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Naming and Referring

The Semantics and Pragmatics
of Singular Terms



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To my mother and father,
Eleanor and Robert

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Preface

1. This book is about the singular referring terms of English, and – by analogical extension – the singular terms of any natural language sufficiently similar to English. Examples of such terms are: *definite descriptions* – e.g., ‘the king of France’, ‘the largest pizza in the whole world’; *pronouns* – e.g., ‘I’, ‘you’, ‘he’, ‘she’; *demonstratives* – e.g., ‘this’, ‘that’; *indefinite descriptions* – e.g., ‘a Martian’, ‘an ichthyologist’; *proper names* – e.g. ‘Huntley’, ‘Drusilla’.

It is indisputable that singular terms hold a special place in any theoretical discussion of natural language. The explanation, or at least the start of one, is simply the frequency with which such terms occur in our sentences – and not just the complex sentences, but the simple basic sentences out of which the complexes are constructed. To be sure, there are simple sentences containing no singular terms, but instead generic or plural terms, e.g. (1)–(3) (‘a many-splendored thing’ in (3) being understood in the generic rather than the singular referring sense).

- (1) Fish swim.
- (2) My feet are tired.
- (3) Love is a many-splendored thing.

Nonetheless, our most commonly used sentences are those like (4)–(6).

- (4) Izzy did it.
- (5) You tattletale!
- (6) A gun is in the top drawer of my bureau. . . get it.

The fact is that discrete individuals are absolutely central to our world as we experience it. And, of course, singular referring terms provide the primary vehicle for our talk about these individuals. Hence, if we do not understand how singular terms work, we have missed something very central to language: its ability to connect our communication, and even our thoughts, with the particular objects that make up our world. In this book I will try to contribute to this understanding, weaving into an account of singular terms discussion both of *talking* about individuals and *thinking* about individuals.

To begin, then, we must consider the kinds of questions about singular terms that need to be addressed. An obvious focus, of course, is the question of *semantics*, or *logic*, viz.

(7) What do singular terms mean?

As a semantic question, (7) concerns a property of singular terms as pieces of language. On the standard view, semantics is a matter of defining the conditions under which the sentences of a language are true.¹ With this understanding, then, (7) is the question of how to represent the contribution of singular terms to the truth-conditions of the sentences in which they occur. So far as giving an answer here, there are two general approaches. The one is to answer (7) with (8).

(8) The meaning of a singular term is the object for which it stands.

I will call this the *objective* approach. Expressed with respect to truth-conditions, (8) entails that, e.g., (9) is true if and only if the individual named by 'Jimmy Carter' does in fact have the property denoted by 'is talking with God'.

(9) Jimmy Carter is talking with God.

The other approach — which I will call the *conceptual* — is somewhat more complicated. As an answer to (7), it would give something like (10).

(10) The meaning of a singular term is a conceptual content determining the term's reference.

The complication, of course, is spelling out — both in general, and case by case — the nature of this 'conceptual content'. In any event, this content determines an individual to be the referent by applying uniquely to it. Where the content is simply descriptive, this is quite straightforward. For example, if 'skinniest skunk' gives the meaning of 'she', the referent of this term is then determined as the individual of which 'skinniest skunk' is uniquely true. Where this content consists of things *other* than descriptions — e.g. images — then it is somewhat more difficult to make clear in exactly what sense the content is uniquely applicable to the referent it determines. At any rate, with respect to truth-conditions, if 'peanut farmer in The White House' gives the meaning of 'Jimmy Carter', then (10) entails that, e.g., (9) is true if and only if the individual denoted by 'peanut

¹ Cf. Davidson, 1967.

farmer in The White House' has the property denoted by 'is talking with God'.

Given these two approaches, an account of singular terms must say something about how we are to decide between them. In a sense, this task will frame the discussion of this book. However, there are two questions related to (7) which will equally concern us as we attempt to answer (7) itself. The first of these I will call the question of *meaning-knowledge*, and would express it with (11).

(11) What do we know when we know the meaning of a singular term?

This concerns whatever it is that we have in mind when we understand a singular term, whether as speaker or hearer — whatever it is by means of which we may be said to know the reference. The second is (12), and I will call this the question of *the meaning-relation*.

(12) What is it for a singular term to have meaning?

