for
the supposed narrow content across worlds is to say that it is the expression’s narrow
content that is held constant, and that will be a circular answer. To which Chalmers’s
reply is this. We don’t have to say that it is the expression’s narrow content that is held
constant across worlds. Instead, we should say that it is the speaker’s original
phenomenal thought associated with the expression token that is held constant across
worlds. And with this constant original phenomenal thought, the speaker can pick out the
extension of the term in every possible world. As a result, we will have a function and
that function in turn gives the narrow content of the expression token. Thus the original
phenomenal thought is given, but it is not the narrow content yet. Only when we use the thought to formulate a function that maps possible worlds to extensions in these worlds, then we turn the thought into a semantic notion, namely, narrow content.

**Objection Two: The Problem Concerning The Dependence of Narrow Content on Token and Wide Content**

Stalnaker (1990) considers the idea that some version of his diagonal proposition may yield an account of narrow content, and raises two types of criticisms. First, he notes that diagonal propositions are defined only in worlds containing the relevant thought token, and cannot easily be extended to worlds without the thought token. Second, he implies that we cannot identify a thought independently of its content, so we cannot ask what the content of a belief would have been had it been a belief on Twin-Earth. And since a diagonal proposition is defined using a two-dimensional matrix which is defined using wide content, then it presupposes rather than explains wide content. Accordingly, the proposed narrow content (as the diagonal proposition) is *derivative* from wide content.

I think that Chalmers’s response to this objection is correct. Chalmers points out that it is fairly clear that these two objections apply only to contextually defined intension/narrow content, and not to epistemically defined intension/narrow content. On the epistemic understanding, one never needs to ask what the content of a belief would have been if it had been a belief on Twin-Earth. The narrow content is defined in a straightforward way at worlds that do not contain the relevant thought token. That is, we always appeal to the *original, fixed* thought in the actual world.

Moreover, narrow content may be derivative from wide content on Stalnaker’s contextual/diagonal understanding, but not on the epistemic understanding. Epistemic
intension can be defined quite independently of subjunctive intension, when we define
epistemic intension, we make no appeal to subjunctive evaluation. We have seen that the
subjunctive intension of a concept is determined by the epistemic intension in
conjunction with how the actual world turns out to be. Therefore it seems that if either
intension is more fundamental, it is the epistemic intension. Subjunctive intension is in
this sense *derivative* from epistemic intension.

**Objection Three: The Problem of Holism**

Block (1991) claims that Fodor’s contextual account of narrow content is subject to the
charge of holism. That is, no two different speakers can have a thought with the same
narrow content, unless they are functional duplicates. Moreover, it seems that the narrow
content of a speaker’s thought will change every time the speaker acquires a new relevant
belief, or indeed, every time that anything relevant to the term happens in the mind of the
speaker. For example, the referent of the term “tiger” may be determined as the set of the
objects that satisfy the beliefs the speaker associates with the term. Suppose that at time \( t_1 \)
the speaker associates \( n \) beliefs with the term, thus “tiger” designates the set of objects
that satisfy these \( n \) properties. After a short period of time, at time \( t_2 \) the speaker might
have learned another thing about tiger, now the referent of “tiger” changes to the set of
things that satisfy the \( n+1 \) properties.

In response, Chalmers writes: “This problem does not apply to epistemic
intensions. There is no problem with quite different thinkers having thoughts with the
same epistemic intension: for example, very different people can have *I am a philosopher*
thoughts with the same epistemic intension. Further, epistemic intensions will not usually
change with the acquisition of new beliefs. A change in epistemic intension requires a
change in a subject’s rational pattern of judgments about scenarios considered as actual: a change in belief may change the subject’s judgments about which scenarios are actual, but it will not usually change a subject’s rational judgment about what will be the case if a given scenario is actual. It may be that epistemic intensions sometimes drift over time, or that corresponding thoughts of different thinkers sometimes have different epistemic intensions, but this falls well short of a general holism.” (Chalmers (2002a), 19)

I agree with what Chalmers has said. However, I also feel that Chalmers’s reply is too concise. For example, it is not very clear why epistemic intensions can drift over time or why a subject’s rational pattern of judgments about scenarios considered as actual can change/evolve gradually over time. In section 4.5, I will try to clarify these points.

**Objection Four: The Problem of Triviality**

In their 1999 paper “Conceptual Analysis, Dualism and the Explanatory Gap,” Block and Stalnaker pose this serious challenge to Chalmers’s two-dimensional framework. On their account, one might be tempted to think that the two-dimensional framework provides a recipe for determining the epistemic intension of any expression in the following way. Everyone can agree that the world contains enough information to determine the semantic value of any expression that has a semantic value. So everyone can agree that if we are given an expression and a set of possible worlds in each of which the expression has some semantic value, this will determine a function taking the possible worlds into the semantic values (or extensions of the expression) in these possible worlds, whatever they are. The resulting function will be the epistemic intension. But is this the relevant two-dimensional framework? Block and Stalnaker deny that it is.
They ask us to consider the English word “coumarone” (it is another colorless liquid, not H$_2$O, but C$_6$H$_4$OCHCH). Suppose that you (like most of the English speakers) have absolutely no clue about what this word means or refers to. You do not even know what kind of thing coumarone is. Is it physical or mental? Is it a geometric figure, a planet, or an animal? You don’t know the answers to any of these questions. Yet, if you were told enough about the world, or about any possible world, especially the information about how the experts with respect to this term use this term in that world, then without leaving your armchair you would be able to tell what that word meant and referred to in that world. Consequently, you would know the epistemic intension of “coumarone,” even though you actually know nothing about the word. This makes the notion of epistemic intension trivial.

It is trivial in the sense that the epistemic intension of a word is supposed to capture what is in the mind of a competent user of the word when she can be qualified as “understanding the meaning of the word.” For instance, a speaker should have beliefs of phenomenal, water-ish properties in order to be qualified as “understanding the meaning of the word ‘water’.” And it has been advertised as the merit of the epistemic intension that it can be roughly approximated by such phenomenal descriptions and hence capture what is in the mind of a competent user of the word. However, in the case proposed by Block and Stalnaker, the speaker has absolutely no phenomenal beliefs associated with the word “coumarone,” this is exactly the case in which according to our ordinary linguistic practice, we will say that the speaker does NOT know the meaning of the word. Yet the scenarios of the word can contain so much information that when given the scenarios, a speaker who previously knows nothing about the word will know everything
about the word and its referent. In other words, the epistemic intension of a word becomes *trivial* because any rational speaker can know the intension without having any phenomenal beliefs associated with the word.

The following is Chalmers’s attempt to reply to this objection of triviality. I will argue that it is not completely satisfactory.

In “The Foundations of Two-Dimensional Semantics,” Chalmers says that one might have the following worry: the epistemic intension may be well defined, but it is *trivial*. The triviality comes from the requirement that descriptions be epistemically complete. In order for a description to be epistemically complete, it will need to specify the truth or falsity of most sentences explicitly, as a result, epistemic evaluation as defined will have an uninteresting structure.

Chalmers admits that this worry is reasonable enough, but believes that it is ultimately wrong, because epistemically complete descriptions do not need to specify the truth or falsity of most statements explicitly, and epistemic evaluation does not have a trivial structure. Take the case of “water”. Here, we can let D be a truth specifying an appropriate amount of information about the appearance, behavior, composition, and distribution of objects and substances in one’s environment, as well as information about their relationship to oneself. *D need not contain the term “water” at any point*: appearance can be specified in phenomenal terms, behavioral terms. Then D is epistemically sufficient for “water is H₂O.” When one knows that D, one will be in a position to know all about the chemical make up of various liquids with various superficial properties in one’s environment, and will then be able to infer that water is H₂O (Cf. Chalmers (2002d), 21).
First, to see the merit of Chalmers’s above reply, let us consider the case of “coumarone” instead of “water.” If, as Chalmers suggests, D does not contain the term “coumarone” at any point, will I (who know absolutely nothing about the word “coumarone”) be able to infer from D that “coumarone is C₈H₄OCHCH? Obviously not. So it seems that Block and Stalnaker’s example in support of their objection of triviality has been blocked by Chalmers’ foregoing strategy.

However, Chalmers’s reply to the objection of triviality concerning proper names is still puzzling. He wrote: “Something similar applies for terms like ‘philosopher,’ or even names like ‘Feynman.’ Here, the base information D may need more than in the case above: for example, it may need to include information about people and their mental states, and the use of certain names, and so on. But once I have this information, I will be in a position to know that Feynman was not a philosopher, even if I had no substantive knowledge of Feynman beforehand. And again, my information need not use the terms ‘Feynman’ or ‘physicist’ to do this (it might use the quite different term “Feynman” in order for me to track down the referent via those from who I obtained the name, but that is legitimate in this context.” (Chalmers (2002d), old online version, 21).

Suppose I know nothing about “Feynman,” not even whether it refers to a person or a mountain or a plant. Then it is clear that information about people and their mental states without the name “Feynman” attaching to them will not enable me to pick out the referent of the name. But suppose D includes information about people (experts in the community with respect to the term) and their mental states with the name (as a word) attaching to them, then I will be able to pick out the referent of the name. Nevertheless, the epistemic intension of the name will be trivialized. Very Roughly, the epistemic
intension of a name becomes *trivial* when a rational speaker who does not know anything phenomenal about the name can nevertheless know the epistemic intension of the name if she is given enough information contained in the scenarios as the arguments of the intension.

Therefore, how to give an account of epistemic intension of proper names in a *nontrivial* way remains a challenge. My task in this chapter is to search for such an account.

**Objection Five: Is Epistemic Intension Ineffable?**

Toward the end of his paper “The Components of Content,” Chalmers emphasizes that although he has used descriptions to characterize epistemic intensions, these descriptions merely provide a rough handle on the intension for the purposes of illustration. The real narrow content is a function from scenarios to extensions, and can be characterized fully only by specifying its value at specific scenarios. As soon as we move to a summarizing description in language, imperfections are introduced, and the narrowness of the content is contaminated. But the intension itself remains narrow, we should not mistake the linguistic description for the real thing. This might suggest that epistemic content is “ineffable.” But Chalmers believes that the real problem is simply that it is difficult to capture the epistemic content (Cf. Chalmers (2002a), 21).

In section 4.5, I will argue that the epistemic intension of proper names can be characterized in a nontrivial and explicit way. As a result, it is not mysteriously “ineffable.”
4.4 Further Examination of Chalmers’s Reply to the Triviality Objection in the Case of Proper Names

This section is a close analysis of Chalmers’s solution to the problem of triviality that is highlighted by Block and Stalnaker in Objection Four of the previous section.

Block and Stalnaker’s point can be viewed in this way. For an English word such as “coumarone,” an expert of the word knows the phenomenal properties associated with the word by our community. Given a scenario in the epistemic space of the word, the expert will examine the underlying chemical structure of the substance that has those phenomenal properties associated with the word, and then he will make a rational decision about what coumarone is in that scenario. And that will be the value of the epistemic intension of the word (a function) corresponding to that argument (that scenario). In this way, we can say that the expert knows the epistemic intension of “coumarone.” Or more importantly, we say that the epistemic intension of the word captures the narrow content of the word in the expert’s mind, roughly, those phenomenal properties our community associates with the word.

