

# The Predicate View of Proper Names

Kent Bach\*

San Francisco State University

---

## Abstract

The Millian view that the meaning of a proper name is simply its referent has long been popular among philosophers of language. It might even be deemed the orthodox view, despite its well-known difficulties. Fregean and Russellian alternatives, though widely discussed, are much less popular. The Predicate View has not even been taken seriously, at least until fairly recently, but finally, it is receiving the attention it deserves. It says that a name expresses the property of bearing that name. Despite its apparent shortcomings, it has a distinct virtue: It straightforwardly reckons with the fact that proper names generally have multiple bearers and are sometimes used to ascribe the property of bearing a name rather than to refer to a particular bearer of the name. It holds that proper names are much the same as common nouns, both semantically and syntactically, with only superficial differences. They both can be quantified and modified. The main difference, at least in English (and some other languages), is that when used to refer a proper name, unlike a common noun, is not preceded by the definite article. The Predicate View accounts for manifestly predicative uses, but to be vindicated, it needs to do justice to the fact that the main use of proper names is to refer.

---

## 1. Introduction

Anyone new to philosophy of language could well figure that proper names are the least puzzling of expressions. Indeed, the overwhelmingly popular view among philosophers is that the semantic function of a proper name is simply to refer to its bearer. This Millian view sees names (I'll generally drop 'proper' from now on) on the model of individual constants in logic. Millianism, aka Referentialism, says that a name stands for whatever it names and semantically does nothing else. What could be simpler than that? The names in (1) and (2) seem to illustrate this:

- (1) Nikola Tesla was a brilliant electrical engineer.
- (2) Salem has always been free of witches.

Yet like common nouns, names can also be quantified and modified:

- (3) Many Nikolas live in Croatia.
- (4) There are more than a dozen Salems in the United States.
- (5) An electric car company is named after the brilliant engineer Tesla.
- (6) The only Salem that is a state capital is the one in Oregon.

These examples might suggest that the names 'Nikola' and 'Salem' are ambiguous, meaning one thing when used to refer, as in their bare, unmodified singular occurrences, and meaning something else when used as count nouns. But simply to claim that proper names have two meanings, depending on whether they occur by themselves or as parts of larger phrases, leaves unexplained *why* they have these two uses. Surely it is not a massive linguistic coincidence. Besides, this view fails to explain why, for example, since Teddy Roosevelt and Franklin Roosevelt were both U.S. presidents, it follows that two Roosevelts were U.S. presidents. So, could proper names each have only one meaning

instead of two, and could there be a unified account of their referential and predicative uses? The Predicate View offers just such an account.

The Predicate View has never been popular, though versions of it have been around for a long time. It was first formulated in passing, though not endorsed, by Russell (1919: 174), first endorsed by Kneale (1962), and first developed by Burge (1973). Referentialism has long been popular, thanks to Kripke (1980), and despite the problems that have dogged it ever since they were pointed out by Frege and by Russell.<sup>1</sup> Frege's and Russell's own theories, two very different versions of so-called Descriptivism, have also been highly influential, despite difficulties exposed by Kripke and others. The Predicate View aims to avoid the problems and difficulties with these other, more popular views.

Calling it the Predicate View may be a bit misleading, since it does not say that names are always *used* to predicate. Indeed, they are generally used to refer. The idea, rather, is that whichever way they are used, names are fundamentally no different in kind from common nouns.<sup>2</sup> Just as the noun 'aardvark' picks out those individuals that have a certain property, so the name 'Aaron' picks out those individuals that have a certain other property. One is the property of being an aardvark, the other the property of being an Aaron, that is, of bearing the name 'Aaron'. Of course, there is an obvious difference between being of a certain animal kind and being of a certain nominal kind and an equally obvious difference between semantically expressing a property of an ordinary sort and semantically expressing a property involving the very term that expresses it, the property something has because of what its name is. This may sound fishy and look circular, but that's what the Predicate View says. Is that a problem for this view? Or is it a virtue, just what we should expect in light of the fact that all Aarons have in common the property of bearing the name 'Aaron'?

To find out, we need to appreciate what has motivated a few philosophers and linguists to adopt the Predicate View, understand what it says and what it does not say, identify its principal virtues, and consider how it can best reply to various objections that have been leveled against it. The most glaring objection alleges that it cannot do justice to the fact that proper names are primarily used to refer, but there are others. These objections, and possible replies to them, will be presented in the last three sections.

## 2. Motivating the Predicate View

Frege's and Russell's descriptivist accounts of names avoid the problems faced by Referentialism, but have some of their own. Frege attributed two levels of meaning to names, not only references but reference-determining senses, whereas Russell, content with one level, denied that names refer (or 'directly designate'). He held that ordinary names, as opposed to 'logically proper names', are really 'abbreviated' or 'disguised' definite descriptions and merely denote. But it seems arbitrary to suppose, as Frege suggested, that the sense of 'Aristotle' is *the teacher of Alexander* or, as Russell suggested, that 'Scott' abbreviates 'the author of *Waverley*'. Why *those* descriptions or, for that matter, any other particular descriptions?<sup>3</sup> Moreover, there is no contradiction in supposing that Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Alexander or Scott the author of *Waverley*.<sup>4</sup> Not only that, since it is highly unlikely that everyone who competently uses a particular name associates the same descriptive content with it, the name would, rather surprisingly, mean different things to different people. Finally, since a single name can have multiple bearers, some even in the hundreds or thousands, it would have to be supposed that different substantive descriptive contents comprise different meanings of the name like 'James Jones', one for each person with that name, and positing such rampant ambiguity can easily seem problematic. Perhaps none of these problems is insuperable for descriptivism, but they do not even arise for the Predicate View.

