EMPTY NAMES, FICTION AND THE PUZZLES OF NON-EXISTENCE

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ical objects. But the availability of the approach I have outlined here is surely sufficient to demonstrate that there is nothing about the semantic/pragmatic behavior of putatively empty names which compels us to posit such entities. And it is surely a reasonable principle that in the absence of any compelling reason for positing such entities, we ought to refrain from positing them.

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Referentialism and Empty Names

ANTHONY EVERETT

3.1 Introduction

In this paper I will be considering empty names and I will be concerned with two questions in particular. I will be concerned with the question of how certain utterances of sentences containing empty names, such as existential and negative existential statements, can have truth values. And I will be concerned with the question of why utterances of certain empty names, such as "Santa Claus" and "Father Xmas" seem, in at least some loose sense, to be about the same thing, even though there is nothing in reality that they are about.[21]

The structure of this paper is as follows. In section 2 I outline these two problems in greater detail. In section 3 I examine the bearing these have upon the semantic doctrine of *Referentialism*, the doctrine that the sole semantic function of a proper name is to refer to its bearer. I suggest a view of the semantic function of empty names which, while it is compatible with Referentialism, allows that certain utterances containing empty names may have truth values. In sections 4 and 5 I develop some technical apparatus. Then in section 6 I use this to provide an account of the sense in which two utterances of empty names may be counted as being about the same thing.

Before proceeding further, however, I want to clarify precisely what it is that I shall be talking about and what I shall not be talking about. I want to distinguish three different ways in which empty names might be employed. For in what follows I will only be concerned with empty

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names which are used in the third of these ways and I think that an an account of language should handle these cases differently. The three-fold distinction is as follows. In the first place empty names might be employed in a *conniving* manner as when we tell a story or relate a myth. Such statements are not to be taken as literal assertions about our real world but rather as part of the process of story-telling or myth-making. They will be claims about the world of the story or myth. And they will be true or false within that story or myth. Examples of such uses include my telling a child "Santa has twelve reindeer" and my saying "Holmes lives at Baker Street" while recounting a Sherlock Holmes story to someone. In the second place empty names may be used in a *metafictional* way to talk about stories or myths from the perspective of our real world. Thus, for example, we might say "Holmes is a character in a Conan Doyle novel," or "In the Conan Doyle stories Holmes is a detective." Such claims are literally true or literally false. They are claims about our real world, for they are about our real-world practices of story-telling and myth-making. But their truth depends in part upon what is the case in the relevant stories or myths. Finally, there are *non-fictional* uses of empty names. Claims which involve non-fictional uses of empty names talk about only the real world and not about fictional or mythic worlds. The truth values of such claims depend only upon what is the case in the real world and in no way depend upon what is the case in any fictional or mythical world. Examples of such claims include "Santa does not exist," "Santa is not to my immediate left," and "I am not identical to Vulcan." These claims seem to be literally true, and whatever it is that makes these claims true it is something about our real world and not anything about the world of the Vulcan-story or the Santa-myth.

No doubt a great deal more needs to be said about the different ways in which empty names might be used. But I am not going to consider these matters here. My point for the moment is simply to note that I am going to be concerned only with those uses of empty names which fall into the *last* of the three categories. I am going to be concerned with *non-fictional* uses of empty names.

3.2 The problems

Suppose that, intending them to be literal claims about the world, I utter the sentences:

(1) Santa Claus does not exist,
(2) Father Xmas does not exist.

And suppose that, intending them to be literal claims about the world, you utter the sentences:

(3) Dr. Jekyll does not exist,
(4) Mr. Hyde does not exist.

Intuitively, I suggest, it is reasonable to suppose that all these utterances are true. Moreover, there is intuitively a sense in which I said the same thing when I made both of my utterances, and in which you said the same thing when you made both of your utterances, but in which what I said was different from what you said. More precisely there is a sense in which both of my utterances were about the same thing (Santa), in which both of your utterances were about the same thing (Dr. Jekyll), and in which my utterances were about something different from your utterances.

Unfortunately it is not immediately obvious how we might account for these two phenomenon. For, of course, there is no Santa Claus and there is no Dr. Jekyll, and so it seems as if there was nothing that you or I were talking about. In the first place, this raises the problem of explaining how you and I can have spoken truly if we were not talking about anything. Whatever it is that underwrites the true of our utterances, it certainly cannot be the fact that the object we were talking about satisfies the properties or conditions we ascribed to it. In the second place it is not easy to explain how, in uttering (1) and (2), I was able to talk about the same thing, and how, in uttering (3) and (4), you were able to talk about the same thing, while you and I were talking about different things, given that in reality neither of us were talking about anything.

The importance of these problems should not be underestimated. For one thing, any adequate account of of Natural Language needs either to provide an explanation of the sense in which utterances of (1) and (2) are true and are about the same thing, or at the very least explain away our intuitions to this effect. An account which fails to provide an adequate account of these phenomena will have failed to account for a very important aspect of our use and understanding of language. One should not suppose that because many empty names such as "Austin Powers" occur in light-hearted works of fiction a serious theory of language need not concern itself with them. On the contrary, at least arguably, most of the occurrences of names in English are occurrences of empty names.[22]

Furthermore, the way in which we account for the sense in which utterances of (1) and (2) make true claims about the same thing will have

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[22]This seems at least true for printed occurrences of names. Most printed material is fiction. And most of the names which occur in such material are empty.

a considerable bearing upon the way we understand the nature of myth and fiction, and the way in which we understand our engagement with fictional works. Suppose, for example, one believed that the only possible way in which we could explain the sense in which (1) and (2) make true claims about the same thing is by supposing that they both refer to some common object. Then one would be lead to postulate some form of Meinongian, or abstract, objects as the referents of "Santa Claus" and "Father Xmas," and of "Dr. Jekyll" and "Mr. Hyde." And it would then be natural to take fictional works to describe various realms of these objects. This issue is not merely of importance within the metaphysics of fiction. A number of philosophers have recently suggested that certain ontologically problematic areas of discourse, such as mathematical discourse and discourse about modality, might be understood as fictional discourse.[23] What precisely this suggestion amounts to, and whether it would really result in a deflation of our ontology, will, of course, depend upon how we ultimately understand fiction. If fictional discourse is ultimately to be understood as making reference to Meinongian or abstract objects, the suggestion that these ontologically problematic areas of discourse be understood as fictional discourse is unlikely to defuse their ontologically problematic status.