On Chalmers’s account, a scenario is a maximally specific epistemic possibility, one with all the details filled in. But Chalmers leaves it open exactly what “maximally specific details” means here. Block and Stalnaker’s worry is this. If every scenario in the epistemic space of “coumarone” contains the information about how our community experts use the word (since a scenario is supposed to have maximally specific details about the world considered as actual), then even a speaker who knows nothing about the phenomenal properties associated with the word will be able to get the information about
the phenomenal properties from the experts’ uses of the word in that scenario and consequently get the right value of the epistemic intension corresponding to that scenario.

Now the epistemic intension of “coumarone” becomes trivial in the sense that a speaker who knows absolutely nothing about “coumarone” will be able to get the value of the epistemic intension of the word right for every scenario in the epistemic space and consequently will know the epistemic intension. This contradicts the advertisement that the epistemic intension is going to capture the narrow content of the word which is roughly approximated by the phenomenal properties associated with the word.

To solve this problem, Chalmers says that the canonical description of a scenario of a term such as “coumarone” should not include the word “coumarone” at any point. If this is true, then the speaker who knows nothing about the phenomenal properties associated with “coumarone” will not be able to get the information about our community experts’ uses of the term in any scenario. Consequently, she will not be able to get the value of the epistemic intension. On the contrary, the expert of the word “coumarone” will still be able to examine a given scenario to see what the underlying chemical structure of the substance with the phenomenal properties (they are in the expert’s head) is and then decide the value of the epistemic intension. In this way, the problem of triviality can be solved.

However, Chalmers treats the case involving ordinary proper names such as “Gödel” differently. He writes: “Something similar applies for terms like ‘philosopher,’ or even names like ‘Gödel’ or ‘Feynman.’ Here, the base information D may need more than in the case above: for example, it may need to include information about people and their mental states, and the use of certain names, and so on. For example, once I know
enough about the history of the use of the name ‘Gödel’ by others in my community, about the properties of relevant individuals, and so on, then I will be in a position to know that Gödel was a mathematician, even if I had no substantive knowledge of Gödel beforehand. And again, my information need not use the terms ‘Gödel’ or ‘mathematician’ to do this. It might use the quite different term “‘Gödel’,” in order for me to track down the referent via those from who I obtained the name, but that is legitimate in this context.” (Chalmers (2002d), 25)

This is a revised version from the quote in section 4.3 which appears in the old online paper, but it has the same spirit. The difference between the term “Gödel” and the word “‘Gödel’” is this. The term “Gödel” as a proper name is not semantically neutral, therefore it is not allowed in any canonical description of scenario, while “‘Gödel’” denotes either the linguistic token in other community users’ utterances involving the name or the mental token in other community users’ mental states involving the name. They are semantically neutral and thus legitimate in the context.

The important thing is that Chalmers allows scenarios of a proper name such as “Gödel” to contain information about our community’s uses of the name. The question is: will the problem of triviality arise again? If every scenario in the epistemic space of “Gödel” contains the information about the history of our community uses of the name (in the Kripkean Causal network), then a rational speaker who does not know anything about Gödel would be able to make a rational judgment to find the value of the epistemic intension of the name in that scenario, and subsequently knows the epistemic intension of the name.
Someone might argue that even this does not make the epistemic intension of the name trivial, because it might be that all there is for a speaker to know the epistemic intension of a name is for her to be able to make a rational decision to pick out the referent of the name when given all the community uses of the name in a scenario. In this view, the epistemic intension of a name degenerates to deference to community and rational judgment based on the information of community uses of the name. Accordingly, the semantically relevant narrow content of a name also degenerates to deference to community and rational judgment. All other specific beliefs of a speaker involving the name are simply semantically irrelevant. To see why this view of epistemic intension/narrow content of a name is false, let us consider the following three speakers of the name “Gödel.”

Speaker A knows everything about the history of our community uses of the name, i.e., uses within the Kripkean causal network of the name throughout Gödel’s life. She is the idealized expert of the name. Speaker B knows absolutely nothing about the name except that the name refers to the referent of the name that the community experts refer to. She does not even know what sort of thing Gödel is, but she has the right deferential attitude. Speaker C has the same correct deferential attitude as speaker B. Moreover, speaker C, who just begins to learn English, unfortunately gets massively mistaken information concerning the English word/name “Gödel.” As a result, C believes that Gödel means the thing with such and such phenomenal properties (the exact phenomenal properties that the vegetable spinach has).
The narrow contents concerning “Gödel” of the three speakers are different. But are these differences semantically relevant? I would like to contend that they are semantically relevant differences in the following senses.

(1) Speaker A can use what is in her head to pick out the correct referent of the name without aid from the community, whereas speaker B cannot use what is in her head to pick out the correct referent of the name without community aid. Therefore, there is something in A’s head that B lacks, although B can learn that thing from the community with her deferential attitude. Since the difference between A’s narrow content and B’s narrow content is relevant to reference determination, (more specifically, there is something in A’s head that enables A herself to determine the reference, and B does not have that something in her head and subsequently B is not able to pick out the reference herself), then the difference is semantically relevant.

(2) With what in her head, B will refrain from picking out the vegetable spinach as the referent of “Gödel,” while C will indeed pick out spinach as the referent of “Gödel” with her massively false beliefs. Thus the difference between B’s narrow content and C’s narrow content is also relevant to reference determination. Subsequently, the difference is also semantically relevant.

(3) Similarly, one can see that the difference between C’s narrow content and A’s narrow content is relevant to reference determination and hence the difference is semantically relevant.

The foregoing case of three speakers shows that the epistemic intension of a proper name such as “Gödel” cannot be reduced to deference to community and rational judgment, because specific beliefs involving the name might be semantically relevant.
Now suppose that *every* scenario in the epistemic space of “Gödel” contains information about the history of our community uses of the name within the Kripkean causal network of “Gödel.” Then each one of the above three speakers will be able to decide the right value of the function (epistemic intension) in every scenario. Thus each one of the three knows the epistemic intension of the name. The epistemic intension of the name becomes *trivial* because any speaker with general deference to community and general ability to make rational judgment can know it. Here “general” means the kind of deference and rationality that apply to every other name, there is nothing specifically required for “Gödel.” In other words, with this general deference and general rationality, a speaker can say that he knows the epistemic intension of every name in the world.

The epistemic intension of the name is also *trivial* in the sense that it is even known by a speaker like C, whose understanding of “Gödel” is seriously defective in a semantic way according to our ordinary linguistic practice.⁵ Also, the epistemic intension is supposed to reflect the semantic narrow content of the name. But our three speakers, A, B, and C will share the same epistemic intension, even though their narrow contents involving the name seem different in a semantically relevant way.

All these counterintuitive consequences result from the assumption that *every* scenario in the epistemic space of the name contains information of all the community uses of the name. Although it is not clear from my previous quote of Chalmers whether Chalmers himself really embraces this assumption, his writings at other places clearly indicate that he rejects this assumption.

For example, Chalmers argues that the epistemic intension of Leverrier’s *tokens* of the name “Neptune” is different from the epistemic intension of his wife’s *tokens* of

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the same name. For Leverrier, in any scenario (even if the community uses of the name are not included), the epistemic intension picks out whatever perturbs the orbit of Uranus in that scenario. For Leverrier’s wife, in any given scenario, she would have to examine Leverrier’s use of the name first and then make her own judgment, her epistemic intension picks out whatever Leverrier refers to as “Neptune” in that scenario. In a scenario where the name “Neptune” does not appear at all, Leverrier’s epistemic intension will pick out whatever perturbs the orbit of Uranus, thus it will have a definite value. However, Leverrier’s wife’s epistemic intension will not be able to pick out a definite object as its value, because his wife could not know his uses of the name, thus the value of his wife’s epistemic intension is indeterminate in that scenario. Since the two functions have different values in one scenario, then they are different functions.

Chalmers wants the epistemic space of a name to be composed of scenarios that contain various combinations of community uses of the name. Thus scenarios that contain all the community uses of the name constitute just one type of scenarios. With the notion of “scenario” thus fine grained, Chalmers is able to use the epistemic intension of a speaker’s token to precisely capture the speakers’ narrow content of the token. For example, the aforementioned speakers A, B, and C will have different epistemic intensions for their respective tokens of “Gödel.” We can find a scenario where the epistemic intensions of A, B, and C have different values and subsequently they are three different functions, even though these three different functions share the same values on a subset of scenarios in the epistemic space of the name, i.e., these scenarios that contain all the community uses of the name.
If the epistemic space of a name consists of scenarios that contain various combinations of the community uses of the name, then the problem of triviality will be blocked. For instance, in a scenario where no community use of “Gödel” is included, incompetent speakers such as B and C will not be able to pick out the right referent in that scenario. However, with the notion of “scenario” thus fine grained, the epistemic intension will vary from one speaker’s tokens to another speaker’s tokens for the same name.

Chalmers emphasizes that for a general account, epistemic intension cannot be assigned to expression *types* but rather must be assigned to expression *tokens*. This raises the objection that if epistemic intensions can vary between tokens of a type, then they do not fall within the domain of the philosophy of language at all. In other words, they are not linguistic meanings that the philosophy of language is searching for. Chalmers dismisses this objection by simply suggesting that this is a terminological issue.

I disagree with Chalmers on this point. I think that this is more than an issue of terminology. I believe that Block and Stalnaker’s challenge from triviality really amounts to this question. Is there a *nontrivial* epistemic intension for the English word (thus type, not just token) such as “coumarone” and “Gödel”? I believe this challenge can be met and it will be my task in the next section.
4.5 Elaboration of Chalmersian 2D Semantics and Its Application to the Case of Proper Names

The focus of chapter one of my dissertation is this question: How is the reference of a proper name picked out in the actual world? Kripke’s semantic argument (e.g., the Gödel case) shows that the answers provided by the descriptive theories are mistaken. Kripke’s own account, the causal picture of reference, faces difficulties as well; notably, the problem of reference change.

To accommodate these difficulties, Gareth Evans amends the causal picture as follows: the dominant causal source of the body of information the speakers associate with the name is the reference. Here “causal” is the key word, it means that the object doesn’t need to fit/satisfy the descriptions associated with the name, it only needs to be the causal source of the descriptions.

I construe two sorts of examples to show that Evans’s theory needs to be further developed. First, it is possible that the dominant causal source of the body of information our current community associates with the name turns out not to be the reference of the name. The reason is that we currently may not have any information about our community’s uses of the name in the past, and these past community uses of the name may collectively carry a decisive weight in our reference determination. Secondly, it is possible that the object that fits/satisfies the body of information associated with the name should be picked out as the reference over the object that is the dominant causal source of the information. The reason is that an object’s actually satisfying the body of information associated with the name carries a certain weight in our reference
determination, although it may not determine the reference in every scenario as the
descriptive theories suggest.

My proposed solution to the central question of chapter one consists of the
following points:
(1) In the ideal situation, if the Kripkean causal network of a name involves only one
object, then that object is the reference. However, if the causal network involves multiple
objects, then before making a decision about which object is the reference, we need to
have access to all the metaphysical facts about our community’s uses of the name.
(2) For each object involved, if it satisfies some pieces of information associated with the
name, it will get some votes as a candidate for the reference of the name. If it is the
causal source of some community uses of the name, it will also get some votes. When we
go through all the objects involved, if there is one object that stands out as the dominant
candidate, then that object should be picked out as the reference of the name. For lack of
a better phrase, I will call this object (i.e. the reference of the name) “the dominant bearer
of our community uses of the name.”
(3) I emphasize the importance of a phenomenon in reference determination that I dub
“our conditional deference to the world.” The usual idea is that if there is a dominant
bearer of our community uses of the name (i.e., an object that either satisfies or is the
causal source of the weighted most of the descriptions concerning the community uses of
the name), then whatever that object is (we defer to the world about whatever hidden
properties that object might have), we pick out that object as the reference of the name. I
construct some cases to show that the dominant bearer (especially when it is the dominant
causal source of the information) could turn out to be something that we will refuse to
take as the reference of the name. Hence in reference determination our deference to the world is only *conditional*.