Bach's (1981) Nominal Description Theory, Geurts's (1997) Quotation Theory, and Katz's (2001) Metalinguistic Descriptivism are different versions of a descriptivist approach that anticipated the Predicate View. Unlike Frege's and Russell's theories, they do not saddle names with substantive descriptive contents, but claim instead that key to the meaning of a name, any name, is the property of bearing that very name. Put in its simplest form, the idea is that the name 'Scott', for example, is semantically equivalent to the definite description 'the bearer of "Scott"'.<sup>5</sup> Of course, this description is incomplete (not uniquely satisfied), since there are many Scotts, and an adequate formulation must take that into account, as indeed the Predicate View does.

Labels like 'Metalinguistic Descriptivism' and 'Quotation Theory' are misleading. They suggest that a name is a disguised description, literally abbreviating a description that quotes the name, as opposed to merely expressing the property of bearing the name. Even so, in claiming that a name is semantically equivalent to a definite description, a phrase that includes a determiner (the definite article), this view can apply only to bare, unmodified singular occurrences of names, as in (1) and (2) above, and not to those in (3)–(6). In these latter occurrences, the phrases in which the name occurs already include a determiner (an article or a quantifier).<sup>6</sup> The Predicate View avoids this problem.

According to the Predicate View, a name semantically expresses a property, that of bearing the name. At least that's one way of putting it. Other ways invoke the property of being named or of being called a certain name. Here is how Burge first put the idea: 'A proper name is (literally) true of an object just in case that object is given the name in an appropriate way' (1973: 430). He left open just what counts as an 'appropriate way',<sup>7</sup> a good idea since there are different ways of acquiring a name. Indeed, sometimes a person, without actually being given a name, acquires a name just by virtue of being called by that name until that name 'sticks'. Also, sometimes a person gets called by a name that isn't theirs. So it seems preferable for the Predicate View to invoke the property of bearing a name (however that comes about) rather than that of being given a name or of being called by a name. This comports with the metasemantic fact that someone can acquire a name without actually being given it, such as by marriage rather than baptism, while excluding the case of being called a name one doesn't have. Finally, notice that unlike 'is named' and 'is called', the verb 'bear' has a convenient noun form, 'bearer'.

The Predicate View is quite plausible regarding plural and modified singular occurrences of names, as in sentences (3)–(6). In contrast, it seems not to work for unmodified proper names in the singular, as in (1) and (2), where 'Nikola Tesla' and 'Salem' seem simply to refer (just as Referentialism says). However, there are two main reasons for thinking that things are not so simple. First, names are frequently shared, as the many Salems illustrate, and there is nothing intrinsic to the name 'Salem' in (2) that connects it solely to the Salem in Massachusetts, the one that a speaker would likely be talking about, rather than, say, the one in Oregon. Such considerations led Burge to suppose that names like 'Salem' are not 'semantically simple' and, in their bare, singular occurrences, 'involve a demonstrative element' (1973: 432).<sup>8</sup> Contrary to what some commentators have supposed, it is doubtful that he meant a covert demonstrative meaning the same as 'this' or 'that'. That view is implausible considering that in many other languages, names are introduced by overt definite articles, counterparts of 'the' in English.<sup>9</sup> This suggests not only that in those languages proper names are like count nouns, but also that in English (and languages like English in this respect) unmodified singular names are introduced by a covert definite article. If so, they are not as bare as they look or sound: They are count nouns in these contexts, just as they are when modified or pluralized.

Simply put, then, the Predicate View says that a name 'N' is semantically equivalent to a phrase of the form 'bearer of "N"'. For example, 'David' is semantically equivalent to 'bearer

of “David”’. This does not imply that they are pragmatically equivalent, and indeed, they are not. Although both semantically express the property of bearing ‘David’, only the phrase makes this explicit by actually quoting the name. That makes a big pragmatic difference with unmodified occurrences in argument position, as illustrated here:

- (7) David is a friend of mine.  
 (8) Three of my best friends are Davids.

The equivalence claimed by the Predicate View is evident in (8) but not in (7), where having the property of bearing the name ‘David’ is incidental to what a speaker would likely mean. This equivalence is prominent, however, with the occurrence of ‘Cassius Clay’ in (9).

- (9) Muhammad Ali used to be Cassius Clay.

A speaker would be using ‘Muhammad Ali’ but not ‘Cassius Clay’ to refer and would mean that Ali used to have the name ‘Cassius Clay’.

### 3. *Three Linguistic Observations*

The Predicate View comports nicely with three noteworthy linguistic observations, two pertaining to names and definite articles and one pertaining to certain neglected uses of names.

Sloat (1969) compared minimal pairs of English sentences differing only in the occurrence of a common count noun in one member of each pair and a proper name in the other. He observed that both can be modified, with adjectives preceding them and with relative clauses or prepositional phrases following them, and that they can be introduced by various sorts of determiners, including numerical (‘three’ and ‘only two’) and non-numerical (‘some’, ‘many’, and ‘most’) quantifiers, as well as the indefinite article. He noticed that the only difference arises with the definite article. It seems that a name cannot be introduced by ‘the’ just in case it is unmodified and in the singular, whereas an unmodified singular count noun cannot occur without a determiner. ‘The Bill’ and ‘bill’ (by itself) are bad, whereas ‘Bill’ and ‘the bill’ are fine. Fara (2015a), in the course of defending the Predicate View, discusses Sloat’s data and other data and proposes that an unmodified name in the singular cannot occur as a syntactic sister of the overt definite article unless the definite article is stressed.<sup>10</sup> Fara’s generalization may have some exceptions, such as names of newspapers, hotels, boats, and rivers, but it seems to cover a very wide range of cases. In any event, Sloat’s data show that names are not as different from common nouns as Referentialism suggests.

