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Revisiting "Can Frege Pose Frege's Puzzle?"

Resumen: *En este artículo reviso temas de mi artículo "¿Puede Frege formular el Puzzle de Frege?". Comienzo discutiendo nuestra conexión con los nombres propios que empleamos, y explico por qué continúo pensando que el estatus epistémico de las oraciones verdaderas de identidad que contienen nombres no es enigmático. Concluyo con algunas observaciones respecto de por qué pienso que los defensores de la concepción de la referencia directa de los nombres deberían aceptar esta posición.*

Palabras claves: *Puzzle de Frege. Nombres propios. Referencia. Saul Kripke. David Kaplan.*

Abstract: *in this paper, I revisit themes from my paper "Can Frege Pose Frege's Puzzle?" I begin by discussing our connection to the proper names that we use, and I explain why I continue to think that the epistemic status of true name-containing identity sentences is not puzzling. I conclude with some remarks about why I think that adherents of the direct reference conception of names should accept this position.*

Key words: *Frege's puzzle. Proper names. Reference. Saul Kripke. David Kaplan.*

I wrote "Can Frege Pose Frege's Puzzle?" with two aims. The first was to describe our epistemic situation with respect to proper names. The second was to argue that there was no puzzling difference in the epistemic status of true name-containing identity sentences.

In this paper, I will offer additional reflections on our connection to names, and I will explain why I continue to think that the epistemic status of true name-containing identity sentences is not puzzling. I will conclude with some remarks about why I think that adherents of the direct reference conception of names should accept this position.

1. At the time that I wrote "Can Frege Pose Frege's Puzzle?", I was drawn to the direct reference conception of language, according to which a proper name has no semantic value other than its bearer. On this picture, names are part of a public language. Individual speakers do not typically create the names that they use; nor are they responsible for connecting those names with their referents on occasions of use. Rather, they encounter existing names in the written or oral productions of others, and go on to use those names (with their referents) in later language-involving encounters, regardless of what epistemic connection they might have (or not have) to the referents.

David Kaplan, in his paper "Words," pointed out that a full account of words in a public language must include specification of the individuation conditions for those words. It was in thinking about this issue that I came to believe that Frege's famous puzzle, about the purported difference in cognitive value between true name-containing identity sentences of different forms, was really no puzzle at all.

In particular, it seemed to me that puzzlement need not arise if we remain focused on a speaker's epistemic situation with respect to public language names. If we recognize that speakers typically acquire and use proper names without either determining or grasping their

individuation conditions, then we should also accept that a speaker may encounter, and later use, a single name on different occasions and yet not recognize that this was the case. And therefore, Frege's claim that "$a=a$ holds *a priori* [...]" (1892, 151) should be denied.

Consider a person who first hears the name 'Aristotle' in a philosophy class, encounters it again the following year in her biology class, and does not recognize it as the same name. Such a person, if she produces the sentence "Aristotle is Aristotle," may well wonder about its truth-value. She surely cannot establish that it is true without further investigation. And that investigation, it seemed to me, would be exactly of the sort that she would conduct if she had encountered 'Aristotle' in her philosophy class and 'Aris' in her biology class.

I still think that this basic point –that there is no fundamental epistemic divide between true name-containing identity sentences of different forms– is correct. And this is so even though I acknowledge that there *are* circumstances in which one can know without investigation that an identity sentence of the form $a=a$ is true: when one says or writes a name, then says or writes "is identical to," and then says or writes that name again.

Recognition of such cases does not, however, regenerate Fregean puzzlement. This is because the *a priority* is attributable to the circumstances in which the sentence is produced, and not the sentence's form. A different variety of "circumstantial *a priority*" can arise for sentences of the form $a=b$, such as when someone introduces a new name and stipulates its referent by using a name already in her vocabulary –e.g., "The austere severity with which Frege approaches issues of truth and meaning makes me want to introduce an endearment by which to speak about him. From now on, I will refer to him with the diminutive 'Gottly'". Having made this pronouncement, the speaker can, on this occasion, know, without further investigation, that the sentence "Gottlob Frege is identical to Gottly" is true.

Thus: one can, in certain circumstances, know the truth of an identity sentence of the form $a=a$ without needing to conduct any empirical investigation. In different circumstances, one can know the truth of an identity sentence of the form $a=b$ without needing to conduct any empirical investigation. In other circumstances, one must conduct empirical investigation to establish who the referent of the name(s) is in order to establish that the sentence at issue is true. None of this, I think, supports the conclusion that there is a basic epistemic divide between true identity sentences of different forms –let alone, a conclusion that proper names express Fregean senses, and co-referential names express different Fregean senses.