The foregoing proposal for theory of reference can be used to provide an account of the epistemic intension of proper names (as linguistic types) in the following *nontrivial* way. Given a name, say, “Gödel,” we can associate with it a web of community uses of the name. The web is structured. In the case of “Gödel,” for instance, at the core of the web, there are uses such as “Gödel is a person,” and “Gödel is not a number.” In the middle of the web, there are uses concerning the great achievements and significant events and significant characteristics of Gödel, or structural and biographical information about Gödel. At the periphery of the web, there are uses concerning less significant things about Gödel.

Now the epistemic intension of the name “Gödel” can be characterized as follows. Among the objects involved in the Kripkean causal network of “Gödel,” the object that is the dominant bearer of the community uses of the name “Gödel” (uses such as “the author of the incompleteness theorem,” and “the professor at Princeton,” etc.) is the reference of the name. A typical argument of the epistemic intension of the name (as a function) is this: a description of which objects are involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name, and moreover, how these objects are related to our community uses of the name via being either the causal bearer or truth bearer. Given such an argument, we can use the above characterization of epistemic intension of the name to make a *rational* judgment about which object is the dominant bearer and pick out *that* object as the referent of the name and subsequently as the *value* of the epistemic intension in that given scenario.
My account of the epistemic intension of proper names is different from Chalmers’s theory in the following aspects.

(1) Chalmers does not make it explicit that if every scenario in the epistemic space of the name contains information about all the community uses of the name, then it will trivialize the notion of epistemic intension and narrow content of the name as an English word. I have argued for this point in detail in section 4.4.

(2) Chalmers mainly focuses on the epistemic intension/narrow content of an individual speaker’s tokens of a name. He does not tell us explicitly how to use epistemic intensions of tokens to capture the semantic content/meaning of a proper name as a linguistic type. He emphasizes specifically that his theory is only for tokens, not for types. But the reason why we need a theory for proper names as linguistic types is this. In our ordinary linguistic practice, when various individual speakers use a name, say, “Gödel,” they all implicitly understand that they are talking about the same name, and that name is a linguistic type. So it is important for us to study the semantic content of a proper name as a linguistic type.

I contend that to determine the semantic content of a proper name usually involves a social effort/cooperation. On my account, even if the semantic content of a name is a social property, it has a “narrow” component in the sense that that component is epistemically accessible to our community as a whole, even though it is not epistemically accessible to various individual speakers without social aid or social cooperation. And this part of the meaning is captured by the notion of epistemic intension of the name as a linguistic type.
(3) Chalmers does not explain how to specify the information in scenarios. I submit that in the case of proper names as linguistic types, we focus on and fix our community’s phenomenal activities/uses concerning the name within the Kripkean causal network which are epistemically accessible to our community as a whole. The arguments of the epistemic intension (as a function) are various possibilities that the underlying objects are related to the community phenomenal activities/uses involving the name within the network.

(4) Chalmers suggests that epistemic intensions are “ineffable.” He gives descriptive approximations of the epistemic intension of special terms such as “water” and “Hesperus.” He gives no approximation for epistemic intensions concerning general, ordinary proper names such as “Gödel.” I intend to show that the result in chapter 1 of my dissertation can give a good approximation for epistemic intensions involving more general, ordinary names. The descriptive approximation can be given by the structured web of community uses of the name, many of these descriptions are uniquely for that name alone.

(5) Chalmers does not say explicitly what “rational judgment” means in the 2D framework. My elaboration suggests that in the case of proper names, making a rational judgment amounts to determining which object involved in the Kripkean causal network is the dominant bearer of the community uses of the name. And since the web of community uses of the name contains specific properties, then making rational judgment amounts to make a rational decision about which object is the dominant bearer of these specific properties.
Let me reiterate three points: (1) This account of epistemic intension of names is *nontrivial*, because the epistemic intension is given by a cluster of community uses of the name, most of them are descriptions *uniquely* of the supposed referent of the name. An individual speaker has to know *sufficiently* many phenomenal properties of the name in order to know the epistemic intension of the name. The speaker cannot get information from any scenario about these phenomenal properties, because in no scenario will the name be attached to the phenomena of our community practices concerning the name. (2) The first dimension of linguistic/semantic content of a name is given by the community uses of the name. This should not be surprising, because for most names, it takes a whole community to secure the reference. Therefore reference determination is a social affair. This dimension of semantic content of names might not be in any particular speaker’s mind, it nonetheless is in the collective minds of our linguistic community, so in this social or communal sense, the epistemic intention of names is still a sort of *narrow* content. The rigidified object picked out in the actual world as the dominant bearer of community uses of the name will be the wide content, because it is even unbeknownst to our community as a whole. That is, before we are given the information about how those underlying objects are related to our community practices of the name, even our community as a whole do not know which object is the dominant bearer. (3) The scenarios as the arguments of the epistemic intension are limited variations of the underlying metaphysical possibilities causally connected to the community uses of the term, with other parts of the world *especially the community uses of the name fixed*.

Now we are all set to show that this account of epistemic intension of proper names can survive all the objections raised by Block and Stalnaker.
First, the problem of under determination, this is the problem regarding what is held constant across possible worlds/scenarios. It is clear that on our account, what must be held constant across possible worlds/scenarios must include the community uses of the expression. And the epistemic intension of the name can be given nontrivially by the fixed community uses of the name.

Second, must narrow content be dependent on wide content? On our account the answer is no. Even if there turns out to be no referent for the name (for example, if the dominant bearer of our community uses of “Gödel” turns out to be a tomato-like device sent by the aliens, and we refuse to take it as the referent of “Gödel”), our community uses of the name can still exist and have its own meaning. In a sense it is the narrow content that has the priority, because it is the community uses of the term combined with the underlying metaphysical facts of the actual world that determine the wide content.

Third, the problem of holism, it is true that for a name of a person who is still alive, say, “Tiger Woods,” the web of our community uses of the name is continuously expanding and evolving. But this doesn’t entail that the epistemic intension of the name is constantly changing in a semantically relevant way. Most of the time, the web of the name is expanding with uses concerning trivial facts about the referent, these limited amount of additional uses of the name will not change who is the dominant bearer of the web.

Intuitively, the dominant bearer of the web of community uses of “Tiger Woods” at this moment and the dominant bearer of the web of the name one month from now will be the same object (if there is one). And for practical reasons and pragmatic convenience, we can treat the epistemic intension of “Tiger Woods” now the same as the epistemic
intension of the name ten days from now. And intuitively we do feel this way and treat it this way. That is why there is no problem of holism for the epistemic intension.

On the other hand, the dominant bearer of the web of “Tiger Woods” now and the dominant bearer of the web of “Tiger Woods” 50 years from now might be different objects. That’s why Chalmers is right to note that the epistemic intensions sometimes drift over time. But our account accommodates and explains this kind of reference change phenomenon well.

Finally, is epistemic intension either trivial or ineffable? I have argued that this is the only challenge to which Chalmers’s reply is not completely clear. And I have attempted to show that using my proposal for the theory of reference, we can offer an account of epistemic intension for proper names in a nontrivial and effable way in terms of the specific descriptions uniquely of the supposed referent in the web of the community uses of the name.

In conclusion, I submit that the elaborated version of Chalmersian two-dimension framework provides a promising account for the semantic content of proper names as linguistic types.
1. My own account of the semantic content of proper names is closer to a version of rigidified cluster theory, more importantly, I want to emphasize the social and pragmatic factors.

2. My understanding is that in order for Chalmers’s strategy to succeed, the epistemic space of the term must contain scenarios in which even the token “‘coumarone’” is excluded. If every scenario in the epistemic space contains the token “‘coumarone’” in the experts’ mind, then the epistemic intension will be trivialized.

3. In the next section, I will explain in detail the challenge from the problem of triviality in the case of proper names. Here a proper name means a word in a language such as English.

4. Again I think that what Chalmers needs here is that the epistemic space of the term must contain scenarios in which even “‘coumarone’” is excluded.

5. If a speaker such as C says: “I know ‘Gödel’ is whatever my community experts use it to refer to. And I understand it refers to this (pointing to spinach).” Then according to our ordinary linguistic practice, we will likely tell the speaker that she is in a good position to learn what the word “Gödel” really means, but right now her understanding of the meaning of the word is seriously wrong.

6. The background story is that Leverrier was the first one in the community to use the word “Neptune” to denote the object that causes the perturbation of the orbit of Uranus. Leverrier’s wife only heard the word from her husband and had no clue what he was using it for.

7. For example, in “On Sense and Intention,” Chalmers says: “There are many intermediate cases, where a name is used with some mixture of deferential and nondeferential elements, so that for a speaker to determine reference of the name, relevant information will include both information about others’ usage and independent information about properties of the referent (perhaps corresponding to some of the speaker’s beliefs involving the name.” (Chalmers (2002c), 24) From this passage we can see that Chalmers thinks that some scenarios should contain only part of the community uses of the name. In such a scenarios, in order for a speaker to be able to pick out the right referent, she should have phenomenal beliefs for those community uses that are not included in that scenario.
5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, my goal is to propose and defend a theory of the meaning or semantic content of proper names. I would like to call it “A Social and Pragmatic Theory” (SPT), for reasons I will explicate later in the chapter.

In section 5.2, I outline the proposed theory, i.e., SPT, and offer an intuitive promotion of the theory. I draw the distinction between SPT and the traditional descriptive theories by emphasizing that on SPT, the descriptive component of the semantic content of a name is indispensable in reference determination.

In the next six sections (5.3-5.8), I contend that SPT can accommodate all the six difficulties facing various theories of proper names, the difficulties that I have introduced in the very beginning of my dissertation. More specifically, in section 5.3, I will explain why Kripke’s modal argument does not pose a problem for SPT. Section 5.4 includes a close analysis of the notion “a competent speaker/user of a proper name.” I argue that this is a semantic as well as a pragmatic notion, and its pragmatic dimension can be used to deal with the epistemic argument on behalf of SPT. I will also show how SPT can survive
Soames’s new attack on Descriptivism. Section 5.5 shows how the result of Chapter 1 can help SPT solve the challenge from the semantic argument. In sections 5.6-5.8, I will explain how on SPT, the descriptive component of the meaning of a name can be used to offer satisfactory solutions to Frege’s puzzle, belief puzzles, and the problem of empty names.

Finally section 5.9 contains further elaboration of SPT. I summarize various arguments in support of this theory and clarify why certain social and pragmatic factors play an important role in determining the semantic content of proper names.

5.2 A Theory of the Meaning of Proper Names

In Chapter 1, I have argued that every ordinary proper name is associated with a structured web of our community uses of the name. In the actual world, the reference of the name can be determined as follows. The object that is the dominant bearer of our community uses of the name, with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world, should be picked out as the reference of the name.