Whatever the correct generalization for the interaction of the definite article and proper names in English, it doesn’t apply to the many languages that lack definite articles. And among those that do have definite articles, many allow and some even require them before unmodified names in the singular.<sup>11</sup> Even without getting into detailed cross-linguistic comparisons, the predicativist can argue that these data support the claim that proper names behave much more like common nouns than Referentialism predicts. Referentialists tend to ignore or at least marginalize plural and modified occurrences of names, as if these need no explanation, and they overlook the fact that in some languages, unmodified names in the singular often occur with overt definite articles.

Our earlier examples of non-referring uses of names involve quantification and/or modification. Interestingly, even bare names have non-referring uses, notably their identificatory and introductory uses, largely overlooked in the literature.<sup>12</sup> When used in either of these ways, a name is used not to refer to someone (or something) but to impute or at least call attention to the property of bearing the name. If you identify someone by saying, ‘That’s George Clinton’, you are not saying that he is identical to himself. Rather, you are saying, though

not quite spelling it out, that his name is 'George Clinton'. A friend of his would be doing likewise if she introduced him to you by saying, 'This is George Clinton'. The only reference to (this) George Clinton in these cases is with 'that' or 'this', not with the name.

#### 4. Some Virtues of the Predicate View

In addition to being supported by the preceding linguistic observations, the Predicate View has a number of other things going for it. As mentioned earlier, it avoids the well-known problems faced by Referentialism, and unlike both Fregean and Russellian versions of Descriptivism, it does not impute substantive descriptive contents to proper names. It offers a unified account of their meanings whether used referentially or predicatively. And, although it is not the only view that aims to connect referring and predicative uses, it does so most directly.<sup>13</sup> It has several other virtuous features as well, although as we will see later, it may also have some shortcomings.

The most obvious virtue of the Predicate View is that it comports nicely with the familiar fact that proper names, such as 'Salem' and 'John Roberts', can be shared, often by a great many individuals. It can directly acknowledge this fact rather than claim, as some philosophers have, that a name like 'John Roberts' is massively ambiguous (in as many ways as it has bearers), that each John Roberts has a distinct name (spelled and pronounced the same), or that 'John Roberts' is really a capitalized indexical or variable.<sup>14</sup> Ambiguity may not be anathema, and the other two options may not be as *ad hoc* as they seem, but everything else equal, it would be desirable to avoid such complications. The Predicate View does that, thereby embracing the fact that a name encodes minimal information. If you hear the unmodified name 'John Roberts', for example, the name provides you only with the limited information, assuming it is being used to refer, that the intended referent bears that name. It's up to you (with help from the speaker if necessary) to connect the speaker's use of that name to a particular bearer of the name, a particular John Roberts, such as the U.S. Chief Justice or my brother-in-law.

Another nice feature of the Predicate View flows from the fact that it is a generic claim about proper names, applying to them as a class.<sup>15</sup> What a name semantically expresses, regardless of what it is the name of, is the property of bearing that very name. You know this about a name even if it is unfamiliar. You don't have to learn anything new when you encounter a name for the first time in order to grasp its meaning (assuming you recognize it as a name), and you don't have to learn anything new about the meaning of a familiar name when you are introduced to an unfamiliar bearer of it. Now, you will need to learn other things in order to figure out who or what the name is being used to refer to, but there is more to understanding a referring use of a name than grasping its meaning, just as there is with incomplete definite descriptions. These are descriptions, like 'the girl' and 'the table', that are not uniquely satisfied, despite what the presence of the definite article suggests, and yet are routinely used to refer to particular persons or things.

As a generic claim, the Predicate View comports nicely with the observation that proper names generally do not belong to particular languages.<sup>16</sup> Take the name 'John', for example, and its counterparts 'Juan', 'João', 'Johann', 'Jean', 'János', 'Giovanni', and 'Γιάννης'. Despite their distinctive pronunciations and spellings, each of them can be used without anomaly (or italics) outside its home language. They don't need to be translated ('Γιάννης' does need to be *transliterated*, into 'Giannis'). For example, if you wish to speak in English about your Spanish friend 'Juan', you do not switch to 'John'. That is not his name, not even in English. And if you say, 'Juan is my friend', you are not speaking partly in Spanish. As the Predicate View has it, 'Juan' expresses the same property whether it occurs in an English or a Spanish sentence, that of bearing 'Juan'. This suggests that proper names are not lexical items in particular

languages. They do have pronunciations and spellings characteristic of particular languages, and they have counterparts with pronunciations and spellings characteristic of other languages, but these counterparts are not *translations* of one another. Dictionaries are not incomplete for not including them, and your vocabulary is not deficient because of all the proper names (and all their bearers) you don't know.