2. Frege, of course, *did* maintain that co-referential names express different senses, and that sentences of the form $a=a$ and $a=b$ must express different thoughts. As I read him, Frege did not begin by considering our relation to names and sentences, and then reach his conclusion about thought; instead, he began with what he took to be two fundamental facts about thought: first, that an object can be presented to us in thought in different ways; and second, that when we grasp repeated instances of the same representation, no investigation is required in order to know that our thought is about a single object.

The development of direct reference theory was, in large part, motivated by a desire to remove all appeals to representations and thoughts in the account of proper name meaning and reference. And yet, many of the founders and prominent adherents of direct reference theory have embraced the traditional Fregean taxonomy of identity sentences. To take just one paradigmatic example: Saul Kripke, who sowed the seeds of direct reference theory in the fertile soil of rejected Fregeanism,[1] nonetheless took pains to note:

> My view that the English sentence "Hesperus is Phosphorus" could sometimes be used to raise an empirical issue while "Hesperus is Hesperus" could not shows that I do not treat the *sentences* as completely interchangeable (1980, 20).

Kripke then briefly indicated how a direct reference proponent might ground this supposed epistemic divide between "Hesperus is Hesperus"

and "Hesperus is Phosphorus": "[…] the mode of fixing the reference is relevant to our epistemic attitude toward the sentences expressed" (*Ibid.*, 20-21). That is: though the names "Hesperus" and "Phosphorus" share a referent, they differ in how that referent was determined, and Kripke viewed this as a plausible source of our different "epistemic attitudes" towards the two sentences.

The claim that we take different epistemic attitudes towards name-containing sentences in response to the mode by which the names' references were fixed is hauntingly Fregean, and seems contrary to the spirit of the direct reference picture. Kripke himself took great pains to establish that users of a proper name need have no descriptive or conceptual means of securing or discerning a bearer for the name that they use. Rather, the name-bearer connection is forged at the time of the name's introduction, either via "reference fixing descriptions" (though Kripke explicitly rejected the suggestion that a description used at name introduction to secure reference should be construed as any part of that name's meaning), or, more commonly, via ostention (or some sort of mental demonstrative). Once the connection between name and object is established, anyone who uses the name refers to that object, even if she is not able to identify it or specify it descriptively. And yet, to appeal to the way that a name's reference was initially fixed to explain our epistemic attitude towards true identity sentences containing that name appears to grant that those who use a name like 'Hesperus', or encounter it in sentences produced by others, have the "mode" of how its reference was fixed playing *some* role in their cognition.[2]

There are at least two reasons to believe that direct reference theorists should not take this position. First, given that these theorists base their rejection of Frege's account of sense in part on the claim that name users typically do not possess uniquely identifying descriptions of referents, they are not well-positioned to argue that such users nonetheless have epistemic access to the means by which a name's reference was initially fixed (perhaps via a description of the referent used in secret by the person who introduced the name, perhaps long, long, long ago, in a language not known to the current user, etc.,

etc.). Second, it is not at all clear how the "mode of fixing the referent" *could* play an epistemic role in cases where a name was introduced via ostention. These points become more acute if we consider the fact that, of the vast majority of names that we use and encounter, we have no idea whatsoever when and by what means (descriptive or ostensive) their references were initially fixed.

In any event, even if we were to set aside these concerns about our epistemic access to modes of reference, Kripke's attempt to provide a non-semantic explanation for the Fregean phenomenon will not succeed. This is because two names could have their references fixed in the very same way, and yet occur in an identity sentence which is clearly on an epistemic par with "Hesperus is Phosphorus".[3] For example, we can imagine a case in which someone points to a celestial object and announces: "I thereby name *that* 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus'." [4] The names then venture out into the world. If we focus on modes of reference fixing, then, in this case, "Hesperus is Phosphorus" should raise no empirical issues. But, clearly, it could: when the names make their way through the community, those who use or encounter them will have no insight into their shared mode of reference-fixing (let alone, via that, recognize their co-referentiality). We should thus put aside Kripke's suggestion that modes of reference fixing can support a difference in our epistemic attitude towards true identity sentences.