Consequently, the questions of how we should account for the truth of utterances of (1)–(4), and how we should account for the sense in which certain empty names are about the same thing, have wider philosophical repercussions than it might at first appear. It is with these questions that we will be concerned below.

3.3 Referentialism and empty names

In this paper I am going to assume that the sorts of arguments offered by Kripke, Donnellan, and others, against Fregean accounts of proper names are correct.[24] That is to say, I shall assume that the semantic contribution of a proper name is not a Fregean sense, or a description, or a mode of presentation, or anything like that. I shall not argue for this point here.

These arguments are usually not merely taken to establish the falsity of Fregeanism. Rather they are generally taken as establishing, or at least as suggesting, a positive view of the semantics of proper names. They are usually taken as establishing the view commonly called *Referentialism*, which can loosely be stated as the view that the sole semantic function of

[23]See for example Field (Field 1980), (Field 1989b), Balaguer (Balaguer 1998), and Rosen (Rosen 1990).

[24]See for example Kripke (Kripke 1980), Donnellan (Donnellan 1972) and (Donnellan 1974), and Salmon (Salmon 1981).

a name is to refer to its bearer. So understood, however, Referentialism faces a particularly acute problem when it comes to empty names. For since such names lack bearers, it is not clear that the Referentialist can ascribe *any* semantic function to them. They cannot refer to their bearers because they have none. And so it is unclear how the Referentialist might explain the truth of (1)–(4), let alone the fact that utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" are in some sense about the same thing. At least *prime facie* these two problems, the problem of accounting for the truth of (1)–(4), and the problem of explaining how utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" can be about the same thing, pose serious difficulties for the Referentialist.

Some have been lead by these difficulties to postulate Meinongian or abstract objects as the referents of empty names.[25] Others have been lead to deny our intuitions that utterances containing empty names genuinely have truth values or are genuinely about things.[26] And yet others have taken the problems generated by empty names to provide a refutation of Referentialism.[27] Now I do not want to argue against such views here. But I do want to suggest that none of these options are particularly happy. They are all somewhat drastic positions of last resort. And they should be avoided if it is at all possible. Fortunately I think that the Referentialist may avoid them.

I think that a better response to these worries can be given. Let us take the two problems discerned above in turn. We will begin by considering how the Referentialist might account for the truth of utterances of (1)–(4). Then in the next three sections we will consider how she might account for the fact that (1) and (2) are, in some sense, about the same thing.

With respect to the first problem, I suggest 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. For consider again utterances of (1)–(4). It is reasonable to suppose that these 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

[25]See for example Zalta (Zalta 1983) and (Zalta 1988). For further accounts which take empty names to refer to Meinongian or abstract objects see Parsons (Parsons 1974) and (Parsons 1980), van Inwagen (van Inwagen 1977) and (van Inwagen 1983), and Thomasson (Thomasson 1996).

[26]See for example Adams and Stecker (Adams and Stecker 1994) and Taylor (Taylor 2000). Braun (Braun 1993) allows that such claims can have truth values but denies that we can take utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" to be about the same thing.

[27]See for example Devitt (Devitt 1989).

make the same point in a different way, the reason why such negative existential claims are true is because empty names fail to make the normal sort of semantic contribution which full names make. In this way, then, it looks as if empty names can sometimes make some sort of semantic contribution to the utterances containing them in virtue of their failing to make a normal sort of semantic contribution. At least it seems reasonable to suppose that the occurrences of empty names in negative existential utterances, such as utterances of (1)–(4), can make semantic contributions to those utterances in virtue of their failing to refer to anything.

Let me briefly indicate how this idea might be fleshed out. The semantic contribution of a name N might be modeled as the singleton of its referent (if any).[28] For example, if N refers to n then we can model its semantic value as $\{n\}$. If N is empty then we can model its semantic contribution as ϕ. And so on. Let us for the moment treat "exists" as a first-level predicate.[29] Its semantic value can then be modeled as a function $\chi_\exists$ from sets to truth values which maps the empty set to *FALSE*, singletons to *TRUE*, and is otherwise undefined.[30]

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[28]The view suggested in Braun (Braun 1993) has some affinities with the view developed above but Braun develops his account rather differently. In particular Braun's view cannot accommodate the fact that utterances (1) and (2) samesay while utterances of (1) and (4) do not.

[29]Here I follow Evans (Evans 1982), chapter 10, and Salmon (Salmon 1987).

[30]I have been concerned with the question of whether we can allow that we can take empty names to make some sort of *degenerate* semantic contribution to certain sorts of *non-fictional* utterances in which they occur, such as utterances of the negative existential claims (1)–(4). However, of course, a question arises concerning precisely *which* utterances containing non-fictional occurrences of empty names we should take to have truth values. For example, the empty name "Santa" occurs in sentences which have a straightforward subject-predicate or relational form, such as the sentence "Santa is happy" and the sentence "Santa is more jolly that Hyde." And while it is plausible to suppose that negative existential claims containing empty names, such as (1)–(4) are true, it is much less clear that we should assign truth values to non-fictional utterances of "Santa is happy" and "Santa is more jolly that Hyde." Understood as literal claims about the world, rather than as claims made in the context of a game of make-believe, it is plausible to suppose that such claims should be regarded as truth valueless. This is no bar to our maintaining that the occurrences of empty names in such claims make degenerate semantic contributions to them. But it *is* to note that such degenerate semantic contributions may not suffice to bestow truth values upon these claims. My point is simply that, in so far as we *do* count non-fictional utterances containing empty names as having truth values, the Referentialist can accept this fact. For the Referentialist is not forced to deny that empty names make any semantic contribution to the claims in which they occur. In some cases this will suffice to establish a determinate truth value for the claim. But in other cases it may not. Obviously it is important to investigate which sorts of non-fictional claims involving empty names have truth values, and why. But I shall not pursue this matter further here.