Finally, there is an interesting fact about the property of bearing a name that may help explain the referentialist intuition that a name is just a tag. This is the fact that different bearers of the same name have nothing substantial in common, nothing beyond the metalinguistic property of bearing the name. That's a very superficial property, one that is generally not of interest when one talks about someone who has that property and generally not a reason for singling out someone who has it. Consider, for example, the fact that each Aaron bears the name 'Aaron' by standing individually in a certain relation to that name. The situation is different with aardvarks and the common noun 'aardvark'. This noun is associated with the kind, not with particular aardvarks. If you're of the right kind you're an aardvark, even if aardvarks were called something else instead. It is true also that if you're of the right kind, you're an Aaron, but not regardless of what Aarons are called. If Aaron Burr, for example, had been given a different name, he would not have been an Aaron.

### 5. *Two Minor Objections to the Predicate View*

The Predicate View is subject to various objections. We will take up the main ones, of two very different kinds, in the next two sections, but start with two minor ones here, since responding to them will clarify what the Predicate View does and does not say.<sup>17</sup>

One objection is that the Predicate View needs to provide an account of what it is, or of what it takes, for something to bear a certain name. To be sure, the same question (whatever its answer) arises for any account of names, but it may seem incumbent upon the Predicate View to answer this question because the property of bearing a name is central to what it says about the meaning of a name. This is an interesting question all right, because of the variety of ways, formal and informal, in which names (including nicknames) can be acquired, but it is not incumbent upon a proponent of the Predicate View to give an analysis of what it is to bear a name. Demanding that would be like insisting that a defender of the causal theory of action produce an analysis of the causal relation or that a proponent of the claim that remembering that *p* entails knowing that *p* provide an account of what it is to know that *p*. Giving such an account would of course be desirable from a broader philosophical standpoint, but it is not obvious that a defense of the view in question, in this case the Predicate View, requires that. After all, we are capable of recognizing instances of the name-bearing relation without the help of an analysis of that relation.

Another objection derives from Kripke's criticism of an argument of Kneale's (1962). Kneale noted that his view, a precursor of the Predicate View, explains why it is trifling to be told that Socrates is called 'Socrates'. Kripke objects that this is no more or less trifling than the fact that horses are called 'horses' (1980: 69). However, there is a relevant difference, at least from a predicativist perspective: whereas Socrates is called 'Socrates' because he has the property of bearing the name 'Socrates' (a property he acquired by being so named), horses are called 'horses' because they each have the property of being a horse. It is quite another matter that this property is expressed by the word 'horse'. Kripke insists that to avoid circularity a theory of proper names must not employ a 'notion of reference in a way that is ultimately impossible to eliminate' (68). He objects that if 'we ask to whom does [a speaker] refer by "Socrates," ... the answer is given as, well, he refers to the man to whom he refers' (70). In fact, however, bearing a name is not the same property as being referred to by that name or by a speaker using it.

The Predicate View is not a theory of reference. Indeed, it denies that names semantically refer at all.<sup>18</sup> Even so, it needs to be accompanied by a compatible account of how names can be, and generally are, used to refer.

### 6. Explaining Referentiality and Rigidity

The main stumbling block for the Predicate View is that proper names seem to be referring terms *par excellence* and to be rigid designators as well (Kripke 1980). So, if they semantically express name-bearing properties, then why, at least in their unmodified singular occurrences in argument position, do those properties not enter into what speakers typically mean when using them?<sup>19</sup> The Predicate View needs to include an account of how and why unmodified singular names are generally used to refer, rather than to impute name-bearing properties, and why they seem to be rigid designators. Such an account must address what a speaker does in using name to refer. Without denying that a name expresses the property of bearing the name, it needs to deny that part of what the speaker is doing is ascribing that property to what he is referring to, rather than merely presupposing that the referent has that property. In this way, as we will see, such an account would be analogous to a common pragmatic approach to referential uses of definite descriptions.

There are two ways a predicativist can go here, one partly semantic and one purely pragmatic. On both approaches, a singular unmodified name 'N' in argument position is taken to be semantically equivalent to a definite description of the form 'the bearer of "N"', whether or not complete. The two approaches agree that incomplete definite descriptions are generally used to refer, but they disagree on whether this needs to be explained in part by a special element of semantic structure. On the first approach, associated with the description is some sort of index or restrictor, whose value fixes the semantic value of the description on one particular satisfier.<sup>20</sup> Whatever this involves exactly, the idea is that unmodified singular occurrences of names in argument position are referential via the same mechanism that operates with incomplete definite descriptions. This approach is partly semantic, since it imputes extra semantic structure to account for referentiality, and is pragmatic only insofar as particular semantic values (referents) are determined in context, presumably by speakers' referential intentions.

The second approach is wholly pragmatic.<sup>21</sup> Rather than impute extra semantic structure either to names or to incomplete definite descriptions, it heeds Russell's observation that 'when a name is used directly, merely to indicate what we are speaking about; [the name] is no part of the fact asserted ...: it is merely part of the symbolism by which we express our thought' (1919: 175). Donnellan echoed Russell when he observed that with a referential use of a definite description, a speaker uses it 'to enable his audience to pick out whom or what he is talking about and states something about that person or thing' (1966: 285). Whatever properties are semantically expressed, name-bearing or otherwise, these do not figure in what the speaker means in using a name or a description to refer. The speaker is interested in conveying something about a certain individual, and the act of uttering the name or the description is merely a cue for the listener to suppose that the speaker is referring to a certain individual and a clue as to which individual that is. As Donnellan put it, 'we are concerned with the thing itself and not just the thing under a certain description' (1966: 303), or as bearing a certain name.

For example, if you say, 'Aristotle was the greatest philosopher of antiquity', you are not suggesting that bearing the name 'Aristotle' had any connection to being a great philosopher. Rather, you intend the property of bearing that name merely to help your listener identify who you are talking about.