Interestingly, Kripke himself identified reasons to doubt this position in his paper "A Puzzle About Belief".[5] There, he considered the case of Pierre, who produces utterances like: "*Londres* is pretty, but London is not pretty". Kripke asked: is Pierre semantically incompetent? Is he irrational? For a Fregean, the answer is simple: neither, of course; the names "London" and "Londres" express different senses, and Pierre can be seen as expressing a belief that could be paraphrased as "The city that I read about in my favorite childhood book is pretty, but the city in which I now live is not pretty". In arguing that the Fregean move will not provide a general solution to these sorts of cases, Kripke described the "puzzle" of Peter, who has heard many things about the musician Paderewski, many things about the politician

Paderewski, and who produces utterances like: "Paderewski is wonderful, but Paderewski is awful." Kripke wrote that Peter's case shows us that "[…] sameness of properties used to fix the reference does *not* appear to guarantee in general that paradoxes will not arise" (1979, footnote 43, 159). Since, on Kripke's view, *reference fixing* is what occurs (only) at the time of a name's introduction, he must hold that there is a single mode of reference fixing (for a single name 'Paderewski') that could be appealed to in this case.

Kripke did not tell us how the lessons learned from the example of Peter should be applied to identity sentences.[6] It is clear, though, that Peter's case does not seem to be in line with Kripke's "Naming and Necessity" position that sentences of the form *a=a* do not raise "an empirical issue".

My own view is that, if one embraces the direct referent framework, one should also accept that the epistemic status of true name-containing identity sentences is not determined by their form. This is because, in that framework, whatever beliefs the user of a name might have –about the name's referent, or about the name itself– are not what individuate that name. Thus, direct reference theorists should reject any attempt to classify identity sentences (or what they express) in a way that assigns to some a privileged epistemic status. *How* a sentence is knowable to be true does not derive from some fact intrinsic to the sentence, to its form, or from the proposition it expresses; rather, it is a function of how the person who is producing or considering the sentence is related to it.

Notes

1. In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke offered a series of arguments against Frege's theory (and all theories that portray a proper name as possessing a descriptive or representational content that determines the name's referent). Kripke, relying in large part on intuitions elicited by key examples, claimed that most competent speakers do *not* associate reference-determining descriptions with the names that they use, and concluded that reference must be effected by some other

means. Kripke then offered an alternative picture, according to which a name, introduced at a particular place and time as a name of a specific object, can be passed, referent-bearing, from person to person. A person who has received a name can use it to refer to its bearer, even if she has no conception (or has a misconception) of that bearer.

2. Though Kripke did not argue for such a claim, construction of such an argument can be attempted on his behalf: begin with the claim that true identity sentences are not on an epistemic par; next, establish that names do not have any kind of descriptive meaning; conclude that the only source of epistemic difference must lie with modes of reference-fixing.

    The challenges to this conclusion raised in the next two paragraphs, however, would offer support to those who might wish to make a *modus tollens* move with this argument: since modes of reference fixing *can't* explain the epistemic difference, we should conclude that names *do* have descriptive meaning. (I do not make such a move myself; I merely note that such an argument would leave Kripke vulnerable to it.)

3. We should also recognize that there are cases in which names have their reference fixed in different ways, though the sentence in which they occur seems to be as good a candidate as any for being knowable *a priori*. In *Naming and Necessity* Kripke gave us the means to formulate such an example when he wrote: "[…] on the picture advocated by this monograph, two totally distinct 'historical chains' that by sheer accident assign phonetically the same name to the same man should probably count as creating distinct names despite the identity of the referents" (1980, 8). If someone introduces 'Hesperus' as a name for an object on a certain day, and another person introduces 'Hesperus' as a name for that same object on a different day, a subsequent sentence "Hesperus is Hesperus," containing those two names, would seem to be on an epistemic par with a sentence "Hesperus is Hesperus" containing a single name twice.

4. Exactly such a case is described by David Kaplan in "Words" (the "mischievous Babylonian", 1990, 115).

5. Though Kripke wrote "A Puzzle About Belief" several years after delivering the *Naming and Necessity* lectures, his appeal to "modes of fixing the reference" occurs in the preface of the *Naming*

and Necessity book, which was published after "A Puzzle About Belief".

6. David Kaplan is another direct reference theorist who noticed the phenomenon highlighted by the "Paderewski" example. In "Demonstratives", he pointed out: "[…] I may introduce a new proper name word and send it on its journey. When it returns to me –perhaps slightly distorted phonologically by its trip through other dialects– I can competently take it into my vocabulary without recognizing it as the very same word! Shocking!" (1980, 563).

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