(12) concerns the relation between singular terms and whatever it is that constitutes their meaning. This is not a trivial matter. Of course, the naive view is that we simply 'see' the relation — as if it were a sort of physical attachment. However, as we have known at least since the writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein, physical attachment is one thing, and naming and referring something quite other.² At any rate, to answer this question is to explain how singular terms acquire their meaning — at least in general — and the difference between terms having meaning and those that do not.

Turning to the matter of answers here, each of the two approaches to the *semantic* question of singular terms will have some implications for (11) and (12) as well — and I will be at some pains to detail this.³ Nonetheless, neither meaning-knowledge nor the meaning-relation is wholly to be accounted for with semantics. To understand meaning-knowledge, we must look at singular terms *in use*. After all, our concern here is with what the speaker has in mind when referring with such terms, and what the hearer has in mind understanding the reference. To understand the meaning-relation, again we must look at referring use. Clearly, it is inconceivable that the meaning-relation should derive from any source other than the social practices and habits of use which surround singular terms. Thus, we have also to consider *pragmatics*: in general, the study not

² Cf. Wittgenstein, 1953, esp. pp. 1–45.

³ *Infra*, sect. 2.

of language *per se*, but of what speakers *do* with language. In the pages of this preface, it will soon become apparent that for our purposes the relevant dimensions of pragmatics are manifold. They include at least: what a *speaker* means using a singular term; the analysis of *referring*, i.e., the speech-act the speaker performs using a singular term; the structure of conversations both in which we refer, and in which we *talk about* referring and the concepts that analyze referring. Our discussion, then, will be as much pragmatic as semantic, and, indeed, the bearing of pragmatics on the semantics of singular terms will emerge as a leading theme of this book.

It remains, then, to begin in earnest the task of introducing my own approach to singular terms. Since one does not write in an historical vacuum, an appropriate start would be to say that the views I will develop here respond most directly to Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*.⁴ Kripke is the most influential current proponent of what I have called the 'objective' approach to the semantics of singular terms. His work is a worthy point of departure, if only because he and his collaborators now dominate the discussion of the issues with which I will treat. We need, then, to lay out the relevant details of Kripke's account. As a preliminary, however, it seems worth saying a bit more about what is at stake in the competition between the objective and conceptual approaches in general, and at least sketching the history of the debate. I will do this in the two sections to follow. Those readers for whom this is familiar ground may wish to skip to the beginning of section 4, where I take up the detail of Kripke, and then launch my own account.

2. Comparing the objective and the conceptual approaches to the semantics of singular terms, it is important, first of all, to see that they differ substantively. That is, the truth-conditions they assign to a sentence like (9) – respectively (13) and (14) – are not logically equivalent.

(9) Jimmy Carter is talking with God.

(13) (9) is true if and only if the individual named by 'Jimmy Carter' has the property denoted by 'is talking with God'.

(14) (Where 'peanut farmer in The White House' gives the meaning of 'Jimmy Carter') (9) is true if and only if the individual denoted by 'peanut farmer in The White House' has the property denoted by 'is talking with God'.

⁴ Kripke, 1972.

Logical equivalence requires that a pair of conditions yield the same truth-value for the given sentence no matter what we suppose to be the case in the world. Now, as it happens, the individual named 'Jimmy Carter' and the peanut farmer in The White House are the *same* individual. Hence, as things stand, both (13) and (14) will assign the same truth-value to (9). However, we can easily imagine a circumstance in which, e.g., a different peanut farmer had won the last Presidential election, and Jimmy had stayed in Georgia. It is imaginable that in that circumstance Jimmy would still talk with God (perhaps not as warmly), while the incumbent in The White House would not. In that case, the truth-value assigned by the objective truth-condition ((13)) would be *true*, while that assigned by the conceptual ((14)) would be *false*. Given this divergence, it might seem that we could decide between the competing approaches on this basis. The trouble is that our raw intuitions of what the truth-conditions *should* be here are rather indecisive. This seems to be one of those cases where we are much more inclined to let our intuitions about truth-conditions be determined by the account to which we subscribe rather than *vice versa*.