Unfortunately, of course, this does not help with the second problem which we discerned above. For it does not help us explain the sense in which utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" are about the same thing while utterances of "Dr. Jekyll" are about something else altogether. We need a separate account of this phenomenon. Here is what seems to me to be a reasonable first stab at analyzing what it is for two utterances of proper names to be about the same thing. Put crudely, two utterances of proper names count as being about the same thing just in case they *share a common source*. Obviously, as it stands, the notion of *sharing a common source* is rather vague and imprecise, but I will attempt to clarify and elaborate it below. For the moment note that the common source shared by utterances of co-referential full names will be their common referent. And in virtue of sharing this source such utterances count as being about the same thing in a *thick* sense. It is more complex to say what it is for utterances of empty names to share a common source, to say what it is for two utterances of empty names to be about the same thing in the *thin* sense that utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" are about the same thing. But, as I said, in what follows I will offer a more precise account of this. In order to do this we must first consider how proper names get introduced into our language and how their reference is fixed. This will be the task of the following two sections.

3.4 Notions of objects

For the moment I will assume that something along the lines of the causal-historical picture of reference for proper names is correct. I shall flesh out and expand this sort of account along the sorts of lines which have been suggested by John Perry in a number of places.[31] To this end I want to tell a short story concerning how a name gets introduced into our language and used thereafter. Obviously this story will have to be rather incomplete and brief. But I trust that it will serve to provide a useful model of how this happens in reality.

Our story begins with a rudimentary picture of the human mind, a picture which draws upon some of John Perry's and Mark Crimmins' work in this area.[32] On this picture the mind can be viewed as containing notions of objects and of properties which can be put together in various ways to form thoughts about those objects and properties.[33] These

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[31]See for example the later papers in Perry (Perry 1993).

[32]See Crimmins (Crimmins 1992), Perry (Perry 1990) and (Perry 2000), and Perry and Crimmins (Crimmins and Perry 1989).

[33]I take thoughts to be structured particulars. Thoughts stand in various logical and causal relationships to other thoughts. And in virtue of their standing in these

notions might be understood as concrete particulars: as expressions of mentalese, or connectionist structures within the brain, or something such. Or they might be understood as something more abstract, as properties or features of the mind. I want to remain neutral here as to their precise nature. For the moment I want to concentrate upon notions of objects. Let us call these notions *o-notions*. Each o-notion is a notion of a particular entity and will have associated with it a store, or a file, of information or misinformation about the object of which it is a notion. We can have more than one o-notion of the same object. However typically each o-notion will only be about a single object.[34]

There are at least three important ways in which we can form new o-notions. We can form new o-notions when we perceive objects.[35] We can formulate descriptions and introduce new o-notions to be about whatever satisfies these descriptions at the time of introduction. Or we can hear or read a name or another referential expression and introduce a new o-notion to be about whatever this referential expression refers to. Associated with a new o-notion will be the (mis)information about the corresponding object which we gain from our perception, from our stipulative description, or from what we have just been told or read.

Let us bring these ideas out by considering an example. Suppose I see Stacie to my immediate left and form an o-notion which is about her. Let us say that I form a *Stacie-notion*. This Stacie-notion will be associated with a file containing the information which comes from my perception of Stacie. It will, for example, contain the information that its object is female, that she is human, that she consequently has or is likely to have many of the properties which humans normally have. As well as this general information about the nature of the object that I am perceiving, the new Stacie-notion will contain information locating her with respect to me. It will contain, for example, the information that she is currently to my immediate left, that I am currently perceiving her, and so on.

Of course, not all our perceptions are veridical. For example, we

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relations they will interact with other thoughts in various ways and stimulate various forms of behavior. Thoughts may be entertained in various modes (belief, desire, etc.) where each such mode will correspond to a distinct sort of role that thought might play in our mental economies.

[34]I say "typically" because we shall that there are, perhaps, cases where an o-notion can be taken to be about several objects which the thinker fails to distinguish. For the moment let us simply assume that each o-notion is about only one object.

[35]The question of how a perception comes to have the content which it does is, of course, vexed. I shall not, however, attempt to address this question here. Rather, for the purposes of this paper I would merely note that, *somehow* or other, our perceptions are intentional. They are perceptions *of* things.

might perceive there to be an object present when in fact there really is none, as when we hallucinate or when we are fooled by a trick of the light. In such a case, on the basis of our misperception, we will form an *empty* or a *non-referring* o-notion which is not about anything. This notion, though empty, may nevertheless be associated with a file of (mis)information gained from perception which we mistakenly take to apply to the referent of the notion. For example, suppose that I hallucinate that there is a little green man sitting in front of me. Then I will form an empty o-notion on the basis of this misperception, an o-notion which is 'about' the little green man. And the file associated with this o-notion will contain various pieces of (mis)information about that notion's supposed referent. For example it might contain the (mis)information that he is little, green, and male.

Likewise, even if there really is an object which we are perceiving, we might misperceive its qualities and nature, perceiving it as being different from the way it really is. I might, for example, think I am seeing a little green man coming towards me and form an o-notion on the basis of my perception, although in fact I am seeing a large stationary oxidized copper statue. In this case I will form an o-notion of the copper statue but this o-notion will be associated with the misinformation that its referent is a little, green, and male. Thus, in general, an o-notion formed on the basis of misperception will be associated with any misinformation we gain on the basis of that misperception.

Note that in all these cases the referent of my new perceptually formed o-notion will be the object, if any, which I perceived. It will be the object, if any, that was the direct causal source for our new notion and consequently was the source of the new perceptually based (mis)information which the file associated with the new notion contains. It will *not* be whatever object satisfies most of the (mis)information in the file associated with my new notion. The referents of our o-notions are not determined descriptively as being those objects which satisfy the information associated with the o-notion. Thus, even if the world did contain a little green man, he would not be the referent of the empty o-notion which I formed on the basis of my hallucinatory misperception. Nor would he be the referent of the o-notion which I formed on the basis of my misperceiving the oxidized copper statue. The former notion would still be empty. And the latter o-notion would still refer to the statue which I misperceived. In neither case would the referent be an unperceived object which happened to fit the misinformation acquired from my misperception.[36]

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[36]The fact that the referent of a perceptually introduced o-notion is not determined

This sort of *directly referential* quality holds true, not merely of o-notions which are introduced as the result of perception, but for all o-notions, even those which are introduced by reference-fixing description. For example, suppose I begin by formulating a description such as "the person just around the corner" or "the inventor of the zip." I may then introduce o-notions to refer to whatever object, if any, actually satisfies the associated description at the time at which the o-notion is introduced. But, though the referents of these o-notions are initially fixed by definite descriptions, these o-notions are to be thought of as behaving analogously to proper names which are introduced by reference fixing descriptions. Once their reference is secured they will continue to refer to that same object even if it no longer satisfies the original description.[37] Once the referent of the o-notion has been initially secured, it is not required that its referent subsequently satisfy the body of information associated with the notion. Note that not all notion-introducing descriptions need denote. We may simply be mistaken about the denotational status of the description we employ, believing it to denote an object when in fact it does not. In such cases an o-notion, albeit an *empty* o-notion, will still be introduced. And this notion will remain empty even if some object should *subsequently* come to satisfy the associated information.