Kripke (1980) held that names are rigid designators, that in a given use a name designates the same individual with respect to counterfactual situations. In contrast, a definite description that

one might suppose is semantically equivalent to a bare, unmodified name could be true of different individuals in different counterfactual situations. So, for example, if we use 'Aristotle' to refer to the last great ancient philosopher, it is not possible that Aristotle, the man we are actually referring to, could have been someone else. However, the name 'Aristotle' could not be semantically equivalent to a description like 'the last great ancient philosopher', since the last great ancient philosopher could have been someone other than Aristotle. According to Kripke, using examples like this, 'We have a direct intuition of rigidity, exhibited in our understanding of the truth conditions of particular sentences. In addition, various secondary phenomena, about "what we would say," ... give indirect evidence of rigidity.' (1980: 14). We would say that Aristotle might not have borne the name 'Aristotle', but we would not say that he might not have been Aristotle. Obviously, there is a big difference between possibly having been someone else and possibly having had a different name. Nothing could have been distinct from itself, but anything with a name could have had a different name. Thus, the Predicate View needs to reckon with the intuition of rigidity.

How do the two approaches to referring uses of names explain the appearance of rigidity? On the semi-semantic approach, it follows immediately that when a name is used to refer, it is rigid *as so used*. But that is with its index or restrictor assigned a particular value. Once its reference (that is, the reference of it combined with its associated index or restrictor) is fixed in context on a certain individual, any reference to a different individual in a counterfactual situation would count as a different use.

On the purely pragmatic approach, the impression of rigidity results from mistaking a fact about the use of a name with a fact about the name itself. The intuitions Kripke invokes are responsive not to the truth conditions of sentences containing the name but to the truth conditions of what speakers would mean in uttering such sentences. Of course, it is not true that *Aristotle*, i.e. the ancient philosopher one uses the name 'Aristotle' to refer to, might not have been Aristotle, i.e. that person. Obviously, *he* could not have been somebody else. However, it begs the question against the Predicate View to assume that the sentence 'Aristotle might not have been Aristotle' semantically expresses that proposition. From the standpoint of the pragmatic approach, this proposition is not the one that a speaker uttering that sentence would likely be asserting, unless he were using the name 'Aristotle' in both of its occurrences to refer and not ascribing the property of bearing that name. A more likely use of the name, in its second occurrence, is to express the property of bearing the name 'Aristotle'. Then the speaker would be asserting that Aristotle might not have had that property, say on the grounds that if Aristotle's parents had named him 'Aristocrates' instead, Aristotle would have been Aristocrates (Bach 2002: 81). On the Predicate View, the rigidity intuition concerns only the referring use of a name. That's the case in which the name-bearing property semantically expressed by the name does not enter into what the speaker means in using it.

Like incomplete definite descriptions, proper names with multiple bearers are typically used to refer to particular individuals.<sup>22</sup> In both cases, there is an implication of uniqueness but not enough information in the words to ensure it.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, there is likely to be no one distinctively salient way to supplement that information enough to single out anything uniquely. So if such a description or such a name can be used felicitously anyway, that must be because there is some salient, relevant, or otherwise distinctive individual the speaker is referring to that presumably fits the description or possesses the name. Suppose you are discussing London with someone, and you were to say either 'The mayor is flamboyant' or 'Johnson is flamboyant'. Either way, if you expect to be understood, you would have to be talking about a particular person, in this case the mayor of London, Boris Johnson. Neither 'the mayor' nor 'Johnson' encodes enough information to single out any one person, but the conversational situation can enable you to convey which mayor or which Johnson you have in mind without having to spell out who.<sup>24</sup>

### 7. *Are Extended Uses of Proper Names Literal?*

One seemingly strong point against the Predicate View is that there are many cases of names used to ascribe a more substantive property than the property of bearing a certain name. For example, a Rembrandt is an artwork by Rembrandt. Indeed, it does not even bear the name 'Rembrandt' (bearing his signature, a token of his name, doesn't count). Many Rembrandts do have names, but their name is not 'Rembrandt'. This supports Fara's (2015b) claim that in this use, 'Rembrandt' is a proper *noun* but not a proper *name*. The same goes for the analogous use of the name 'Tesla', as applied to individual cars. A Tesla car may have the name 'Tesla' emblazoned on it, but 'Tesla' is the name of its brand, not its name (its owner could give it a name, but cars, unlike boats and horses, generally don't have names).<sup>25</sup>

Now compare likely utterances of the (a) and (b) sentences in these examples:

- (10) a. Levis were invented by a Strauss.  
       b. The Blue Danube was written by a Strauss.
- (11) a. Many Brueghels were great artists.  
       b. Many Brueghels hang in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna.
- (12) a. Lincoln is still much admired.  
       b. Lincoln is on every penny.