Be this as it may, beyond this semantic difference, each of the two approaches has its own special strengths and weaknesses. *Prima facie*, these seem to balance each other out, making impossible any easy decision between the two. Starting with the objective approach, it has the obvious advantage of simplicity. Moreover, it fits well with the majority of cases of singular terms — i.e. proper names, pronouns, demonstratives — lacking any obvious source for a conceptual concomitant. On the negative side, of course, the objective account is not so compatible with definite and indefinite descriptions. It seems unnatural to discount the semantic significance of the descriptive content of such terms — yet, this is what the objective approach would force us to do. More important, perhaps, by virtue of its very simplicity, the objective account offers very little help with the related questions of meaning-knowledge and of the meaning-relation. To say that the term stands for an object does not yet tell us anything about what we have in mind when we *understand* the term — unless we are to hold that we somehow have objects in mind 'directly' (whatever that might mean!). Likewise, while the object may be the term's meaning, the relation between term and object making this the case remains completely unilluminated.

Looking now at the conceptual approach, its strengths and weaknesses are just the mirror image of its competitor's. Here it is the

cases of definite and indefinite descriptions that are unproblematic — the descriptions in these cases serving as the stipulated conceptual content. (I should say, ‘*relatively* unproblematic’. It is not clear that the description in an *indefinite* description is sufficient for the conceptual content, since this description does not ordinarily apply *uniquely*). By contrast, for pronouns, demonstratives, and proper names, the conceptual approach is at least uncomfortable. To make sense of the idea of conceptual content in these cases we have to tell rather special stories — stories inevitably complicating our account of how these terms work. For example, for a demonstrative we might say that this content comes from the conception of the referent had in mind by the speaker using the term. However, we thereby introduce the problem of how he gets this content across to his hearer — I will have a good deal more to say about this in Chapters XI and XII. Nonetheless, given that we *do* build this complexity into our semantic account, we at the same time provide ourselves with resources for explaining meaning-knowledge and the meaning-relation. In answer to question (11) we can now say that it is this conceptual content — however it is that we characterize it — that we have in mind when we understand the term. In answer to question (12), we can now say at least this much: that it is this conceptual content that relates the term to its referent. Of course, in a sense, this is just to trade one problem for another. In place of the relation between term and referent, we now need to explain the relation between the singular term and its conceptual content. However, in making this trade we have a sort of reduction: the question of the meaning-relation for singular terms becomes the question of the meaning-relation for descriptive words generally. This might be taken as a step forward.

I should say, finally, that definite descriptions and proper names are the two focal cases in most actual discussion of the two approaches to singular terms. There are good reasons for this. For the conceptual approach — as we have seen — definite descriptions provide the vindicating case *par excellence*, while for the objective theory they pose an unavoidable challenge. Proper names, of course, provide a case on the side of the objective approach. They are the favored of such cases because they at least *seem* to be the most accessible to us. After all, everyone has — or could have — the experience of making up a name, and giving it a meaning by bestowing it on something/one. Since we do these things, we ought to know what it is that we are doing. Hence, if only we pay close enough attention, we ought to know all there is to know about the

meaning of at least these singular terms. Of course, in reality, things are not quite so simple — performing an act being one thing, explaining what we do, and how we do it, quite another. Nonetheless, our ostensible familiarity with proper names makes them forever the tantalizing pathway into the study of singular terms.

3. Given the discussion of the preceding section, we have for singular terms two explanatory approaches, and two focal cases. The history of their discussion may then be broken down into:

- (a) attempts of the conceptual approach to handle proper names like definite descriptions, and
- (b) taking the objective approach with proper names and the conceptual approach with definite descriptions.

In principle, there ought to be a third possibility, *viz.*

- (c) attempts of the objective approach to handle definite descriptions like proper names.

When we come to Kripke, we will have to consider whether this really is what he is trying to do.

At any rate, over the past century or so, the dominant strand in the discussion of singular terms has been (a). In historical order, the leading figures here have been Gottlob Frege, Bertrand Russell, and Peter Strawson. While working within the same framework, the succession of their theories has crystalized important subsidiary issues within the conceptual approach. It is worth allowing some of these to emerge here, taking each of the three figures in turn.