The final manner in which o-notions may be introduced is this. Suppose we encounter a name or a demonstrative in discourse, either reading it or hearing it somewhere. We might then introduce an o-notion to correspond to the referent of that name or demonstrative. This o-notion will depend for its reference upon the mechanism which secures reference for the name or demonstrative, and it will not depend upon the referent satisfying the information which is associated with the notion. Thus, for example, I might overhear a conversation in which people use

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descriptively is particularly important. For not only is it quite possible for much of the (mis)information associated with a notion to be wrong, but, even if it is correct, very often the information associated with a notion may be insufficient to pick out a unique object. For example, Emma's notion of Cicero gained from her elementary Latin class might only be associated with the information that he was a Roman called "Cicero," a description which is insufficient to distinguish between the more famous Cicero who wrote philosophy denounced Catiline and was murdered by his enemies, his cousin who was one of Caesar's commanders in Gaul, and any number of other family members. Nevertheless in such a case Emma's notion would still refer to the famous Cicero (we can suppose) in virtue of that gentleman being the original source of that notion and the information associated with it.

[37] It is an interesting question whether any description whatsoever may be used to introduce an o-notion or to fix the reference of a proper name. I know of no compelling reason for denying that any description may be used to fix the reference of a proper name, though I cannot argue for this here. In a similar way I allow that any description may be used to introduce an o-notion.

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the name "Louis." I might then form an o-notion corresponding to that name. This o-notion will refer to whatever the name "Louis" was used by the conversers to refer to, irrespective of whether the information in the file associated with this new o-notion singles out that object. Of course it might turn out that the relevant name or demonstrative fails to refer. In this case the newly introduced notion will also fail to refer.

I have sketched three important ways in which new notions may be introduced into a cognizer's mental economy. At this point I want to make two general observations concerning such notion-introductions.

3.4.1 O-notions and make-believe

My first point is as follows. Although I shall not argue for this here, I shall follow Walton and others in taking us to engage in games of make believe whenever we make up, or engage with, stories, myths, and fictions.[38] So far we have considered cases where an o-notion is introduced in the course of our normal interactions with the world. However we may also introduce o-notions in the context of a game of make-believe. So at this point I want say a little concerning precisely what I take make-believe to consist in and how we might introduce new o-notions in the course of it. Obviously I can only offer a very simple sketch of this phenomenon here. Nevertheless I take this sketch to be essentially correct and to provide a useful way of understanding our practices of make-believe.

Engaging in a game of make-believe involves our entertaining and manipulating thoughts in ways that are analogous to the ways we normally entertain and manipulate them.[39] The intrinsic nature of the thought itself will remain the same whether we entertain it normally or employ it in a game of make believe. However a thought which is employed in a game of make-believe differs from a thought which is not so employed in the *precise role* which it plays in our mental economies and in the behavior which it generates. For example, normally, the thought that a monster is approaching will, if the cognizer believes it, stimulate the cognizer to run away. But if this thought is made-believed rather than believed, it will not generate this response. Thus we may regard a game of make-belief as a context in which certain thoughts are hooked up to

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[38] See for example Walton (Walton 1990) and Currie (Currie 1990).

[39] Recall that I take thoughts to be structured particulars. Thoughts stand in various logical and causal relationships to other thoughts. And in virtue of their standing in these relations they will interact with other thoughts in various ways and stimulate various forms of behavior. Thoughts may be entertained in various modes (belief, desire, etc.) where each such mode will correspond to a distinct sort of role that thought might play in our mental economies. In all these respects a thought which is being normally entertained does not essentially differ from a thought which is being entertained in the course of a game of make-believe.

our mental economies and our behavior in a different way from normal. If a thought is employed in this game of make-believe it will no longer stand in the all its usual sorts of causal relations to other thoughts and to bodily behavior.[40]

Now just as we may introduce new notions in the normal course of things, so we may introduce new notions when engaging in make-believe. While engaging in make-believe I might perceive a certain object and introduce a notion which is, in the course of my game of make believe, to refer to whatever I make-believe the object which I perceived to be. For example, I might be engaged in a game of make-believe while watching a play. I see a new actor walk on stage and introduce a new notion on the basis of that perception. This new notion will not refer to the actor. Rather, within the context of my game of make-believe, it will refer to whatever character the actor is playing. And outside of the context of my game it will refer to nothing at all, it will be an empty notion.

Again, I might engage in a game of make-believe in which I pretend that there is a sun-god. I introduce a new notion for this deity by means of the descriptive condition "the deity corresponding to the sun." This new notion will, within the context of my game of make believe, refer to the sun-god. Outside of that context, however, it will be empty. It will refer to nothing.

Finally, suppose that you are telling me a story. We both make-believe that what you are telling me is true. I might hear you utter a name and introduce a new notion to refer to whatever you referred to. Suppose you are referring to something which only exists within the story you are telling me. Then my new notion will refer to that thing within the context of our game of make-believe and will refer to nothing outside of that context. If, however, your name-utterance *does* refer to something outside the context of our make-believe then my new notion will refer to that thing.[41]

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[40]This is not to deny that, depending upon the details of the game, it may still stand in *some* of these relationships. For example, suppose I engage in make-believe when watching an exciting film. In such circumstances my heart might beat faster, just as it would if my make-beliefs were real beliefs. Note moreover, that entertaining a thought during a game of make-believe may also lead that thought give rise to *new* patterns of bodily behavior. I might engage in a game of make-believe in which I make believe that trees are evil aliens. The thought that there is a tree in front of me may then lead me to behave in ways it would not normally, I might run away and hide.