Based on this account of the reference of proper names, I would like to propose the following Social and Pragmatic Theory of the Meaning of Proper Names (SPT). It is “social” because I want emphasize that the semantic content of a proper name as a linguistic type is generally the result of social cooperation. It is “pragmatic” because I want to emphasize that the semantic implications in our ordinary linguistic practices are determined by various pragmatic factors or considerations.
The Social and Pragmatic Theory of the Meaning of Proper Names (SPT)

The meaning or semantic content of a proper name N is given by the following rigidified cluster of descriptions: The object that is in this (rigidified) world the dominant bearer of our community uses of N with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world.²

Before I try to defend this proposal vigorously, I would like to point out that it has the following intuitive appeals:

(i) Given a proper name N, we usually understand N not only as that object, but also as that object with such and such properties. Of course, as an individual speaker, each of us might not know many of these properties, but we all defer to our community experts regarding these properties.

(ii) We understand that N is an object that not only has properties concerning her great achievements or significant events in her life (if she has any) or her major characteristics, but also has properties concerning many other things in her life/history. Again, we defer to community experts regarding these other properties too.

(iii) If we are careful, we will notice that although N is the object that is the dominant bearer of our community uses of N in this world, it is generally not true that the same object o will be the dominant bearer of these specific community uses (which can be given by specific ordinary definite descriptions such as “the author of the incompleteness theorem of arithmetic”) in every possible world. For example, in a possible world (an alternative historical scenario), another object o’, rather than o, could become the dominant bearer of the same community uses. Also, in another possible world, the name
N might be associated with a significantly different web of community uses, as a result, object o might not be the dominant bearer of our current community uses associated with the name.

(iv) Although in a possible world the object o might not be the dominant bearer of those specific definite descriptions that represent our current community uses associated with the name, once the actual world is fixed, that is, once o is picked out in the actual world as the dominant bearer of those specific community uses, then in every possible world, it is true that that object o is the dominant bearer of those specific community uses in this (i.e., the actual) world.

(v) We are aware of the possibility that some of our community uses associated with the name might turn out to be false even in the actual world. For instance, it is possible that the referent of the name does not satisfy (fit) the definite descriptions, instead, it causes our community to believe that the referent satisfies these properties in the actual world. To accommodate this possibility, we emphasize that an object can in general become the dominant bearer of our community uses of the name via a combination of satisfying certain descriptions in the web and being the causal source of certain other descriptions in the web.

(vi) In some extreme cases, an object can become the dominant bearer of community uses of a name via being the causal source of most of the properties in the web, but the properties that the object actually has could turn out to be such a distortion of what we believe the referent should have that we might intuitively refuse to defer to the world to pick out that object as the referent of the name. In such cases, there is no referent for the
name, in other words, the name degenerates to an empty name. The meaning of such an empty name will be discussed in section 5.8. ³

Next I would like to have a close look at the structure of the semantic content of a name on SPT. In section 3.5 of chapter 3, I introduced Soames’s proposal for the semantic content of what he calls “partially descriptive names” such as Princeton University and Professor Saul Kripke. On Soames’s account, the semantic content of a partially descriptive name N has two components: the referent o and a descriptive property P. In any possible world w, the proposition expressed by the sentence “N is F” is true iff o has both properties P and F at w.

According to my proposal (SPT), the semantic content of an ordinary proper name such as Aristotle and Gödel has a structure formally similar to that of the semantic content of a partially descriptive name, but at the same time, the two are different in a substantial way. Let me explain. SPT is a version of a rigidified cluster theory with the cluster of properties based on our community linguistic practices involving the name. Since the rigidified cluster description will designate the same object in every possible world, therefore that object can be viewed as actually contained in the rigidified description.⁴

Consequently, on SPT, the semantic content of an ordinary proper name N can be viewed as having two components: the referent o and a rigidified description P_R.⁵ The description is rigidified because it looks like this in general: the dominant bearer in the actual world of such and such properties (specific properties in the structured web of our community uses concerning N). Accordingly, in any possible world w, the proposition expressed by the sentence “N is F” is true iff o satisfies both P_R and F at w.⁶
However this is only a structural similarity in formality to what Soames advocates in the case of partially descriptive names. The essential difference is this. For a partially descriptive name, the referent satisfies the ordinary definite description in every possible world, whereas for an ordinary proper name, the referent satisfies the *rigidified* cluster description in every possible world.

This concludes my introduction of SPT. To defend this theory, in the next six sections, I will endeavor to show that it can address all the six difficulties listed in the beginning of my dissertation.

5.3 The Modal Argument

According to the traditional descriptive theories, the meaning of a proper name can be given by a definitive description, or more generally, a cluster of definite descriptions. Usually these descriptions are understood or interpreted as descriptions concerning only the great achievements or significant events of the referent of the name. Suppose that the name N is associated with such a cluster of descriptions, say, $P_1 \ldots P_m$. Then on the traditional descriptive theory, the meaning of N is that object that satisfies the weighted most of $P_1 \ldots P_m$.

The modal argument is designed to show that this theory of meaning is false. If the traditional descriptive theory is right, then “N is the object that satisfies the weighted most of $P_1 \ldots P_m$” will express a necessary truth, consequently it will be true in every possible world. However, there exist possible worlds in which N lives a totally different
life from that he has lived in the actual world, and as a result, N does not satisfy any of the properties \( P_1 \ldots P_m \).

Further analysis shows that an ordinary proper name such as N and an ordinary non-rigid definite description such as “that object that satisfies the weighted most of \( P_1 \ldots P_m \)” have different modal profiles. N is a rigid designator. It designates the same object \( o \) in every possible world, where \( o \) is the object that is picked out as the referent of the name in the actual world. The definite description is not a rigid designator. In a possible world \( w \), it will designate whatever object \( o_w \) that satisfies the weighted most of \( P_1 \ldots P_m \) in \( w \). And there are possible worlds in which \( o_w \) is not \( o \).

The modal argument shows two things. First, the traditional descriptive theory of meaning is false. Secondly, a proper name is a rigid designator, it designates that object \( o \) in every possible world where it exists, where \( o \) is the object that is picked out as the referent of the name in the actual world. What is not entailed by the modal argument is the direct reference theorist’s claim that the meaning of the name is exhausted by that object \( o \) which is the referent of the name in the actual world.

On the social and pragmatic theory (SPT) that I propose, an ordinary proper name N is associated with a structured web of community uses concerning N. The properties \( P_1 \ldots P_m \) which are concerned with great achievements and significant events and major characteristics only constitute a small portion of this structured web of uses. The meaning of N can be given like this:

(M) N is the object that is in the actual world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses associated with the name N.
This meaning Thesis (M) given by SPT can survive the modal argument. Suppose that object o is the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses associated with the name N, then the argument in Chapter 1 shows that o should be picked out as the referent of the name in the actual world. Now in every possible world w, N designates that object o. Moreover, that object o satisfies the property that it is in the actual world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of N, even in the possible world w.

One might raise the following objection to meaning Thesis (M) of SPT. If we use rigidified descriptions, then we can just focus on the descriptions given by the traditional descriptive theories, i.e., descriptions concerning great achievements and significant events such as P₁…Pₘ. We can simply propose a meaning thesis as follows: N is the object that in the actual world satisfies the weighted most of properties P₁…Pₘ. This meaning thesis can survive the modal argument too. In every possible world w, N will designate that object, and that object will satisfy the property that it is the object that in the actual world satisfies the weighted most of P₁…Pₘ.

It is true that the aforementioned rigidified version of traditional descriptive theory can survive the modal argument provided that N does satisfy the weighted most of P₁…Pₘ in the actual world. Nevertheless, it will face other difficulties. It will be clear in the next two sections that even the rigidified version of the traditional descriptive theory cannot survive the epistemic argument and the semantic argument. Indeed, even Salmon and Soames, as staunch opponents to the descriptive theories as they are, concede that the rigidified descriptions can survive Kripke’s original modal argument (Salmon 1981, 27; Soames 2002, 40). However, their further objection to the strategy employing rigidified
descriptions is exactly that it cannot solve the problems posed by the epistemic argument and the semantic argument.

It is my burden to show that the meaning Thesis (M) of SPT can survive various versions of the epistemic argument and the semantic argument.

5.4 The Epistemic Argument

There are three different versions of the so-called epistemic argument. I intend to argue that none of them can refute the meaning Thesis (M) of SPT.

The First Version of the Epistemic Argument

To deal with the modal argument, the rigidified version of the traditional descriptive theory needs the assumption that the referent of the name N does satisfy the weighted most of the properties $P_1 \ldots P_m$ in the actual world. The first version of the epistemic argument challenges this assumption. That is, we do not know a priori that the referent of N does satisfy the weighted most of $P_1 \ldots P_m$ in the actual world. Take “Shakespeare” as an example, it is possible that Shakespeare historically actually did not write *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, or any other work our community attributes to him. Instead, a bizarre and brilliant man named Smith wrote every one of the great works we commonly attributed to Shakespeare and Smith let Shakespeare publish all these works under his name.

Thus the first version of the epistemic argument can be expressed in this way. Given that we associate with the name “Shakespeare” the properties $P_1 \ldots P_m$ concerning his great achievements, we still do not know without further empirical investigation that
it is indeed Shakespeare who satisfies the weighted most of $P_1…P_m$ in the actual world.

Although this poses a challenge to the rigidified version of the traditional descriptive theory, it is not a problem for SPT. According to SPT, we associate with “Shakespeare” a structured web of community uses, $P_1…P_m$ constitute a small portion in this web. We do not know without further empirical investigation that it is indeed Shakespeare who satisfies the weighted most of $P_1…P_m$ in the actual world. Nevertheless, via community collaboration, we do know without further empirical investigation that Shakespeare in the actual world is the dominant bearer of the web of community uses associated with the name.

Hence SPT can reply to the first version of the epistemic argument as follows. Given that we associate with the name “Shakespeare” the structured web of community uses, we do know without further empirical investigation (and hence a priori) that it is indeed Shakespeare who is the dominant bearer of the web of these specific uses in the actual world.

*The Second Version of the Epistemic Argument*

Let $N$ be a proper name, let $D$ be whatever proposed rigidified description associated with $N$. In the case of SPT, $D$ would be “the object that is in the actual world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses associated with $N$.” Here the web consists of specific uses.

Soames asks us to consider the following two sentences.

(1) If $N$ exists, then $N$ is $D$.

(2) If $D$ exists, then $D$ is $D$. 

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Soames argues that if D indeed gives the meaning of the name, then (1) and (2) will encode the same semantic proposition, however it is evident that (2) is true a priori, whereas (1) is not. Therefore, D is not the meaning of the name.

I would like to defend SPT against the second version of the epistemic argument by making the following observations.

First, the meaning or semantic content of a proper name as a linguistic type is a social property, determining the referent of a name is a social affair. The various specific uses of the name in the structured web might not be in any single speaker’s mind, but they are in the collective minds of various speakers involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name.

Second, it takes a historical period of time to form the descriptive component of the meaning of the name. Only when the descriptive component of the meaning of the name (which is given by the structured web of community uses) is formed, we fix the descriptive component, and then use it to determine the referent of the name via picking out the object that is the dominant bearer of the web of those specific uses.

Thus it takes an empirical process to form the descriptive component of the meaning of the name and consequently it also takes an empirical process to determine which specific object is the referent of the name in the actual world.

Third, once the descriptive component of the meaning of the name is formed, and the referent of the name is determined, we rigidify both that object o as the referent of the name and the web of community uses with those specific properties. From then on, our community as a whole can have epistemic access to the meaning of the name, i.e., that object that is in this world the dominant bearer of the community uses which includes
these specific properties, without further empirical investigation. Only in this sense, we can say that our community as a whole can know, without further empirical investigation, that N is D. Only from then on can we say that (1) and (2) encode the same semantic proposition, but from then on we can also say that our community as a whole knows that (1) is true without further empirical investigation (i.e., a priori).