In using 'a Strauss' in (10a), a speaker is likely to mean a person with that name but in (10b) to mean a member of the renowned Strauss family of composers. In using 'Brueghels' in (11a), a speaker might mean people with that name or perhaps members of a certain extended family. In contrast, in using 'Brueghels' in (11b), a speaker is likely to mean paintings by Pieter Brueghel the Elder (never mind that he generally signed his name without the 'h'). A speaker uttering (12a) would likely be using 'Lincoln' to talk about its most famous bearer, but in (12b) a speaker presumably would mean an image of him.<sup>26</sup>

Jeshion (2015a, 2015b) argues that examples like these (and several other kinds) pose a serious challenge to the Predicate View. If names semantically express name-bearing properties, then the Predicate View has to explain how names can be used as if they expressed other properties. Insofar as its main motivation is to give a unified account of predicative and referential uses of names, according to which both involve expressing name-bearing properties, the Predicate View has to claim that uses like those in the above examples are not literal (or else that names are multiply ambiguous with respect to these different uses). After all, properties like belonging to a certain family, being painted by a certain person, and being a representation of someone are not name-bearing properties. Although Jeshion does not claim that such examples refute the Predicate View, she does argue that the predicativist is not entitled simply to assert that these uses are not literal just because they do not express name-bearing properties. Perhaps names used to attribute name-bearing properties are not literal either (as a referentialist might insist), or perhaps all these uses are literal.

Jeshion has a point. To justify classifying these extended uses as not literal on the grounds that they do not ascribe name-bearing properties, we can't just assume the truth of the Predicate View. The predicativist needs to show that extended uses are derivative, somehow parasitic on the name-bearing use claimed to be basic. Here it is perhaps relevant to point out that these uses are confined to names of limited sorts. For example, whereas the names of painters, sculptors, and architects can be used as capitalized count nouns for paintings, sculptures, and structures, the analogous situation does not hold for composers and compositions or for novelists and novels. There seem to be special practices involved in these cases, specific not to particular

names but to categories of things that they are (in some uses) names for. This point would seem to apply to other extended uses of names.<sup>27</sup> In each case, the property in question involves some relation to some uniquely prominent bearer of the name, be it an individual or a collective entity.<sup>28</sup>

For example, in the Rembrandt case, the speaker is exploiting the practice of using the name of an artist to identify ('That Rembrandt ...') or describe ('That is a Rembrandt') a work by that artist. Should we think of this use as involving a distinct conventional meaning, transforming the proper name 'Rembrandt' into a homonymous proper count noun? If so, then in that use 'Rembrandt' semantically expresses the property of being a work by that artist. Or should we think of it, rather, as an extended use of the name 'Rembrandt', with some of what the speaker means left implicit? On that view, the name 'Rembrandt' does not acquire a distinct meaning, just a distinct use. It does not mean work by Rembrandt but the speaker means that in using it.

Whether or not the Predicate View is correct – Fara's 'Names are Predicates' (2015a) makes the strongest case to date for it – it does justice, ironically enough, to the original Millian's observation that 'when we predicate of anything its proper name' (here, he gives some examples), 'we do not, in so doing, convey to the hearer any information about them, except that those are their names' (Mill 1872: 22).<sup>29</sup>

### *Short Biography*

Kent Bach, professor emeritus of philosophy at San Francisco State University, was educated at Harvard College and University of California, Berkeley, USA. He has written extensively on the subjects of philosophy of language, theory of knowledge, and philosophy of mind. His books include *Thought and Reference* (Oxford, 1987, expanded edition 1994) and, with Robert M. Harnish, *Linguistic Communication and Speech Acts* (MIT Press, 1979).

### *Notes*

\* Correspondence: San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Ave, San Francisco, CA 94132, USA. Email: kbach@sfsu.edu.

<sup>1</sup> Frege and Russell famously argued that Referentialism, the thesis that the meaning of a proper name is simply its referent, is vulnerable to several difficult problems, including the problems of vacuous names, true negative existential statements, informative identity statements, cognitive significance, and substitution in attitude contexts. For example, if Bigfoot does not exist, then there is nothing for 'Bigfoot' to refer to. So how, on the (referentialist) view that identifies the meaning of a name with its referent, can 'Bigfoot' be meaningful and, for that matter, differ in meaning from 'Atlantis'? And how can 'Bigfoot does not exist' manage to express a proposition, much less a true one, if 'Bigfoot' does not refer? Similarly, given that on Referentialism 'Reggie Dwight' and 'Elton John' have the same meaning/reference, how could 'Elton John is Reggie Dwight' be not only true but informative, and how could 'Reggie Dwight wears glasses' differ in cognitive value from 'Elton John wears glasses'? Finally, it seems that one could believe that Elton John wears glasses without believing that Reggie Dwight wears glasses. For fuller discussion of these problems, as well as of attempts by Millians to get around them, see any philosophy of language textbook or reference article on proper names, such as Cumming 2013.

<sup>2</sup> Generally, they are like count nouns, but some brand names, such as 'Coca Cola', 'Teflon', and 'Silly Putty', being names of substances, are mass nouns, like 'wine', 'paint', and 'clay'.

<sup>3</sup> To avoid having to answer that question, Searle (1958) once held that a proper name abbreviates a definite description specifying a weighted disjunction of conjunctions of properties associated with the item named. This, the so-called 'cluster theory', has serious difficulties of its own.

<sup>4</sup> The same could be said for bearing the name 'Aristotle' and that might seem to be a problem for the Predicate View. But see Section 6.

<sup>5</sup> This was Bach's formulation (1981, 1987/1994: ch. 7), dubbed the 'Nominal Description Theory' both because the description it says a name is semantically equivalent to mentions that very name and because this description is not substantive.