[41]It is important to realize that your name-utterance *might* genuinely refer to something *outside* the scope of the make-believe. It should certainly not be thought that all notions involved in our practice of make-believe need be new empty notions introduced in the course of our engaging in that make-believe. On the contrary we will often *import* pre-existing notions, indeed pre-existing non-empty notions, into

Thus, both in the course of our normal activities and while engaging in games of make-believe, new o-notions may be introduced by perception, description, and on the basis of our encountering name-utterances. Notions which we introduce during a game of make-believe on the basis of perception or description will refer to something within the context of that make-believe. But they will refer to nothing outside that context. Outside of that context they will be empty. Notions introduced during a game of make-believe on the basis of our encountering a name-utterance will refer to whatever that name-utterance refers to.

3.4.2 Mediated notion-introduction

The second point which I want to make is this. When we introduce a new notion our introduction will often be *mediated* by some item or description through which we initially gained access to the referent of our new notion. This is most obvious in cases where a notion is introduced on the basis of a reference-fixing description. Suppose that I introduce a new notion descriptively. Here, the description which I employ to fix my notion's referent, the set of properties and conditions which I invoke, will occupy an intermediate position between the new notion and its referent. For it is *through* this description that I initially pick out the object to which the new notion will subsequently refer. Note that this phenomenon holds both for full names which are introduced on the basis of a reference-fixing description, and for empty names which are introduced on the basis of such a description. Suppose that I introduce a notion and attempt to fix its referent on the basis of the misdescription

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our game of make believe. These notions will be about whatever it is that they are normally about, whatever it is that they are about outside the context of the game. And such games will involve our making-believe various things about the real-world referents of these imported notions. Some of the information with which these notions are usually associated may be employed in the game. Such importation is an important mechanism whereby fictional works are able to talk about real things, and whereby information about the real world and items therein may be brought into play in our engagement with fiction. For example, when we read a Sherlock Holmes novel we import our London-notion. This is why we take Holmes stories to be talking about London. It is how we are able to bring any knowledge we might have of London, in particular Victorian London, to bear upon the Holmes stories. And it allows us sometimes to learn things about the real Victorian London on the basis of what the Holmes stories say and the information we consequently come to associate with our London-notion when we are engaged in a game of Holmes-make-believe. For example, I may learn geographical facts about London from the Holmes stories, associating that information with my London-notion while engaging in the pretense that the Holmes stories are true, but then retaining the information when I retrieve my London-notion from this pretense and use it to think about London outside my game of Holmes-make-believe. This sort of process is no doubt very complex but I shall not discuss its details here.

"the round square." Here, even though my new notion does not refer to anything, the description "the round square" will still serve to mediate the introduction of my new notion. For it is through being associated with this reference-fixing description that my round-square-notion is introduced, even though it is this association which ultimately determines that my new notion *fails* to refer to anything.

We have been considering one sort of case where the connection between notions and he world is *mediated* by an intermediate description. However this sort of phenomenon may hold true, not merely of notions which are introduced purely on the basis of a reference-fixing descriptions, but also of notions introduced on the basis of perception. Consider, for example, the following scenario in which a new notion is perceptually introduced. Suppose that I hear the door closing and, recognizing that the door is being closed by a person, I form a new notion which is to refer to that person. In this case the event which I directly perceive, the closing of the door, and the description "the person who just shut that door" will serve as an intermediate complex through which reference to the person closing the door is initially secured. What I directly hear is the event of the door closing. But when I hear the door closing I introduce a notion to refer, not to the event of the door's closing, but rather to the person who stands in the given relation to that event. In this way the event of the door's closing and the description "the person who just shut that door" *mediate* the introduction of my new notion. Once again, this sort of phenomenon may also hold true for empty notions introduced on the basis of perception. Perhaps, to modify the example just given, the wind blows the door shut and so the notion I introduce does not refer to anything. This does not prevent the event of the door's closing, and the description "the person who just shut that door," from mediating the introduction of my new empty notion. For I attempted to employ them to secure the reference of my new notion. It was on their basis that I introduced my new notion.

I would point out that this sort of mediation may occur not only in normal cases of notion-introduction, but also in cases where I introduce a notion in the course of a game of make-believe. For example, if I make-believe that there is a sun-god, introducing a new notion on the basis of the description "the deity corresponding to the sun" then the introduction of this notion will be mediated by that description. Again, suppose I make-believe that trees are people and introduce a new person-notion on the basis of seeing a tree. The introduction of my new notion will be mediated by the tree I perceive together with some description such as "the person corresponding to that tree." Thus, mediated notion-introduction can occur both in normal contexts and within contexts of

make-belief.

Now I do not mean to claim that we are always explicitly aware of the precise nature, or even the existence, of such mediating elements. I may introduce a notion to refer to a door-shutter without my explicitly formulating the description "the person who just shut that door." Nevertheless, I suggest, in cases where we introduce notions on the basis of some mediating element we *do* have at least some sort of tacit awareness of that element. The mediating element can, with sufficient reflection, be brought to mind. I shall not at the moment attempt to explore the psychological details of how we may use such intermediate descriptions and complexes to secure reference to other entities. I shall simply assume that, somehow or other, such mediation occurs.

3.5 Referential frameworks

I suggested above how new o-notions might be generated when we encounter an unfamiliar name and subsequently introduce a new o-notion to be about whatever that name refers to. However the interrelations between o-notions and names are more complex than this. On the one hand, while engaging in discourse we might encounter a name which we already associate with an o-notion **N**. In this case we might well take the name to refer to whatever that notion **N** is about, and we will augment our relevant file of information with the information we glean from discourse.[42]

On the other hand we might also use a name to express thoughts which involve one of our notions. It may already be that there is a name which is associated with the notion in question, just as the name "Stacie" is associated with my Stacie-notion. If I wish to express thoughts which involve my Stacie-notion, if I wish to express thoughts about Stacie, I will tend to use this name. Other people will associate this name with their Stacie-notions and form thoughts about Stacie, involving those notions, on the basis of hearing my utterance.