Moreover, I think that the quickest defense of SPT against this version of the epistemic argument might be like this. On SPT, sentence (1) and sentence (2) encode semantic proposition (3) and semantic proposition (4), respectively:

(3) If D exists, then D is D.

(4) If D exists, then D is D.

As a consequence, sentence (1) and sentence (2) are a priori from a semantic point of view, even though some individual speakers might not be able to grasp the exact semantic proposition from sentence (1).

The Third Version of the Epistemic Argument

This version of the epistemic argument points out the phenomena that often a competent speaker or user of a proper name knows only a few specific properties in the structured web of community uses associated with the name. Moreover, different competent speakers/users of the same name might know different subsets of properties in the web.

I think that these phenomena can be explained away as follows. First, let me emphasize again that on SPT, the descriptive component of the meaning of a proper name is a social property. It depends on social cooperation. For an ordinary proper name, since the associated web of community uses includes so many properties, it is usually pragmatically impossible and unnecessary for an individual to grasp all these
specific properties. For pragmatic purposes, when an individual speaker masters sufficiently many properties in the associated web, and if she is willing to defer to the community experts with regard to the properties that she does not know, then this individual speaker/user of the name can be dubbed as “a competent speaker/user of the name.”

Second, let us consider a concrete name “Bill Clinton.” Suppose that every speaker here is willing to defer to the community experts regarding the referent of the name. That is, each person knows that Bill Clinton is that object that our community experts refer to as the referent of the name “Bill Clinton.” It seems clear that in our ordinary linguistic practice, we can say the following various things concerning “knowing Bill Clinton.”

(a) I don’t know Bill Clinton at all.

(b) I barely know Bill Clinton.

(c) I know Bill Clinton.

(d) I know Bill Clinton well.

(e) I know Bill Clinton very well.

(f) I know Bill Clinton extremely well.

This suggests that knowing the referent of a name is a matter of degrees. Hence it is a holistic rather than an atomistic matter. A competent knower/speaker/user of “Bill Clinton” is a speaker who knows Bill Clinton sufficiently well, where “sufficiently well” is a notion depending on various pragmatic considerations.

As I have argued previously in Chapter 3, our use of the word “know” in the phrase “know a person” may have many implications, some of them are pragmatic, but other implications may well be semantically relevant. Everybody can take the right
referential intention quickly for all the names in the world. But if some individual speaker associates massively false beliefs with the name “Bill Clinton,” then there is nothing in our ordinary linguistic practice that indicates that we cannot say something like: “You do not know Bill Clinton and you have got what the name ‘Bill Clinton’ means seriously wrong.” Hence it is a coherent position to maintain that knowing the meaning of a name is also a matter of degrees and it is a holistic rather than an atomistic matter.

Third, in general, a person can be dubbed as “a competent speaker/user of a name N” if the following conditions are satisfied: (i) she has a sufficient, partial grasp of the descriptive component of the meaning, (ii) she does not have massively or severely false beliefs associated with the name, (iii) she is willing to defer to the community experts regarding the referent and meaning of the name. Consequently, it is not necessarily true that a competent user/speaker of a name must know the meaning of the name completely.

Fourth, although different individual speakers might have totally different partial grasps of the descriptive component of the meaning of a name, they can talk about the same object with the same web of community uses associated with the name via their deference to the community experts. Normally, competent speakers know different things (properties) concerning a name, but when they communicate, they know that they are talking about the same object as the referent of the name determined by a communal effort. Moreover, they know that they are talking about that same object with the same structured web of community uses; because they, as competent speakers, know that that object must have a lot of other properties that they themselves do not know, but other community members/experts know, therefore, they defer to the community with regard to
those properties unbeknownst to them individually. In this way, they are certain that they are talking about the same object with same properties.

5.5 The Semantic Argument

According to the traditional descriptive theory, the object that satisfies the weighted most of the properties concerning the great achievements and significant events commonly associated with the name is the referent of the name in the actual world. The semantic argument uses examples such as the Gödel case to show that this theory of reference is false.

Kripke’s own picture of reference asks us to focus on the causal-historical chain or network. There is an initial baptism at the beginning of the network. And there is the chain of deferential intentions. That is, when a speaker learns the name from another speaker, she always has the intention to use the name to refer to the same object that the speaker from whom she learns the name intends to use the name to refer to. According to this picture, the referent will be the object that is dubbed with the name at the baptism.

Evans discovers the phenomenon of reference change which shows that Kripke’s heuristic picture needs to be elaborated as Kripke himself expected. Evans’s later, more developed theory of reference claims that the object that is consistently and regularly recognized by the community producers of the name N as N should be picked out as the referent of the name in the actual world.

But there are realistic cases that indicate that Evans’s later theory needs further elaboration. For instance, both Osama Bin Laden and his double might be consistently
and regularly recognized by our community experts/producers of the name as *Osama Bin Laden*. Nevertheless, the fact that only one of these two objects actually satisfies/fits the prominent properties such as “the master mind behind ‘9.11’” makes that object alone stand out as the dominant bearer of the community uses associated with the name, and subsequently it alone should be picked out as the referent of the name “Osama Bin Laden” in the actual world.

Based on these results and observations, in Chapter 1, I propose the following theory of reference. For each proper name, there is a structured web of community uses associated with the name; among the objects involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name, the object that is the dominant bearer of the web of uses with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world should be picked out as the referent of name in the actual world.

And I have argued in Chapter 1 that this theory of reference can accommodate all the challenges posed by the original semantic argument, the phenomenon of reference change, further troubling cases such as “Osama Bin Laden and his double,” and “Aristotle the tomato like device.” Moreover, *as an empirical generalization*, it can be proposed as a necessary and sufficient condition of our reference determination. It is sufficient in the sense that for any object involved in the Kripkean causal network of the name, if it stands out as the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of the name with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world, then that object is the referent of the name. It is necessary in the sense that in order for any object to be the referent of the name, it must be an object involved in the Kripkean causal network of the
name, and it must be the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of the name with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world.

For the social and pragmatic theory (SPT), since its meaning Thesis (M) is based solely on the foregoing theory of reference, as a consequence, the semantic argument is not a problem for SPT.

The modal argument, the epistemic argument, and the semantic argument have been employed together to refute various descriptive theories. I have contended that these arguments together cannot refute SPT, even though SPT endorses a descriptive component in the meaning of proper names.

Since SPT is a rigidified description type of theory of meaning, and in his 2002 book *Beyond Rigidity* Soames has raised a series of objections to the strategy of rigidified description and to descriptive theories in general, in the rest of this section, I will go through each of Soames’s objections and argue that none of them can refute SPT.

Soames raises the following three questions to challenge the suggestion that descriptivism might be defended using Kripke’s causal picture. These questions are also proposed as challenges to descriptivism in general, namely, any theory that proposes that certain descriptions give the meaning of a proper name.

Question 1. How can the descriptions fix the reference of the name? How can the theory explain the phenomenon of reference change?

The reference theory of SPT offers a specific account of how the descriptions fix the reference of the name, i.e., as the dominant bearer of community uses associated with the name. And the phenomenon of reference change can be explained like this: when two objects are involved separately in time in the Kripkean causal network, after a long
period of time, the object that got involved later becomes the dominant bearer of the
community uses of the name, consequently it becomes the referent of the name.

Question 2. What is the relationship between the proposed descriptions as the meaning of
the name and various distinct descriptions associated with the name by individual
speakers?

On SPT, the proposed descriptions that \textit{collectively} give the meaning of the name as a
linguistic type are \textit{social} properties. They are based on social cooperation. The notion of
“a competent speaker/user of the name” is a pragmatic notion. An individual speaker can
be dubbed as “a competent speaker/user of the name” via being able to \textit{partially} grasp the
web of community uses of the name and defer to the community concerning uses that she
does not know. Thus various individual competent speakers can have distinct partial
grasps of the community uses of the name; nevertheless, through their deferential stands,
they can talk about the same referent and the same meaning.

Question 3. How can this descriptive account of meaning survive the attacks from the
original modal argument and epistemic argument?

I have argued in sections 5.3 and 5.4 that SPT can deal with these two arguments well.

Besides the above questions/challenges to descriptivism in general, Soames
provides several criticisms of the strategy of rigidified description in particular. (Soames
2002, 41-45) The first criticism is a variant of the problem of empty names, and I will
show in section 5.8 that it is not a problem for SPT. The second criticism is a variant of
the epistemic argument, and I have discussed it as the second version of the epistemic
argument in section 5.4. The third criticism is a variant of the semantic argument. Soames
adds the following twist. Let D be whatever content-giving description based on what has
happened within the Kripkean causal network of the name “Venus.” In an ancient Babylonian’s belief that Venus was a star, D would not be the semantic content of “Venus.”

Here is my response. The ancient Babylonian was qualified as “a competent speaker of the name” via partial grasp (with deferential attitude) of the community uses of the name at that time. After two thousand years, the web of our community uses associated with the name has evolved tremendously. And the meaning of the name has evolved accordingly. An object that was the dominant bearer of our community uses two thousand years ago might not be the dominant bearer of the current web of community uses of the name anymore. In short, a speaker could be a competent speaker of a name by the pragmatic standard at his time without knowing the tremendous evolution of the meaning of the name two thousand years after his death.

Soames’s main criticism of the strategy of rigidified description is given by the following argument. It is possible for a speaker S in a possible world to believe that Aristotle was a philosopher without believing that the F in the actual world was a philosopher.

The structure of Soames’s argument is as follows.

Step1. Suppose that the semantic content of “Aristotle” is the semantic content of “the F in the actual world.”

Step2. The sentence “Aristotle was a philosopher” and the sentence “the F in the actual world was a philosopher” encode the same semantic proposition.

Step3. The belief sentence “S believes that Aristotle was a philosopher” and the belief sentence “S believes that the F in the actual world was a philosopher” encode the
same semantic proposition, and thus have the same truth value.

Step 4. The two belief sentences could have different truth values, therefore, the supposition in step 1 is false.

I would like to argue that the following two belief sentences do not encode the same semantic proposition. Here is the reason. S can be a competent speaker of the name “Aristotle” via partial grasp of the meaning of the name with deferential attitude. Moreover, the semantic contribution of the name “Aristotle” in the belief context (5) is S’s partial grasp of the semantic content of the name with deferential attitude. That is, in (5), “Aristotle” makes the semantic contribution as that object that was a philosopher and has such and such other properties (deference to the community). In other words, in S’s belief context (5), the name’s semantic contribution is given by S’s mental content of the name rather than the semantic content of the name given by “the F in the actual world.”

Consequently, if we take the position that a name such as “Aristotle” is ambiguous in belief contexts, then contrary to what Soames claims in step 3, the belief sentences (5) and (6) encode different semantic propositions. Since step 3 has been blocked, then the supposition in step 1 is not false.
5.6 Frege’s Puzzle

Suppose that a and b are two co-referential proper names. On the direct referent theory (DRT), the following two sentences

(7) a=a
(8) a=b

encode the same piece of semantic information. Namely, the object (that is the referent of “a” and “b”) is the object itself. Therefore, on DRT, both (7) and (8) should be knowable a priori and uninformative. However, intuitively, while (7) is knowable a priori and uninformative, (8) seems knowable a posteriori and informative. This is the challenge that Frege’s puzzle poses for DRT.