(i) *Frege*⁵ Writing about 100 years ago, Frege laid the foundations on which all subsequent systematic conceptual approaches to singular terms have been built. Impressed by the problems of what I have called ‘meaning-knowledge’ and ‘the meaning-relation’ — and aware of the inadequacies of the objective approach for these purposes — Frege developed a theory on which *all* terms in language have both a ‘sense’ and a ‘reference’. For a given term, then — singular *or* general — this ‘sense’ is the conceptual content determining which item(s) in the world are/is the term’s referent(s). While this sense *can* be descriptive, it is not clear that it *need* be. It *is* intended

⁵ The works of Frege on which I base this little account are chiefly Frege, 1892(a), Frege, 1892(b) (both translated in Geach and Black, 1960) and Frege, 1918 (translated in Strawson, 1967).

to be whatever a speaker or hearer can 'have in mind' when understanding a term, although it is not to be identified with psychological phenomena *per se*. Thus, while proper names are to this extent treated on the model of definite descriptions, it is not clear that this position is tantamount to a crude equation of their conceptual content with sets of descriptions.

Turning to Frege's specifically semantic doctrine, it is that terms contribute to the truth-conditions of the sentences in which they occur by virtue of their *reference*, rather than by virtue of their *sense*. Of course, since the sense *determines* the reference, we do not have here a version of the objective approach in disguise. Nonetheless, doing semantics in this way, Frege involves himself in complications to which the conceptual account — on the face of it — may have seemed immune. Two of these are specially deserving of mention. The first is the problem of what are called 'intensional contexts' in sentences. Paradigmatically, these are positions for terms in the object clauses of psychological and modal predicates — e.g., following 'John believes that . . .', 'Mary hopes that . . .', 'It is possible that . . .', 'It is necessary that . . .'. For terms in such positions, the contribution to truth-conditions is not simply a matter of reference — and, indeed, this is just our criterion for recognizing intensional contexts. For example — to use Russell's famous case⁶ — since 'Scott' and 'the author of *Waverly*' refer to the same individual, if their bearing on truth were always simply a matter of their reference then (15) and (16) ought to be logically equivalent.

(15) George IV wished to know whether Scott was the author of *Waverly*.

(16) George IV wished to know whether Scott was Scott.

However, while (15) is true, (16) is patently false. To deal with this phenomenon — while still maintaining that truth is a matter of reference — Frege added the following proviso: for a term occurring in an intensional context, the reference is what would normally be the term's sense. This does take care of the difference between (15) and (16), since — while 'Scott' and 'the author of *Waverly*' have the same reference — we have every reason to attribute to them divergent senses. This solution does, however, introduce some problems of its own. For example, it requires an additional sense for a term in the cases where its normal sense is the reference, and this can be shown to entail an infinite hierarchy of senses for each term. It is

⁶ Russell, 1905, p. 47 (in Russell, 1956).

not clear whether this consequences is an unacceptable one, but, in any event, this is not a matter we can pursue here.⁷

Turning to the second complication, this is the problem of terms having sense but no reference. Examples are: 'the present king of France', 'the oldest winged pig', and so on. On Frege's account, such terms have nothing to contribute to sentential truth-conditions, except where they occur in intensional contexts. As a result, these terms deprive the non-intensional sentences in which they occur of truth-value. That is, for a sentence like (17), the Fregean truth-conditions are something like (18).

(17) The oldest winged pig wears a wig.

(18) (17) is *true* where the referent of 'the oldest winged pig' has the property denoted by 'wears a wig' and is *false* where this referent does not have this property.

Since there is no referent, the conditions neither for truth nor falsity are satisfied. Frege attempted to solve this problem by postulating an arbitrary referent for otherwise non-referring terms – the goal being to leave no sentence without truth-value. However, since the resulting truth-conditions have little to do with what we intuitively take to be the meaning of these terms, this feature of Fregean semantics remains uncomfortable.

(ii) *Russell*⁸ It was at least in part in response to this discomfort with Frege that Russell – in collaboration with Wittgenstein – developed his own version of the conceptual approach.⁹ In agreement with Frege, this new version holds that the singular terms of a natural language – including proper names – have sense or connotation determining their reference. Russell, however, seems to intend to confine this sense to the descriptive. Moreover, Russell is prepared to allow singular terms a semantic significance whether or not they have a reference – and, indeed, this is just the point at which he and Frege initially part company. The theory behind this is that an ordinary singular term is really a disguised assertion – asserting the existence of the individual its sense purports to pick out. Of course, such assertions contribute to the truth-conditions of sentences containing them whether or not the individual asserted to ex-

⁷ For the most comprehensive discussion of this and other difficult questions about Frege, cf. Dummett, 1973.