- <sup>6</sup> There are other natural objections to Metalinguistic Descriptivism, but since they can be directed at the Predicate View as well, we will take them up later.
- <sup>7</sup> Notice that Burge prefers the notion of being true of to that of expressing a property. So does Fara (2015a), but as she points out, since the Predicate View categorizes names as count nouns (but see note 2 above), its advocates can assume that whatever is the best way of characterizing the general semantic character of count nouns will apply to names as well.
- <sup>8</sup> Elugardo (2002) has carefully reconstructed and defended Burge's main argument for the Predicate View.
- <sup>9</sup> Sawyer (2010) has recently defended 'That'-Predicativism, as Fara (2015a) calls it in contrast with 'The'-Predicativism. From now on, 'the Predicate View' will be used just for the latter, since 'That'-Predicativism seems to be undermined by cross-linguistic data involving languages in which determiners can introduce unmodified names, and these determiners are definites, not demonstratives.
- <sup>10</sup> Fara uses the syntactic term 'sister' to cover post- as well as pre-modifiers. The presence of a modifier of either sort would make the name part of a larger syntactic unit available to complement the determiner that heads the entire phrase. Also, the sister requirement exempts appositives, such as nonrestrictive relative clauses, since a phrase like 'George Clooney, who is no longer a bachelor' is bad if introduced by 'the'.
- <sup>11</sup> Some languages also lack indefinite articles. For in-depth discussion of cross-linguistic data and syntactic issues arising in connection with names and definite articles in different languages, see Longobardi (1994) and Matushansky (2006, 2008).
- <sup>12</sup> Also neglected are vocative uses (but see Hawthorne and Manley (2012: 228ff), who in fact suggest that they pose a problem for the Predicate View). Though bare and unmodified, at least some vocative uses are arguably not referential. For example, it seems that a speaker who calls out, 'Hey George', is not referring to George but trying to get his attention.
- <sup>13</sup> Two critics of the Predicate View, Leckie (2013) and Rami (2014), have suggested ways to connect referential and predicative uses without assimilating them, but their proposals remain to be developed. Leckie calls hers the Polysemy View, claiming that the meanings of names in their predicative uses, owing to a special lexical rule, are connected to but distinct from their core referential meanings. She does not take up extended uses of names, such as those discussed in Section 7 below, but perhaps the Polysemy View could be extended to account for them as well.
- <sup>14</sup> Kaplan (1990) endorses the second option, developing Kripke's suggestion that 'uses of phonetically the same sounds to name distinct objects count as distinct names', at least 'for theoretical purposes' (1980: 8). Pursuing those purposes might require assigning different subscripts to homonymous names, one for each bearer, but this would not help ordinary language users, since the only way for them to ascertain which 'William' (e.g.) another speaker is using is to identify which William is being referred to. As for construing proper names as indexicals or variables, perhaps the most developed approach is Cumming's (2008).
- <sup>15</sup> To be sure, there are special practices for naming boys, girls, pets, horses, boats, buildings, companies, and products, but these concern what sorts of names are given to what sorts of things. This bears on the kind of name something could have but not on what it is to have that name.
- <sup>16</sup> Names for prominent geographical places seem to be an exception. In English, we say 'Cologne', not 'Köln', and 'Florence', not 'Firenze'. Titles of works also get translated.
- <sup>17</sup> Some more specialized and subtle objections, including several due to King (2006), are rebutted by Sawyer (2010).
- <sup>18</sup> Gray (2014) is unsatisfied with this sort of response. He finds Kripke's objection forceful enough to propose a version of the Predicate View designed to make virtuous what he thinks would otherwise be a vicious circle.
- <sup>19</sup> To say that names semantically express name-bearing properties is just a convenient way of saying that each name expresses the property of bearing that name.
- <sup>20</sup> Burge (1973), Larson and Segal (1995: 353–5), Elbourne (2005: 172–3), Hawthorne and Manley (2012: 219–242), and Fara (2015a) propose different versions of this approach. Larson and Segal's, slightly modified by Elbourne, is similar to Burge's except that it opts for a covert definite article rather than demonstrative. Hawthorne and Manley, not that they endorse the Predicate View (2012: 233–5), posit a covert 'singular restrictor'. Fara considers different options for incomplete definite descriptions in general and presumes that whichever one works best for them will work for names as well.
- <sup>21</sup> The pragmatic approach parallels pragmatic treatments of referential uses of definite descriptions, notably Kripke's (1977). Surprisingly, however, Kripke was not confident that his approach could be extended to *incomplete* definite descriptions, even though his notion of speaker's reference would seem to be especially suited to apply to their referential use, and he found it 'somewhat tempting to assimilate them to the corresponding demonstratives' (1977: 271).
- <sup>22</sup> Some incomplete definite descriptions, such as 'the doctor' (as in 'go to the doctor') and 'the radio' (as in 'listen to the radio'), have nonspecific uses, and some, such as 'the dodo' and 'the typewriter', have generic uses.
- <sup>23</sup> In different ways Geurts (1997) and Rothschild (2007) both treat this implication as a kind of presupposition. Where names are concerned, Bach calls such a presupposition a 'proprietary pretense' (2002: 88ff.). One pretends, at least within the confines of the conversation, that the individual one is talking about is the sole bearer of the name. Hawthorne and

Manley have argued that it is a problem for the Predicative View if in referring uses the property of bearing the name is not attributed but presupposed (2012: 223–5).

<sup>24</sup> There are exceptional cases, in which the property expressed by a description or the property of bearing the name becomes part of what the speaker means. Rothschild (2007) explains the difference between these and normal referring cases with the help of a distinction between ‘role-type’ and ‘particularized’ descriptions, and extends this distinction to names. Fara (2015a) employs his distinction to explain why only some (fairly rare) uses of names, in analogy with role-type uses of descriptions, ascribe name-bearing properties, whereas most uses, like particularized uses of descriptions, are referring and do not ascribe such properties. To be sure, in using a name to refer a speaker normally *presupposes* that the referent bears the name.