Salmon’s defense of DRT against Frege’s puzzle goes like this. Contrary to what we intuitively believe, the only semantic (or semantically relevant) information that (8) conveys is indeed “the object (the referent of “a” and “b”) is the object itself” as DRT claims. All the other intuitively knowable a posteriori information is semantically irrelevant information, or in Salmon’s own words, pragmatically imparted information. Therefore, our intuition is misguided, and Frege’s puzzle poses no problem for DRT.

Soames adopts the same strategy. On Soames’s account, (8) semantically express a proposition that is not only true, but also both necessary and knowable a priori, because it is just the proposition “the object is the object itself.” Nonetheless, the primary assertions made by utterances of (8) are often neither necessary nor knowable a priori. This explains our intuition that (8) seems knowable a posteriori and informative. But these primary
assertions presumably convey only semantically irrelevant propositions. Therefore

Frege’s puzzle is not a problem for DRT.

Here is my objection to Salmon’s and Soames’s defenses of DRT based on the
distinction between semantic information and pragmatically imparted information.
Besides the trivial information that the object is the object itself, (8) conveys other types
of information. I would like to argue that contrary to what Salmon and Soames claim,
these other types of information can be clearly semantically relevant.

Sentence (8), i.e., “a=b,” can convey three pieces of information:

(i) the object is the object itself. (This is a fact in the world concerning the referent of
both “a” and “b.”)

(ii) The referent of “a” is the referent of “b.” (Salmon says that this piece of
information imparts the nontrivial linguistic information about the fact that we use two
distinct names “a” and “b” to refer to the same object, unbeknownst to ourselves. Salmon
suggests that it is presumably not semantically encoded information, but only
pragmatically imparted information.)

(iii) Since our community as a whole do not know that “a” and “b” refer to the same
object, usually our community associates with “a” a web of community uses/beliefs
concerning “a,” and associates with “b” a different web of community uses/beliefs
concerning “b.” That is, we understand “a” to denote that object a that has properties
P₁…Pₘ, and we understand “b” to denote that object b (which is different from object a in
our mind) that has properties Q₁…Qₙ. Thus when we are told that object a is object b,
another piece of information that is conveyed by (8) to us is this: that object a has the
properties P₁…Pₘ and Q₁…Qₙ. As a result, we will associate with “a” and “b” a new
web of community uses/beliefs that is based on the combination of the two previously distinct webs of uses. (Salmon claims that information like this, which is concerned with speaker’s beliefs, intentions, and attitudes is pragmatically imparted information and not semantically relevant information.)

I would like to use the following concrete cases to show that information conveyed by (8) as described in (ii) and (iii) can be semantically relevant information.

Case 1. Before the scientific discovery that Hesperus is Phosphorus, our community as a whole had believed for thousands of years that “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” refer to different objects. As a result, for thousands of years, our community had pointed to the morning star and said that this is not the object that is the referent of “Hesperus;” and we had pointed to the evening star and said that this is not the object that is the referent of “Phosphorus.”

Since for thousands of years, our community had committed consistent and regular mistakes concerning the referents of “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus,” thus I submit that the mistake that our community had been making is a semantic rather than pragmatic mistake, because it is a severe mistake concerning the referents of the names. If it is a semantic mistake, then the piece of information that the referent of “Hesperus” is the referent of “Phosphorus,” which corrects a severe semantic mistake, should be a semantically relevant piece of information rather than a piece of pragmatically imparted, linguistic information as Salmon claims.

Case 2. Analogously, suppose that our community has for many years made a consistent and regular mistake concerning the referents of “Clark Kent” and “Superman.” Since it is a massive and severe mistake about the referents of the names, then it is a semantic rather
than pragmatic mistake. Hence the piece of information that the referent of “Clark Kent” is the referent of “Superman,” which corrects a massive and severe semantic mistake, should be a piece of semantically relevant information.9

Case 3. Consider the numerical equation “5=V’” using both the Arabic and the Roman numeral for five. Suppose that Jones is familiar with “5” but not with “V,” Salmon claims that this equation pragmatically imparts nontrivial information that V is a numeral for the number five.

Imagine this scenario: Jones first encounters the term “V” in a chemistry text. He had absolutely no idea what “V” stands for. From the information in the text, he is pretty sure that “V” should denote some chemical substance. But his guess is wrong, even in the text, “V” means five. So for a long time, Jones believes that “V” means a certain chemical substance. It seems clear that Jones’s belief is semantically flawed or defective. Now later when he learns that “V” means the number 5, that piece of information corrects his semantically defective belief. Therefore, that piece of information is semantically relevant rather than pragmatically imparted. This example shows that information conveyed by (8) to a particular speaker can be semantically relevant too, contrary to what Salmon claims.

Case 4. We can develop Kripke’s original Gödel case like this. Many years ago in Vienna, a man named Schmidt was murdered. The police dubbed the murderer “Buffalo Bill.” Let us assume that it was indeed Gödel who killed Schmidt for the proof of the incompleteness theorem of arithmetic. However, because of a series of unfortunate mistakes, the police somehow built up a profile of “Buffalo Bill” that is completely mistaken. For instance, they believed that the murderer must be a woman, who looks like
this (the sketch), who is a movie star, etc. After a period of time, the police realized that the profile matches the great movie star Greta Garbo shockingly well. Although they didn’t have decisive evidence to arrest Ms. Garbo, privately, the police did associate the web of uses of “Greta Garbo” with “Buffalo Bill.”

It seems that the police’s beliefs are semantically defective, because they have no clue who “Buffalo Bill” is, and moreover, they have a massively mistaken web of uses associated with the name. Thus when the police finally learned that “Buffalo Bill” is “Kurt Gödel,” this piece of information causes their beliefs involving the name to change in a semantically relevant way, because they replace the massively mistaken web of uses with the correct web of uses.

These cases show that (8) can convey pieces of information described in (ii) and (iii) which are semantically relevant information. If this is right, then DRT is problematic, because it cannot capture these semantically relevant contents encoded by (8). Consequently, DRT has not met the challenge posed by Frege’s puzzle.

Since (8) can convey semantically relevant information of various types, types described in (i), (ii) and (iii), then the real challenge from Frege’s puzzle is to propose a meaning/semantic content theory that can capture all these types of semantically relevant information. I submit that the social and pragmatic theory (SPT) can fulfill this task.

On SPT, the meanings/semantic contents of “a” and “b” can be given as follows.

(A) \( a = \text{that object (the referent in the world) + that (the referent of “a”) is in this world the dominant bearer of the web of uses including properties } P_1 \ldots P_m \).
(B) \( b = \) that object (the referent in the world, unbeknownst to us, it is the same object as that in (A)) + that (the referent of “b”) is in this world the dominant bearer of the web of uses including properties \( Q_1 \ldots Q_n \).

Now based on meaning analyses (A) and (B), sentence (8), i.e., “a=b,” conveys the following three kinds of potentially semantically relevant information.

(i) That object is that object itself.

(ii) The referent of “a” is the referent of “b.”

(iii) The referent of “a” (now we know that it is the same as the referent of “b”) has the properties resulted in by the combination of the two previously separate webs of uses, i.e., resulted in by \( P_1 \ldots P_m Q_1 \ldots Q_n \).

Thus SPT explains our intuition that “a=b” is knowable a posteriori and can be semantically informative in multiple ways.

5.7 Belief Puzzles

In this section, I will explain how the social and pragmatic theory (SPT) can provide a satisfactory solution to the problem concerning the apparent failure of substitutivity of co-referential proper names in propositional attitude attributions. Consider the following examples.

(9) Lois Lane believes that Superman can fly.

(10) Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly.

(11) The ancient astronomer believes that Hesperus is Hesperus.

(12) The ancient astronomer believes that Hesperus is Phosphorus.
On the direct reference theory (DRT), belief sentences (9) and (10) encode the same semantic proposition, consequently they have the same truth value. And belief sentences (11) and (12) also encode the same semantic proposition, so they have the same truth value too. These conclusions contradict our strong intuitions that sentences (9) and (11) are true, whereas sentences (10) and (12) are false. In sections 2.5 and 3.6 I have contended that Salmon’s and Soames’s strategies to solve the belief puzzles on behalf of DRT are still unsatisfactory or unfinished.

I would like to show that SPT can provide an account of semantic content of proper names in the belief contexts so that our intuitions regarding the above belief ascriptions can be accommodated precisely.

On SPT, the semantic contents of “Superman” and “Clark Kent” have the following structures.

(13) Superman = that object (our conditional deference to the world) + that (the referent of “Superman” as our community understands) is in this world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of “Superman” which includes such and such specific properties $P_1$…$P_m$ (the result of social cooperation).

(14) Clark Kent = that object (our conditional deference to the world, unbeknownst to us, it is the same object as that object in (13)) + that (the referent of “Clark Kent” as our community understands, which is a different object from the referent of “Superman” as far as our community knows) is in this world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of “Clark Kent” which includes such
and such specific properties $Q_1...Q_n$ (again the result of social cooperation, and $Q_1...Q_n$ are drastically different from $P_1...P_m$).

Within Lois Lane’s belief contexts which are described by the belief sentences (9) and (10), the semantic contributions made by “Superman” and “Clark Kent” are constituted by Lois Lane’s partial grasps of the semantic contents of these names. We can say that Lois Lane’s partial grasps of the semantic contents of the names are Lois Lane’s mental contents of these names. Whereas the semantic contents of these co-referential names are social properties, Lois Lane’s mental contents of these names are her personal properties depending on her individual/unique partial grasps of those social properties which are shared by all competent individual speakers across the linguistic community via their deferential attitudes toward the fruits of social cooperation.

On SPT, Lois Lane’s mental contents of “Superman” and “Clark Kent” can be described as having the following structures.

(15) Superman = that object (conditional deference to the world) + that (the referent of “Superman” as Lois Lane understands) is in this world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of “Superman” which includes such and such specific properties $P_1...P_i$ (properties that Lois Lane associates with “Superman”) and many other properties (her deference to the community).

(16) Clark Kent = that object (conditional deference to the world) + that (the referent of “Clark Kent” as Lois Lane understands, which is a different object from the referent of “Superman” as far as Lois Lane knows) is in this world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of “Clark Kent” which includes
such and such specific properties $Q_1 \ldots Q_j$ (properties that Lois Lane associates with “Clark Kent”) and many other properties (her deference to the community). On this analysis, the semantic contributions made by “Superman” and “Clark Kent” in belief sentences (9) and (10) are different, because Lois Lane’s mental contents of “Superman” and “Clark Kent” are different in these belief contexts. Although Lois Lane’s mental content of “Superman” and her mental content of “Clark Kent” share one common component, namely, that object as the referent in the world, her mental contents of these two terms have distinct epistemic components.

The epistemic components of Lois Lane’s mental contents of “Superman” and “Clark Kent” are different in the following two senses. First, that object as the referent of “Superman” as Lois Lane understands it is different from that object as the referent of “Clark Kent” as Lois Lane understands it. In other words, as far as Lois Lane is concerned, the referent of “Superman” and the referent of “Clark Kent” are two distinct objects. And as I have argued in section 5.6, it is plausibly a semantically relevant mistake, because it makes Lois Lane consistently and regularly identify the referents of the names mistakenly.

Secondly, Lois Lane’s mental contents of the two terms are distinct because she associates two distinct sets of properties with the terms. And descriptions in the mental contents may well be semantically relevant because they can determine how the speaker will behave with regard to reference determination and linguistic inferences involving the names.

Since on SPT “Superman” and “Clark Kent” make distinct semantic contributions to belief sentence (9) and belief sentence (10), respectively; then these two belief
sentences encode two distinct semantic propositions, contrary to DRT’s claim. As a consequence, sentences (9) and (10) can have different truth values, and this accommodates our intuition.

