



Book Review

Naming and Identity. By GREGORY BOCHNER. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 2021. Pp. 250. \$110.00 (Hardback). ISBN 13: 978-1108428453.

Featured by the author as part of the output of a wider investigation into key issues in the contemporary philosophy of language and the mind (Bochner 2019–2021), *Naming and Indexicality*, volume 11 in the Key Topics in Semantics and Pragmatics series, fully satisfies the publisher’s promise to bring the reader “accessible yet challenging accounts of the most important issues, concepts and phenomena to consider when examining the semantics and pragmatics of natural languages” (ii). Indeed, the author has made a very thorough treatment of proper names, never losing his sense of direction in the vast and complex literature available; by providing a clear, detailed, and systematic survey of views from Fregean descriptivist theories and the referentialist revolution to our day, the book fills a gap and constitutes an excellent companion to current discussion on the topic. The weighty presence of “indexicality”, anticipated in the title as an equal protagonist alongside “naming”, is explained by the fact that the most promising theories on proper names are identified in the book as being “descriptivist theories of some indexical sort” (4). These theories model the distinction between the descriptive and referential elements of naming on the difference that indexicals typically make between conventional meaning and contextual reference, the latter identifying linguistic expressions whose meaning is dependent on the context in which they are used. Thanks to this wide scope of treatment, *Naming and Indexicality* is also an excellent point of departure for research on linguistic reference at large, setting out, as it does, to answer the broad question, “How do words stand for things?” (1).

Structured in five chapters, Bochner’s adventurous intellectual journey devotes Chapter 1 (which opens with the orthodox view of proper names, namely that their meaning is exhausted by their unique referents, i.e., with John Stuart Mill’s statement that names name things in the world, not ideas in the mind) to a comprehensive treatment of descriptivism, which effectively sketches the main points of the debate between

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Millians and Fregeans in the first few pages, purposely taking Gottlob Frege's Puzzle as a working hypothesis despite its having recently been called into question (6). The puzzle (or co-reference problem) is handled through the famous example of the Babylonians naming a celestial body in the evening sky "The Evening Star" (the Greeks' "Hesperus") and a celestial body in the morning sky "The Morning Star" (the Greeks' "Phosphorus") without realizing that they had named the same planet (that we now know as Venus) twice. Millianism implies that two proper names have the same meaning when they have the same referent. Frege first retained this notion, then rejected it, postulating the existence of a second level of meaning besides reference in the form of what he referred to as sense.

Bochner postpones his defense of the claims following from descriptivist assumptions to a subsequent piece of writing, as these matters go beyond the topic of the book, clearly identified in the title as lying within the realm of linguistic reference. After addressing the epistemic puzzle that also led Bertrand Russell to endorse descriptivism (the no-reference problem, Russell thinking that singular terms describe rather than offer a referent, overcoming the Fregean need for sense), Chapter 1 shows how, under the influence of Rudolf Carnap, the common features in the descriptivist picture inspired by the theories of Frege and Russell later combined in a general theory of names, a particular version of descriptivism which possibly neither Frege nor Russell ever endorsed.

Descriptivism, the dominant reference point throughout the first half of the twentieth century, increasingly came under attack in the 1960s. Chapter 2 shows how the Description Theory of Names would come to be rejected by linguistic referentialists, who launched an authentic revolution, introducing new arguments, notions, and theories in semantics and philosophy. This chapter gives an overview of the classical referentialist theories of Saul Kripke (with its arguments for the *rigidity* of proper names, which revived the ancient doctrine of essentialism, whereby objects necessarily possess certain properties), Hilary Putnam (with its arguments for *semantic externalism*, whereby the meaning of a term is determined by factors external to the speaker), and David Kaplan (with its *direct reference* for indexical expressions, i.e., linguistic expressions whose reference can shift from context to context so that the content of an indexical, with respect to a certain context, is the object to which it refers, not a property that determines the referent), systematizing the arguments against descriptivism into modal, semantic, and epistemic, and providing an overall accessible way into the otherwise too-dense literature of the referentialist revolution. These arguments also serve, in the chapters to follow, as references against which other theories of meaning and reference for proper names are tested. The focus of the chapter is still on proper names due to their historical importance in debates. However, in the revolution against descriptivism, the notions developed in connection with proper names progressively extended to natural kind terms (natural kinds being groupings of entities that share a common essence), indexicals, and demonstratives; their treatment in the chapter provides the occasion for introducing concepts that will re-appear in subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3 focuses on the corollaries of the Rigidity Thesis. Based on the idea that the task of a semantic theory is to explicate *public meaning*, in *Naming and Necessity* Bochner demonstrates how Kripke holds that proper names are *rigid designators*: the meaning of sentences involving proper names is not obtained through the substitution of a contextually appropriate description for the name; proper names designate the same thing in all the possible worlds in which that thing exists. The main epistemic puzzles arising from this thesis, which any theory of singular expressions must address, are reformulated in modern semantic terms, involving modal notions, and a further apparent puzzle is introduced. Kripke challenges the traditional understandings of such philosophical categories, used to characterize the epistemic properties of propositions, as necessary/contingent, a priori/a posteriori, and analytic/synthetic, contending that the three pairs belong to different areas: "necessary" and "contingent", involving the existential status of things; "a priori" and "a posteriori", concerning the way propositions are confirmed or knowledge acquired; "analytic" and "synthetic", pertaining to the meaning of words, hence the overlap among them. Following Paul Boghossian, Bochner argues that co-reference and no-reference puzzles essentially arise from violations of the principles of epistemic Transparency (or a priori knowledge) of content, an argument that also highlights the role that an epistemic thesis of Transparency has implicitly played in contemporary theories of meaning since Frege. Moreover, he emphasizes the connections between epistemic and modal notions (opacity/transparency and intensions, respectively).