However I might also choose to coin a new name to express a notion, in which case this new name will gain its reference from that notion. It will refer to whatever that notion does. Let us suppose that I introduce the name "S" to express my Stacie-notion. When other people hear my new name they will form notions (let's call them "S-notions") which are to be about its referent. They will in turn associate the name "S"

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[42] Whether we do indeed take the name to refer to whatever **N** is about will, of course, be complex matter in which we assess the context to determine how likely it is that the utterance is about that object. If we deem it unlikely that our interlocutor is talking about the referent of the o-notion we associate with **N** then we will simply take them to be using **N** to talk about some other object.

with these S-notions and they will use the name "S" to express thoughts involving them. Yet further people will hear these utterances and form S-notions on their basis, they will use the name "S" to express these S-notions, and so on. This whole process will continue with more and more people developing S-notions and using the name "S" to express them. And after a while the use of the name "S" to express S-notions will become well entrenched within our linguistic community. The reference of all these S-notions and utterances of "S" used to express them will be determined by the reference of my original Stacie-notion.

In this way, a complex framework of name utterances, mental notions, and notion-introducing perceptions or acts of description is built up. This framework allows people who never encounter Stacie to form notions of her when they encounter utterances of her name, notions whose reference is fixed by the proceeding framework of name utterances and notions. And it allows them to use the name "S" to express their S-notions, again securing reference to the original Stacie via the pre-existing framework of name utterances and notions. They may even introduce a new name to express their S-notions and pass this new name on to others. Let us call this apparatus of mental notions, linguistic utterances, and notion-introducing acts, a *referential framework*.

Thus each name we use will be associated with a complex referential framework stretching back to a *base* at which a base-notion was introduced through an act of perception or description. In cases where these base-notions have a referent the associated referential framework will have that object as its *referential source*. And the name-utterances which occur within the referential framework will refer to that object. In cases where the base-notions lack a referent, being introduced by misperception or misdescription, the framework will not have a referential source. And the name-utterances which occur within the framework will not refer to anything but will be empty. Consequently what, if anything, the referent of a name-utterance is will be determined by the referential framework within which that name-utterance occurs. Note that referential frameworks may grow up in this way, not merely for notions which are introduced normally, but also for notions introduced in the course of a game of make-believe.

Let us illustrate these ideas by considering some examples. Suppose that I see Stacie and form a notion of her upon this basis. I introduce the name "S" to express thoughts involving my new notion and a referential framework arises for this name in the usual manner. Then Stacie is the *referential source* of this framework. My new notion of Stacie lies at the *base* of the framework. And the utterances of "S" which occur as parts of this referential framework will refer to Stacie in virtue of their being

part of a referential framework with Stacie as its referential source. This situation is illustrated in figure 1.
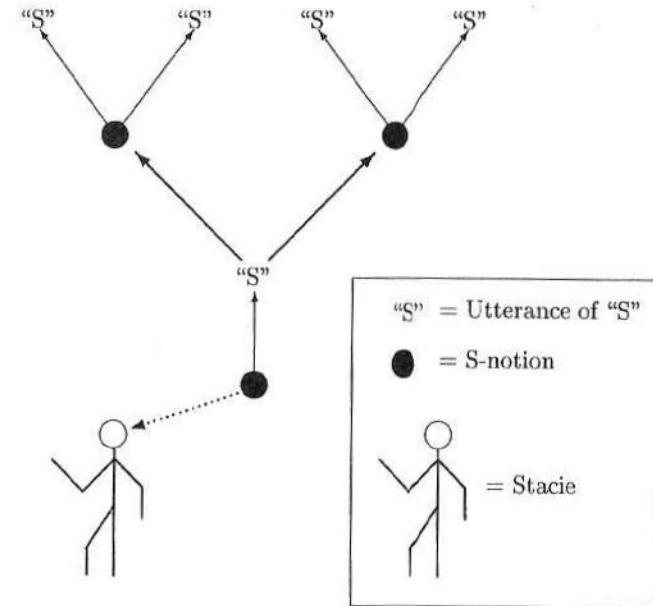

Figure 1: The Referential Framework for "S"

Suppose now that I introduce an o-notion on the basis of misperception. Suppose that I hallucinate that there is a little green man standing before me, form a notion on that basis, and introduce the name "Fred" to express thoughts involving that notion. Finally suppose that a referential framework then grows up for the name "Fred" in the usual way. In this case the referential framework will have my perceptually based notion at its base. However, since that notion is empty, it will not have a referential source. And the utterances of "Fred" which occur as parts of this referential framework will refer to nothing in virtue of their being part of a referential framework which has no referential source. This situation is illustrated in figure 2.
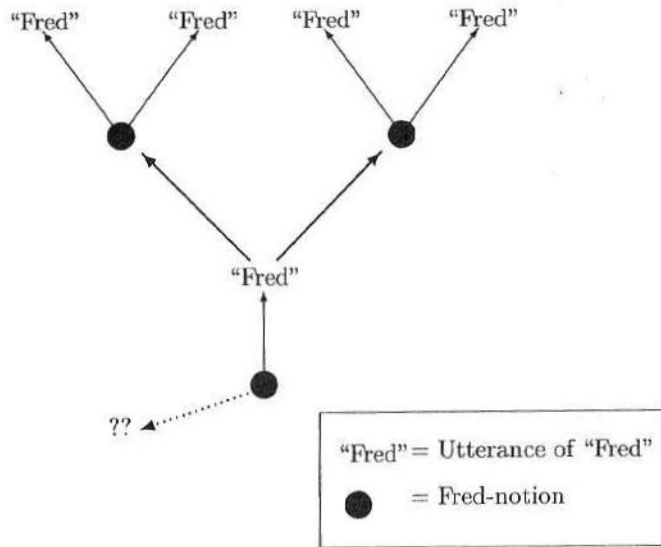
"Fred" = Utterance of "Fred"

● = Fred-notion

Figure 2: The Referential Framework for "Fred"

In my discussion of notion-introduction above I noted that in many cases the introduction of a notion will be *mediated*. The introduction might be mediated by a set of descriptive conditions which the referent of the introduced notion is taken to satisfy. Or it might be mediated by some object or event which is directly perceived taken together with some description which relates the referent of the new notion to the object of the perception. Let us say that a referential framework which arises from the mediated introduction of a notion has its *reference-fixing source* in the mediators which give rise to that framework. In this way the referential frameworks associated with certain names may have as their reference-fixing sources various reference-fixing descriptions, perceived objects, and so on, items which mediate the introduction of the base notions of those frameworks.