Moreover, the account from SPT can precisely explain our intuition that sentence (9) is true while sentence (10) is false. Sentence (9) is true because Lois Lane’s mental content of “Superman” has the epistemic component which includes the specific description that Superman is an object that can fly. Sentence (10) is false because Lois Lane’s mental content of “Clark Kent” has the distinct epistemic component which includes the specific description that Clark Kent is an object that cannot fly. Therefore, I submit that SPT can provide us with an account of semantic contents of proper names in the belief contexts that can precisely capture our intuitions regarding these belief ascriptions.

5.8 Empty Names

The aim of this section is to show that SPT can provide an account of the semantic content of empty proper names that can solve satisfactorily various problems caused by empty names. Let us look at the following examples.

(17) Socrates does not exist now.

(18) Socrates is a great philosopher.

(19) Sherlock Holmes does not exist.

(20) Sherlock Holmes plays the violin.
In section 2.6, I have discussed these examples in detail and argued that the direct reference theorist’s solutions have problematic consequences. To see what kind of account SPT can provide regarding the semantic content of empty names, let us first recall SPT’s account of the semantic content of non-empty proper names. Let N be a non-empty proper name, according to SPT, the semantic content/meaning of N has the following structure.

(M) \( N = that \) object (our conditional deference to the world) that is in this world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of N which includes such and such specific properties.

Now suppose that \( N_E \) is an empty proper name, that is, \( N_E \) has no referent in the physical world. Note that in (M), if N is an empty name, then the first component of the meaning of N, i.e., \( that \) object, does not exist in the physical world. However, the second component of the meaning of N can still exist with a certain modification.

This is because we can still think and talk about an object that has such and such properties regardless whether the object really exists in the physical world or not. Moreover, our thoughts and talk involving such nonexistent objects seem to have meanings and semantic contents. To capture these phenomena in our linguistic practices involving empty names, I would like to propose the following meaning Thesis (\( M_E \)) for an empty name \( N_E \).

(\( M_E \)) \( N_E = the \) object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties according to our community linguistic practices of \( N_E \) in this (actual) world.

With regard to names such as “Socrates,” whose referent once existed, but is long gone, although the referent of the name does not exist anymore, the structured web of
community uses associated with the name can continue to exist. Thus the meaning of “Socrates” can be given by the following definite description constituted by our continuous linguistic practices involving the name: Socrates is the object that is the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of the name in this world, where “the object” is not any real object in the physical world, rather, it is part of the rigidified description as a linguistic device.

With this analysis from SPT, sentences (17) and (18) encode the following semantic propositions:

(17’) The object that is the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of the name “Socrates” in this world does not exist now.

(18’) The object that is the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of the name “Socrates” in this world is a great philosopher.\(^{13}\)

Since (17’) and (18’) are true, therefore (17) and (18) are true. This avoids the difficulty faced by the direct reference theory, because on DRT, (17) and (18) currently encode the following semantic propositions:

(17’’) _____ (blank, nothingness) does not exist now.

(18’’) _____ (blank, nothingness) is a great philosopher.

It is difficult to see how these two incomplete propositions can have truth values. And Salmon’s strategy to adduce past propositions that currently do not exist has the following weakness. It violates a highly plausible metaphysical principle with no good reasons other than the specific need of his own semantic theory.

Let us turn to fictional names such as “Sherlock Holmes.” First the author develops certain original thoughts involving the name “Holmes,” the name is just a
mental token in the author’s thoughts. Then the author shares his thoughts involving the name with other members in the community via linguistic practices involving the name, in these linguistic practices, the name can be viewed as a linguistic device/linguistic type. Consequently, two things will happen in our linguistic community. First, in the real world, we will say that Holmes is that fictional character that satisfies the weighted most of such and such specific properties according to our community linguistic practices involving the name originated from the author’s original thoughts. Within the fictional world, we will pretend that Holmes is that object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties in the actual world (that is, actual world within the fictional context).

To capture these phenomena, we can follow Kripke to say that there are two names involved here: Holmes₁ and Holmes₂. Holmes₁ is the name we use in the fictional world, while Holmes₂ is the name we use in the real world. The meanings of both names are constituted by specific properties according to our linguistic practices involving “Holmes” in the actual world. More specifically, on SPT, the semantic contents of Holmes₁ and Holmes₂ can be given as follows.

(21) Holmes₁ = that object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties in the actual world (that is, actual world in the fictional context, in our game of pretense).

(22) Holmes₂ = that object (fictional character as a linguistic type to reflect the mental type of our shared thoughts involving the name) that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties according to our linguistic practices involving
the name in this world (that is, the rigidified, actual world in the real world context).

Since these proposed meanings are epistemic and descriptive in nature, we need to examine whether they can survive the modal argument, the epistemic argument, and the semantic argument, because these arguments are supposed to be objections to any descriptive account of meaning.

The Modal Argument: Within the fictional world, we take that Holmes (i.e., Holmes₁) to be that object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties in the actual (fictional) world. In any possible (fictional) world w, we can imagine in our game of pretense that Holmes could have lived a totally different life. However, even in w, it is true that Holmes is that object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties in the actual (fictional) world. Therefore, Holmes₁ as a rigid designator with rigidified descriptions can survive the modal argument within the fictional context.

In the real world, we take Holmes (i.e., Holmes₂) to be that object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties according to our linguistic practices in this (real) world. In a possible (real) world w, our linguistic practices involving the same name could change substantially, say, as the result of the author’s drastic revision and expansion of the original novel in w. However, even in w, it is true that Holmes is that object that is the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties according to our linguistic practices in this (actual) world. Since our linguistic practices involving the name in this world is rigidified, then the meaning of Holmes₂ is also rigidified, therefore it can survive the modal argument within the real world context.
The Epistemic Argument: Within the fictional context or within the game of pretense, an individual speaker can be dubbed as “a competent speaker/user of the name ‘Holmes₁’” if she knows sufficiently many properties associated with the name and she has the right deferential attitude with regard to the properties she does not know. Again the meaning of “Holmes₁” is a social property that belongs to all the members who participate in the game of pretense. And the notion of “a competent speaker/user of the name” is a pragmatic notion.

In the real world, an individual speaker can be dubbed as “a competent speaker/user of the name ‘Holmes₂’” if she knows sufficiently many properties concerning our community linguistic practices involving the name in the actual world and she has the right deferential attitude with regard to the properties she does not know. The meaning of “Holmes₂” is a social property that is embedded in our current linguistic practices in the actual world. And the notion of “a competent speaker/user of the name” is a pragmatic notion.

The Semantic Argument: Since for empty names, there is no referent, therefore there is no problem regarding how the referent is secured. The meanings of “Holmes₁” and “Holmes₂” are originated causally from the author’s original thoughts via a causal-historical chain.

Now let us consider the truth values of (19) and (20). First, within the fictional context of our game of pretense, Holmes₁ does exist as a person with such and such properties, thus (19) is false. Since Holmes₁ as a person does play violin in the fictional world, therefore (20) is true. These results match our intuition well.
That is, when we talk within the fictional context, we say that Holmes exists and plays
the violin.
Second, outside the fictional context and our game of pretense and in the real world,
Holmes₂, as a linguistic type (fictional character) which reflects our mental type
concerning our shared thoughts about an object that does not exist in the real world, does
not exist (as a supposed brilliant detective), and only in this sense (19) is true. Since
Holmes₂ is not anything that can play the violin in the real world, therefore (20) is false.
These results also match our intuition well. When we talk in the framework of the real
world, we say that Holmes is just a fictional character that does not exist and cannot play
the violin in the real world.

I thereby submit that SPT can provide a satisfactory account of the semantic
content of empty proper names.

5.9 Further Elaboration of The Social and Pragmatic Theory

I summarize the main arguments/reasons in support of SPT in the following replies to
various questions/challenges to SPT.

Question 1. Why should the descriptions in the structured web of community uses of the
name constitute part of the meaning of the name?

I think that the following seven arguments offer good reasons why the descriptions
associated with the name collectively constitute part of the semantic content of the name.
First, the Indispensability in Reference Determination Argument: According to Chapter 1, an object o is the referent of a name N iff o is in the actual world the dominant bearer of the structured web of community uses of N with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world. Were the object o not the dominant bearer of the web of uses with the conditional deference constraint in the actual world, it would still be that same object, but it would not be the referent of the name anymore. Thus the referent of N is not necessarily a fixed object in the actual world, instead, the descriptions associated with the name collectively play an indispensable role in reference determination. If we follow the tradition that meaning is something that we can grasp and use it to secure the reference, then these descriptions in the associated web of uses should collectively constitute part of the meaning of the name.

Second, the Semantically Relevant Argument: That the structured web of community uses of the name constitutes part of the semantic content of the name can be illustrated by the following phenomena. Given a name N, suppose that an individual speaker S is willing to defer to the community experts to secure the referent of N. That is, S understands the name N as that object that my community experts use the name to refer to, or N is that object that is secured by the causal-historical chain associated with the name. If the meaning of the name is indeed exhausted by the referent of the name as the direct reference theorist claims, then S should understand the meaning of N fully.

However, consider a concrete name “Hesperus,” if the speaker S points to the referent of the name causally and deferentially on the one hand, but on the other hand, she obtains the false belief from a source that she absolutely trusts that Hesperus is a special number, then we have the strong intuition that S’s understanding of “Hesperus” is
semantically defective. In other words, the descriptions at the center of the web are semantically relevant.

Now suppose that S is still willing to refer to the referent of “Hesperus” via causal and deferential pointing, and this time she gets the core properties right, that is, she has the correct beliefs such as “Hesperus is not a number,” and “Hesperus is a planet.” Nevertheless, this time she obtains massive false beliefs from a source that she absolutely trusts about specific properties. Let us say that she is associating all the specific properties that are true of the earth with the name “Hesperus.” That is, she has the specific beliefs such as “Hesperus is the third planet from the sun,” “Hesperus looks like this (lots of pictures of the earth),” “there is water on Hesperus,” “there are a lot of human beings on Hesperus,” etc. In such a scenario, we also have the strong intuition that S’s understanding of “Hesperus” is semantically defective. We would tell S that she could not point to the referent of “Hesperus” causally and deferentially and at the same time hold firmly all these massively false specific beliefs involving “Hesperus.” These two things are incoherent, and if she insists on holding on to both things, then she will fail to secure the unique object as the referent of the name. Accordingly, her understanding of the meaning of “Hesperus” is semantically flawed. This scenario shows that even the specific properties in the web of uses of the name collectively could be semantically relevant.

On Soames’s minimal Competence Condition, as long as the speaker takes the right referential intention, then her understanding of the name is good in a semantically exhaustive way. Her beliefs concerning specific properties of the referent are just semantically irrelevant. Cases such as this show that this is just not true. And we need a
epistemic and descriptive component of the meaning of the name to capture this type of semantic relevance.

Third, the **Normative Constraint on Linguistic Inference**s Argument: Closely related to the above second semantic relevance argument, we can see that a speaker who has massively false beliefs about the **structural, biographical, and yet specific** properties of the referent of a name will make corresponding massively false linguistic inferences in the space of giving and asking for reasons. But that kind of massively false linguistic moves involving the name will just not be permitted by our community linguistic norms. Let us use the example of Hitler again. Suppose a speaker insists (with the Soamesian referential intention but unfortunately having required egregiously distorted beliefs) that Hitler is the leader of the free world who defeated the Nazis in world war II, and Hitler is the great man who saved so many innocent lives in world war II, etc. Our community linguistic norms will just not tolerate such outrageous linguistic moves involving the name.