<sup>25</sup> ‘Tesla’ is also its manufacturer’s name, but some brand names are not manufacturers’ names. For example, the toothpaste Crest is made by Procter & Gamble.

<sup>26</sup> This is assuming metonymy is involved here. One could argue that (12b) is literally true, perhaps on the grounds that ‘on’ means depicted on. However, there is obviously a sense of ‘on’ in which the man Lincoln is *not* on any penny, and an image of him *is* on every penny. Consider here Magritte’s painting ‘The Treachery of Images,’ with its famous inscription, ‘Ceci n’est pas une pipe’. To be sure, it is a painting of a pipe, but a pipe is not on the painting. Anyway, there is no one sense of ‘on’ in which both Lincoln and an image of him are on pennies.

<sup>27</sup> One such case involves dynasty names, such as ‘Romanov’. Boër (1975) used that as a counterexample to Burge’s (1973) original predicativist account, and it is prominent in the debate between Jeshion and Fara.

<sup>28</sup> In response to Jeshion (2015a), Fara (2015b) develops a proposal along these lines.

<sup>29</sup> Many thanks to an anonymous referee for spotting a number of places in need of correction, qualification, or clarification.

### Works Cited

- Bach, Kent. ‘What’s in a Name,’ *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 59 (1981): 371–386.
- . *Thought and Reference*, pbk. ed., revised with postscript, Oxford: Oxford University Press 1987/1994.
- . ‘Giorgione was So-Called Because of his Name.’ *Philosophical Perspectives* 16 (2002): 73–103.
- Boër, Steven. ‘Proper Names as Predicates.’ *Philosophical Studies* 27 (1975): 389–400.
- Burge, Tyler. ‘Reference and Proper Names.’ *Journal of Philosophy* 70 (1973): 425–439.
- Cumming, Sam. ‘Variabilism.’ *Philosophical Review* 117 (2008): 525–554.
- . ‘Names.’ in E. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2013 Edition), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2013/entries/names/>> (2013).
- Donnellan, Keith. ‘Reference and Definite Descriptions.’ *Philosophical Review* 75 (1966): 281–304.
- Elbourne, Paul. *Situations and Individuals*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005.
- Elugardo, Reinaldo. ‘The Predicate View of Proper Names.’ in G. Preyer & G. Peter, (eds.), *Logical Form and Language*, Oxford: Oxford University 2002. 467–503.
- Fara, Delia Graff. ‘Names are Predicates.’ *Philosophical Review* 124 (2015a): 59–117.
- . ‘Literal’ Uses of Proper Names.’ in A. Bianchi (ed.), *On Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015b. 251–279.
- Geurts, Bart. ‘Good News About the Description Theory of Names.’ *Journal of Semantics* 14 (1997): 319–348.
- Gray, Aidan. ‘Name-bearing, Reference, and Circularity.’ *Philosophical Studies* 171 (2014): 207–231.
- Hawthorne, John, and David Manley. *The Reference Book*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.
- Jeshion, Robin. ‘Names Not Predicates.’ in A. Bianchi (ed.), *On Reference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, (2015a). 225–250.
- . ‘A Rejoinder to Fara’s ‘Literal’ Uses of Proper Names.’ in A. Bianchi (ed.), *On Reference*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015b. 280–294.
- Kaplan, David. ‘Words.’ *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 64 (1990): 93–119.
- Katz, Jerrold J. ‘The End of Millianism.’ *Journal of Philosophy* 98 (2001): 137–166.
- King, Jeffrey C. ‘Singular Terms, Reference, and Methodology in Semantics.’ *Philosophical Issues* 16 (2006): 141–161.
- Kneale, William. ‘Modality de dicto and de re.’ in E. Nagel, P. Suppes and A. Tarski, (eds.), *Logic, Methodology and Philosophy of Science, Proceedings of the 1960 International Congress*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, (1962): 622–633.
- Kripke, Saul. ‘Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference.’ *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 2 (1977): 255–276.
- . *Naming and Necessity*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.
- Larson, Richard and Gabriel Segal. *Knowledge of Meaning*, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1995.
- Leckie, Gail. ‘The Double Life of Names.’ *Philosophical Studies* 165 (2013): 1139–1160.
- Longobardi, Giuseppe. ‘Reference and Proper Names.’ *Linguistic Inquiry* 25 (1994): 609–665.

- Matushansky, Ora. 'Why Rose is the Rose: On the Use of Definite Articles in Proper Names.' *Empirical Issues in Syntax and Semantics* 6 (2006): 285–307.
- . 'On the Linguistic Complexity of Proper Names.' *Linguistics and Philosophy* 21 (2008): 573–627.
- Mill, John Stuart. *A System of Logic*, Definitive 8th Edition, 1949 Reprint, London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1872.
- Rami, Dolf. 'On the Unification Argument for the Predicate View on Proper Names.' *Synthese* 191 (2014): 115–143.
- Rothschild, Daniel. 'Presuppositions and Scope.' *Journal of Philosophy* 104 (2007): 71–106.
- Russell, Bertrand. *Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1919.
- Sawyer, Sarah. 'The Modified Predicate Theory of Proper Names.' in S. Sawyer (ed.), *New Waves in Philosophy of Language*, Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. 206–225.
- Searle, John R. 'Proper Names.' *Mind* 67 (1958): 166–173.
- Sloat, Clarence. 'Proper Nouns in English.' *Language* 45 (1969): 26–30.