This holds true for both full and empty names. Suppose, for example, that I introduce an empty notion to correspond to the referent of the misdescription "the round square" and subsequently coin the name "P" to express that notion so that a referential framework develops for utterances of the name "P." Since the description "the round square"

fails to pick out an object this resulting referential framework will not have a referential source. It will, however, have as its *reference-fixing source* the description "the round square." Again, suppose that I hear the wind blowing the door shut and mistakenly suppose there is some person who shut the door, introducing a notion and name to refer to that person. The referential framework associated with utterances of this new name will not have a referential source. But nevertheless it will have as its *reference-fixing source* the event of the door's shutting and the description "the person who just shut that door."

3.5.1 Three ways to share sources

Now observe that two quite separate referential frameworks might share the same *referential source*. Suppose for example that there were two tribes which lived on different sides of a big mountain but which never met or interacted in any way. Indeed suppose that one of the tribes died out before the other tribe even arrived on the scene. Finally let us suppose that one tribe used the name "Q" to refer to the mountain, while the other tribe used the name "R." Clearly the referential frameworks associated with the names "Q" and "R" are completely disjoint. Nevertheless, given that the two frameworks latch onto the same mountain, they will share their *referential source*.

Likewise, note that two quite separate frameworks might share a common *reference-fixing source*. Suppose that our two tribes both take the mountain to be a god, and they both introduce notions to refer to this deity on the basis of the mediating description "the deity corresponding to this mountain." They go on to introduce the names "S" and "T" to express thoughts involving those notions, and referential frameworks develop for those names in the standard way. The names "S" and "T" will be empty, they will not have any object as their referential source. Moreover, the referential framework associated with utterances of "S" will be completely distinct from that associated with utterances of "T." Nevertheless both frameworks will share a *reference-fixing source*. The big mountain, and the description "the deity corresponding to this mountain," will serve as the reference-fixing source of both frameworks.

Finally, observe that a referential framework might grow up for a name and then grow two branches, each associated with a different name. Consider the following case. The Romans used the names "Cicero" and "Tully" interchangably to express the same thoughts. And a single referential framework for both names grew up with the famous Roman orator as its *referential source*. However, let us suppose, at some time Person-R was talking to Person-S employing both the names "Cicero" and "Tully" in her conversation. Person-S, not recognizing that

the two names were supposed to refer to the same individual and were used by Person-R to express the same thoughts, introduced two different notions corresponding to the two different names. She formed a Cicero-notion on the basis of her hearing Person-R's utterances of "Cicero." And she formed a separate Tully-notion on the basis of her hearing Person-R's utterances of "Tully." Person-S then used the name "Cicero" to express thoughts involving her Cicero-notion, and the name "Tully" to express thoughts involving her Tully-notion. In turn others heard her utterances of "Cicero" and formed Cicero-notions, and heard her utterances of "Tully" and formed Tully-notions, without ever recognizing that Cicero was Tully. In this way over time the single referential framework which was initially associated with the names "Cicero" and "Tully" developed two branches, one associated with the name "Cicero" and the other with the name "Tully." These branches stretched back to Person-R and merge in her Cicero-Tully-notion. For it was at the point of her conversation with Person-S that the initial common referential framework for "Cicero" and "Tully" split into two, with a different branch corresponding to each name. Let us say that two branches of a referential framework which share an initial segment share a *framework source*.

Let us recap. Each use of a name will be associated with a 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 description (etc.) these mediating items will form the *reference-fixing source* of the framework. And in cases where two branches of a referential framework share a common initial segment they will share a common *framework source*. Now of course, as I said earlier, this picture is of necessity rather simplistic. It is only a sketch of what is no doubt in reality a terribly complex phenomenon. Nevertheless it does, I think, provide a good model of how names get introduced into a language and how they function subsequently. We are now in a position to provide an account of what it is for two utterances of proper names to be thinly about the same thing.

3.6   Thick aboutness and thin aboutness

I suggested above, you will recall, that two utterances of proper names which are about the same thing have a common source. We can now offer the following more precisely characterization:

Thick aboutness: Two utterances of proper names μ and ν are about the same thing in a *thick* sense just in case the referential framework which includes μ and the referential framework which includes ν share a common *referential source*.

Thin aboutness: Two utterances of proper names μ and ν are about the same thing in a *thin* sense just in case (1) they are not about the same thing in a thick sense (2) the referential framework which includes μ and the referential framework which includes ν share a common *reference-fixing source* or a common *framework source*.

Let us consider some simple examples to illustrate the basic idea. Suppose that two people, Person-A and Person-B, both hear the wind blow my door shut and they both assume that the door was in fact closed by a person. On the basis of this they each introduce an empty notion which they take to refer to that person. And they each introduce a different name with which to express these notions. Person-A introduces the name "Peter" and Person-B introduces the name "Brian." Person-A talks to her friends about the person who closed the door, using the name "Peter" when she attempts to do this. After a while her friends start to use the name "Peter" themselves. They make such claims as "Person-A is still puzzled by Peter's disappearance" and "Peter doesn't really exist, Person-A probably just made a mistake." In this way a referential framework will develop for the name "Peter" amongst the linguistic subcommunity who use that name, a framework leading back to the point at which Person-A introduced her empty notion.

Likewise we can imagine that Person-B also talks to her friends about the person who closed my door, using the name "Brian" when she attempts to do this. After a while her friends start to use the name "Brian" themselves. They make such claims as "Person-B is still puzzled by Brian's disappearance" and "Brain doesn't really exist, Person-B probably just made a mistake." In this way a referential framework will develop for the name "Brain" amongst the linguistic subcommunity who use that name, a framework leading back to the point at which Person-B introduced her empty notion.

In these circumstances it would be reasonable, I suggest, to take Person-A and her friends to be, in some sense, talking about the same thing as Person-B and her friends. It would be reasonable to take utterances of "Peter" to be thinly about the same thing as utterances of "Brian," even though neither name referred to anything. Of course the referential frameworks associated with utterances of the two names "Peter" and "Brian" would not share a referential source. Nevertheless these

two referential frameworks would both share the same *reference-fixing source*. For the same event and description would mediate their introduction. The reference-fixing source of both frameworks would be the event of the door's closing and in the description "the person who just shut that door." So the referential framework containing utterances of "Peter" would share its reference-fixing source with the referential framework containing utterances of "Brian." It is our implicit recognition of this fact, I suggest, that explains why we take Person-A's utterances of "Peter" and Person-B's utterances of "Brian" to be thinly about the same thing.