There are other possible peripheral mistakes in linguistic moves concerning facts such as exactly how many hairs Hitler had at a specific moment, or how many minutes exactly Hitler slept on a specific day, etc. These mistakes in linguistic moves will be ignored by our community norms, and will be judged as semantically irrelevant. The comparison of these two types of mistaken linguistic moves may shed light on why the former kind is deemed as semantically relevant. Because these structural, biographical properties, though specific, they are specific properties of the referent that have significant and lasting impact on the life of the referent and even on our history, society, culture, and world. As a consequence, these specific properties define the form of life for
the referent and maybe even partially define the form of history and life of our community. Thus we adduce these specific properties to secure the referent of the name and we intend to adduce them to convey the structural, biographical, historic information that has lasting influence on our community. This kind of high **pragmatic utility** associated with these specific properties make them *collectively* (since only collectively the events described by these properties made their defining and lasting impact) semantically relevant.

Fourth, **the Explanatory Power Argument**: With the epistemic and descriptive component of the meaning of proper names, SPT can provide satisfactory explanations of Frege’s puzzle, belief puzzles, and the problem of empty names. The explanatory power constitutes a good reason to support the existence of such an epistemic and descriptive component of the meaning of proper names.

Fifth, **the Transworld Identify Argument**: To promote the modal argument, Kripke asks us to imagine a possible world (a possible alternative historical scenario) in which Hitler could have chosen a completely different life when he was, say, eight years old. However, at *that* historical time when Hitler was eight years old, we pick out the referent of “Hitler” as the dominant bearer of the community uses associated with “Hitler” at *that* time.

        In general, in order for the modal argument to go through, we need to say that from a certain historical time t, N could have lived a completely different life. However, whenever that historical time t was, we still use part of the web of our community uses associated with the name at that time *in the actual world* to secure the referent at time t. In other words, the structured web of our community uses associated with the name in the
actual world plays an indispensable role in determining transworld identity. If we take meaning as something that we can understand and use to identify reference in all possible worlds, then this is another reason why there should be a descriptive component in the semantic content of proper names.

Sixth, the Irreversibility of History Argument: Starting from any historical time t, there were indefinitely many possible scenarios that could unfold historically, each of these possible historical scenarios constitutes a Kripkean type possible world. However, only one unique historical scenario can actually happen and it becomes the actual world. Moreover, once it has actually happened, history has the unique characteristic that it cannot be reversed. Because of the irreversibility of history, once history has happened, or once the actual world is fixed, we can rigidify the descriptions we derive in the actual world and take them to every possible world to secure the referent of the name. That is, in every possible world, we can secure the referent of the name as the dominant bearer of such and such specific properties in the actual world, whether the same object satisfies the same properties in that possible world is irrelevant. In this sense, the descriptive component of the meaning of the name is necessary too.

Seventh, the Evolutionary Argument: On the direct reference theory, “that object as the referent of the name” is an atomistic notion, it is invariant throughout the historical contexts. On the social and pragmatic theory, “that object as the referent of the name” is a holistic notion, it takes a historical period of time for that object to grow up, to mature, to develop herself, to realize her full potential, to blossom and flourish. In the same process, the natural, social, and cultural environments constantly influence that object, the precipitate of these influences might become an inseparable part of that object.
This is why we feel that Abraham Lincoln as a three years old boy and more than fifty years later, Abraham Lincoln as the great president, although they are still the same object, their difference is significant enough for the meaning of the name to evolve accordingly to capture the difference. That is why we have the intuition that today if a speaker refers to the referent of “Abraham Lincoln” causally and deferentially but at the same time believes that it is currently a three years old boy who has such and such properties, then that speaker’s understanding of the meaning of the name is semantically flawed.

It usually takes the actual history in our actual world to form the epistemic and descriptive component of the meaning of a proper name.

Question 2. Why is the theory dubbed as a “social and pragmatic” account?

I believe that it is a social and pragmatic theory because of the following reasons. First, with regard to the semantic argument, on SPT, to determine the referent of a name in the actual world, we need to depend on the structured web of community uses of the name which is normally the result of social collaboration. Also, we need to consider the dominant bearer of the web. In my view these value judgments are based on pragmatic considerations. Second, with regard to the epistemic argument, on SPT, the epistemic and descriptive component of the meaning of a name is a social property. However, the notion of “competent speaker/user of the name” is a pragmatic notion, a speaker who knows sufficiently many properties associated with the name and has correct deferential stance
can be dubbed as “a competent speaker of the name.” Here, “sufficiently many” is a
notion depends on various pragmatic considerations.

Third, with regard to the modal argument, on SPT, it takes a historical period of time in
the actual world to form the web of community uses of the name, the historic precipitate
(those descriptions that carry more weight in reference determination and in what
kind of information we intend to convey in our communications) will be placed closer
to the center of the structured web. The web of uses are structured according to
considerations of pragmatic convenience or pragmatic utility.

Question 3. Your account assumes the notion of “semantic relevance,” but what exactly
does this notion mean? For example, being ugly, is it relevant with respect to the working
ability as a salesman of vacuums? Some people might say yes while others might say no,
and it is just not clear how we can settle the controversy.

My account only relies on our intuition that certain things (e.g. certain beliefs and
attitudes of a speaker) are clearly semantically relevant while certain others beliefs and
attitudes of a speaker are clearly semantically irrelevant. There might exist borderline
cases where our intuition is not clear. And being ugly may well be a borderline case when
it comes to decide whether it is relevant with respect to the working ability as a salesman
of vacuums. But even in the case concerning the working ability as a salesman of
vacuums, some properties such as “being blind,” or “being paralyzed,” or “being insane,”
or “being in a deep coma” seem to be clearly relevant to that working ability; whereas
other properties such as “having a friend who is 20 years old,” or “weighing 160 pound
on February 15, 2005,” or “having a 10 minute nap on March 15, 2005” seem to be clearly irrelevant to that working ability.

My account only needs to appeal to our intuition that certain descriptive properties are clearly relevant in a semantic manner. That will be enough to challenge Salmon’s and Soames’s sweeping claim that all descriptive properties/beliefs/attitudes are semantically irrelevant information or pragmatically imparted information. And this sweeping claim plays a fundamental role in their strategies in defending the direct reference theory.

Moreover, I have offered three kinds of explanations in support of our intuition about the semantic relevance of certain community uses/descriptive beliefs and attitudes, namely, the reference determination argument, the community normative constraint on linguistic inferences argument, and the position in the structured web of community uses and pragmatic convenience and utility argument.

Question 4. Does the epistemic and descriptive component of the meaning of a name need to assume the analytic/synthetic distinction?

The answer is no. The structured web of community uses associated with the name is based on our linguistic practices involving the name. Our linguistic practices involving the name are based on our interactions with the world under the influences of social, historical, cultural environments. When Nature and these external environments evolve, so will our linguistic practices of the name. And the structured web of community uses of the name will evolve accordingly.
As a result, every description/property in the web can be revised. And the placement of every description/property in the web can be adjusted. Therefore, there is no analytic/synthetic distinction. Instead, the degree of semantic relevancy of a property is determined by the degree of pragmatic importance of that property. To put it in another perspective, the degree of semantic relevancy of a property is determined by the centrality of that property in the web of community uses.
1. Here I mean proper names as linguistic types.

2. The actual community uses collectively constitute part of the semantic content of the name. As far as an individual speaker is concerned, these explicit community uses as a whole constitutes a social property and thus a metaphysical fact. Consequently an individual speaker can use the phrase “the community uses” to refer to this metaphysical fact.

3. Before section 5.8, I will assume that the dominant bearer of community uses of a name does satisfy the constraint of our conditional deference to the world, and thus the referent of the name exists. In other words, the name is a non-empty name. For the sake of convenience, from now on, I will drop the phrase “with the constraint of our conditional deference to the world.” But whenever we talk about the dominant bearer of community uses of a name being the referent of the name, we should always keep this constraint in mind.

4. Unlike an ordinary definite description that may pick out different objects in different possible worlds, a rigidified description picks out the same object in every possible world; I simply use the statement “that object can be viewed as actually contained in the rigidified description” to emphasize this characteristic of the rigidified description. It serves to match and highlight our intuition that a name means that same object that has such and such properties in the actual world.

5. Here we must have the rigidified description in the first place. Only because the description is rigidified, can we have the same object o in every possible world, and subsequently o can be viewed as part of the content.

6. It is true that on this account, content of a name makes explicit reference to the actual world, even when a sentence containing the name is evaluated at a possible world w.

7. That is, given any name that is actually used in the community, a competent speaker can say that this name refers to the object that has the right causal relation with our community experts of the name. On Soames’s minimal condition, this speaker knows the meaning of the name.

8. I need to clarify and explicate two points here. First, on my account, the meaning of a name changes in belief contexts. This theoretical move is intended to explain our strong intuitions concerning propositional attitude ascriptions. It also intends to explain the individual speaker’s linguistic behavior concerning, say, reference determination and linguistic inferences involving the name. As I have argued
repeatedly, these phenomena concerning the speaker’s mental state/content and subsequently his linguistic behavior seem to be semantically relevant. However, this move doesn’t need to entail that the name as a linguistic type cannot have meaning given by complete descriptions. Competent speakers use a name with the implicit deference to the community uses of the name, it is just a lot of times they as individuals don’t have epistemic access to this social property, and sometimes they even hold severely distorted beliefs that have semantically relevant consequences. Secondly, in Soames’s story, the speaker S in the counterfactual world w should use the term “Aristotle” as a linguistic type used by the community in the actual world w A, not as a linguistic type used by the community in her world w. These two might be two different names sharing the same symbol.

9. This case shows that Salmon’s “mode of representation” might be a semantically relevant notion.

10. For a competent speaker, (9) is not a priori, because she usually needs to do an empirical investigation to see what exactly Lois Lane’s mental content concerning “Superman” is.

11. It is clear that the truth values of sentences (11) and (12) can be explained analogously, where the ancient astronomer’s mental contents of “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” are distinct.

12. Besides the problems faced by Salmon’s abstract object theory that I have discussed in section 2.6, Salmon’s theory also has the following difficulties: (i) Given that M and N are two co-referential empty names, i.e., they both refer to the same abstract entity, then Frege’s puzzle and belief puzzles involving M and N will come back. (ii) On Salmon’s account, the semantic content of an empty name M is exhausted by its referent, i.e., that abstract object, all the associated descriptions are semantically irrelevant. However, a speaker can take the deferential stand with regard to the referent of “Sherlock Holmes,” that is, she can agree that “Sherlock Holmes” refer to whatever her community experts refer to; but on the other hand, she can insist that Sherlock Holmes has all the properties we normally associate with “Santa Claus” (because of some false information from the source that she absolutely trusts). In such a scenario, although the speaker gets the referent of the empty name right, but because of her massively mistaken beliefs associated with the name, there is strong intuition that her understanding of “Sherlock Holmes” is semantically defective. Consequently, semantic context is not exhausted by the referent of the empty name as Salmon claims.

13. On SPT, the phrase “the object” in (17’) and (18’) is a linguistic device as part of the sentences. It can be used by us to express our thoughts independently of the existence of the actual physical object the phrase refers to. Since the direct reference theorists take the extreme view that a name denotes the referent as a
physical object across the contexts of utterance and no descriptive information is part of the meaning of the name, then this strategy is not available to them.

14. This is a complex topic. I will leave it to future studies.


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