Chapter 4 analyses and discusses many of the descriptivist responses to the referentialist revolution, including versions of haecceitic descriptivism, wide-scope conventionalism, actualized and Dthat-descriptivism, the view that names are synonymous with referential uses of descriptions, and causal and metalinguistic descriptivism. All of these responses are refuted on the basis of the modal, semantic, and epistemic arguments devised by Kripke, Putnam, and Kaplan (set out in Chapter 2), and the first important conclusions on the characteristics of proper names are drawn: they are (a) obstinately rigid (designating the same thing in every possible world, regardless of whether that thing exists in that specific world); (b) non-descriptival (expressing no semantic content that mediates their denotation); and (c) semantically indifferent to the psychological states of individual users. This means that the dominant view regarding the semantics of proper names is essentially Millian. That is, names function neither like descriptions nor like indexicals; their

semantic value is just their referent or, to borrow from John Perry's terminology, names *name* whereas indexicals *denote*; names and indexicals *refer* while descriptions *describe* (Perry 2001). This leaves puzzles of cognitive value and modal illusions unexplained. The solution may be in the rejection of the traditional assumption that "proper names and the sentence/utterances containing them are associated with only *one* content" (172–173); basically, in the heated debate between descriptivism and anti-descriptivism, Bochner reconciles referentialism and Fregean puzzles by indicating a third way, which is based—it turns out in Chapter 5—on a new form of two-dimensionalism. Chapter 4 first explores the tenets of two-dimensionalism, a framework that distinguishes two different contents for every sentence/utterance combining descriptive and indexical elements (one content being descriptive and the other referential). Some of its central assumptions are defended, but its various existing models—pragmatic, semantic, epistemic, and metasemantic—are all refuted as remnants of descriptivism. Indeed, Bochner gradually points to the need for a novel interpretation, arguing in favor of metasyntactic two-dimensionalism—the only descriptivist model that proves to be compatible with the arguments raised by the referentialist revolution—according to which the epistemic puzzles result from an imperfect identification of words, viewed as external objects.

The concluding chapter recaps the main "lessons" gathered in the book, reiterating that, when "properly understood" (5), the arguments developed in the referentialist revolution show that names have a Millian semantics and that a metasyntactic interpretation of two-dimensionalism such as the one introduced in this book is the only form of descriptivism compatible with this conclusion. In turn, a metasyntactic model will be compatible with the account of indexical thought set forth by David Lewis. Unlike Lewis, however, Bochner, inspired both by François Recanati (his erstwhile Ph.D. supervisor) and by situation semantics (developed as an alternative to possible worlds semantics), declares that he is no radical internalist. In doing so, he opens up a window onto some of the fascinating questions raised by indexical thought, thereby setting expectations for some sort of sequel to the present volume.

The book also features a useful glossary, which helps to keep track of and better penetrate/make sense of the wide array of technical notions and theses dealt with in the text. Bochner's volume, then, confirms its dual essence as, at the same time, an easy-to-follow overview of a wide-ranging and complex topic and a sophisticated expository essay. It is undoubtedly both an exceptional endeavor and a worthwhile read across a variety of disciplines and interests around language issues. It would certainly be a useful addition to the library of any graduate or Ph.D. student of linguistics, pragmatics, philosophical semantics, philosophy of the mind, and philosophy of language, and it would also be valuable and enjoyable (thanks to the author's ability to entertain and maintain a conversation with the reader) for established language and philosophy scholars and practitioners, despite the "minor inaccuracies or surprising opinions" (Ciecierski 2022) that a fully expert reader in philosophy of language might detect in this work.

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