Next, consider "Dr. Jekyll" and "Mr. Hyde." When writing his famous book Stevenson engaged in a game of make-believe in which he made-believe that the story he was writing was true. Let us suppose that, in the course of this game he introduced a new notion on the basis of various descriptions, a notion which would come to serve as his Jekyll-Hyde-notion. That is to say, he made up various stories and descriptions and he introduced his Jekyll-Hyde-notion to be about a person who, he made-believe, satisfied those stories and descriptions. And he employed this single Jekyll-Hyde-notion when he was subsequently engaging in the Jekyll-and-Hyde game of make-believe.

Now of course Stevenson wrote the story of Jekyll and Hyde into a book, told the story to friends, and so on, only revealing the identity of Jekyll and Hyde at the very end. Nevertheless the utterances of "Jekyll" and of "Hyde" which Stevenson made in order to tell his story all served to express thoughts and make-beliefs involving the same Jekyll-Hyde-notion. The sentences he wrote using the name "Jekyll" served to express thoughts and make-beliefs in which he employed his Jekyll-Hyde-notion.

Suppose that I start to read Stevenson's story. I engage in a a game of Jekyll-Hyde make-believe but I do not realize that Jekyll is Hyde. I form two separate notions, a Hyde-notion formed upon my encountering tokens of "Hyde" and a Jekyll-notion formed upon my encountering tokens of "Jekyll." And I use distinct names to express these distinct notions, using the name "Hyde" to express my Hyde-notion and the name "Jekyll" to express my Jekyll notion. Nevertheless, the referential frameworks containing my utterances of "Jekyll" and "Hyde" will share a common reference-fixing source in the descriptions and stories on the basis of which Stevenson introduced his Jekyll-Hyde-notion. Moreover, if we follow these frameworks back towards their origin we will find that they merge in Stevenson's Jekyll-Hyde-notion and so share a common (albeit short) initial segment. Consequently the referential frameworks containing my utterances of "Jekyll" and "Hyde" will share *both* a common reference-fixing source, *and* a common framework source. It is our

implicit recognition of this, I suggest, that explains why we take utterances of "Jekyll" and "Hyde" to be thinly about the same thing.

Finally consider utterances of the names "Santa" and "Father Xmas." Now I shall not suggest an account of what the reference-fixing source, if any, of these name-utterances might be. I don't want to delve too deeply into the precise origins of the Santa myth at the moment. For not only are such details both obscure and complex, they are also besides the point. The crucial point is simply this. Eventually, through various no doubt complex, processes, 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. They expressed thoughts involving these notions using an Ur-name which was the ancestor of our names "Santa" and "Father Xmas." And a referential framework grew up for this Ur-name in the usual way. Eventually, at some point, the names "Santa" and "Father Xmas" came to be associated with this framework. However at this point that framework came to split into two branches, with speakers of British English using the name "Father Xmas" to express thoughts involving their Santa-notions, and speakers of American English using the name "Santa" to express thoughts involving *their* Santa-notions.

Now both these branches grew out of a *shared initial segment* of referential framework. If we were to follow the referential frameworks associated with our utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" back towards their origin we would find that they *merge*. Consequently it does not matter *what* the reference-fixing source of the referential framework associated with utterances of "Santa" might be. The fact that this framework shares an initial segment with the framework associated with utterances of "Father Xmas" *guarantees* that both frameworks share a common framework source. And it is our implicit grasp of *this* fact, I suggest, which underwrites our sense that utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" share a common source.

3.7 Concluding remarks

I began this paper by discerning two problems generated by empty names, problems which seemed particularly pressing for a Referentialist. The first of these was the problem of accounting for the truth value of certain claims, such as negative existential claims, which involve empty names. And the second was the problem of explicating the thin sense in which utterances of "Santa" and "Father Xmas" seem to be about the same thing. In the course of the paper I have attempted to answer both these difficulties. I suggested that the Referentialist might view empty

names as making some form of *degenerate* semantic contribution to the utterances which contain them. I then offered an account of what it is for two utterances of proper names to be about the same thing in a thin sense. I suggested that in order for two utterances to be thinly about the same thing, the two utterances needed to share a common source. And I sketched an account of what this might amount to. Obviously there remains a great deal more to be said about the sorts of issues which I have been considering. Nevertheless I have tried to sketch the outline of, what seems to me to be, the correct account of this.

4

On Myth

AVROM FADERMAN

I'm going to talk about what I'll call mythical names empty names that weren't introduced (or turned into empty names) by a deliberate choice to use the name as empty. There are probably a fair number of names like this: "Bigfoot," "Scylla," and the names children or the insane attach to imagined companions. These names pose several problems not posed by fictional names, including the problem I'm going to discuss here, which is a problem for baptismal pictures of reference.

According to baptismal pictures of reference, the descriptions associated with a name (unless such descriptions are explicitly used to introduce the name) are irrelevant to determining the name's referent. Rather, a name refers to the object it does because that object (to borrow a term from Kripke) was baptized with that name; that is, the name or its linguistic ancestor was originally used to refer to that object. As the name is passed down a cultural chain of transmission, its reference goes with it, so that no matter what descriptions we currently associate with a name, the name continues to refer to whatever it originally referred to. There are some usually pretty vaguely specified restrictions on the cultural chain, so that not all cultural chains will preserve reference, but this much is important to a baptismal picture: The picture cannot simply reduce to a form of descriptivism, and any way of specifying restrictions on the cultural chain that make it essentially a form of descriptivism are inadmissible.

The baptismal picture famously has problems with names that change their referents over the course of their history. Kripke himself suggested the first problem cases: He notes, for example, that "Santa Claus" is supposedly a perversion (the linguistic heir) of "St. Nicholas," who was a real historical figure, not a fictional character who delivers toys (See

stars, we don't want to tie our hands either in considering whether there are infinitely many *sets* of stars. A case can thus be made for (imagining there to be) a plenitude of sets of stars, and a master set gathering all the star-sets together; and a plenitude of 1–1 functions from the master set to its proper subsets to ensure that if the former is infinite, there will be a function on hand to witness the fact. This perhaps gives the flavor of why the preference for a universe as "full" as possible is not terribly surprising on a gameskeeping conception of the theory of sets.

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