⁸ The relevant works of Russell here are Russell, 1905 and Russell, 1918 (both in Russell, 1956).

⁹ Wittgenstein, 1961.

ist really does. When the assertion is untrue, it simply necessitates that the sentence containing it is false. Thus – to use the traditional example – as Russell analyzes it, (19) is equivalent to (20) ((20) being the ‘Russellian expansion’ of (19)).

(19) The king of France is bald.

(20) There is one and only one king of France and he is bald.

While Frege would have to deny (19) a truth-value, on Russell’s account – given its equivalence to (20) – it is simply false.

So explained, Russell’s account *may* be construed – rather than as a version of the conceptual approach – as a denial that the singular terms of natural language are genuine referring terms at all. Russell himself seems inclined to so characterize his views, and this is associated with a curious concomitant of the theory, *viz.* the postulation of ‘logically proper names’. Logically proper names have semantic properties like those the objective approach attributes to ordinary proper names: what they mean are just the individuals they stand for. The only difference is that *logically* proper names somehow cannot fail to refer – they have reference by virtue of logical necessity. Not surprisingly, ordinary proper names are not meant by Russell to qualify as logically proper in this sense. Indeed, it is debatable whether any term in a natural language could have the characteristics which this necessary reference seems to entail. Among these are: that the objects for which these names stand must be absolutely simple (since a complex referent could decompose and thereby leave the name without a referent); that these names have an absolutely direct connection with what they stand for, unmediated by anything conceptual; that the referents of these names can be known only by direct perceptual acquaintance, and not by description. The motivation for appealing to such names goes far beyond the scope of a summary presentation. However, we can say at least this much: logically proper names are required if we want to preserve anything of the referring relation in natural language within Russell’s theory. If we suppose that every term with a conceptual content does not refer to the individual to which it applies, but instead asserts that individual’s existence, then the only place for reference is with terms that have no conceptual content.

(iii) *Strawson*¹⁰ Writing in reaction to Russell, Strawson represents a contemporary return to the position of Frege. Strawson

¹⁰ I draw this section from Strawson, 1950, Strawson, 1952, Strawson, 1959, Strawson, 1961, and Strawson, 1964.

takes as his basic premise that the reference of a singular term to an individual is a fundamental relation in language, to be captured by any viable theory. He then argues that it is better to attribute this relation to the ordinary singular terms in language than to resort to the obscure notion of logically proper names. It is better to do this, he claims, even though we pay the price of semantic insignificance where our singular terms fail to refer. Indeed, Strawson makes a virtue of this necessity, asserting – with some plausibility – that denying sentences like (19) a truth-value, we are more faithful to our linguistic intuitions than if we equate them with their Russellian expansions. In addition, Strawson offers two amendments to Fregean theory which further ameliorate its discomforts.

The first is to develop a semantic characterization for the case of reference-failure. Strawson does this by introducing the notion of ‘semantic presupposition’. In general, for any two sentences *S* and *P*, this is defined with (21).

(21) *S* *semantically presupposes* *P* if and only if the truth of *P* is required for *S* to be either true or false.

P is then called the ‘semantic presupposition’ of *S*. Given Fregean theory, sentences with singular terms semantically presuppose that these terms apply uniquely to existing individuals. The case of reference-failure, then, is the case in which this presupposition is unsatisfied. With this new notion in hand, we can then deal with the problem of truth-valuelessness – of ‘truth-value gap’ – by simply taking ‘neither-true-nor-false’ as a third truth-value. Of course, in conjunction with this, we must work out the systematic relations between this third truth-value and *true* and *false*. Given the definition in (21), this turns out to be a possible endeavor, albeit a complicated one.¹¹ With this amendment, then, we now pay for faithfulness to linguistic intuition with increased complexity in our semantics. This seems an easier cost to bear than either truth-value gaps, or the Fregean expedient of arbitrarily chosen referents.

Second, Strawson settles on a descriptive characterization of the conceptual content of singular terms. He supposes that associated with each singular term are descriptions (or predicates) at least in principle expressible linguistically, and that the term refers to an individual by virtue of the associated descriptions being true of it. In the case of proper names, the theory is that the name is associated with one – or, more likely, a *set* of – description(s). The name

¹¹ Cf. van Fraassen, 1968, van Fraassen, 1969, and van Fraassen, 1971.

then applies to its bearer by virtue of the description — or some subset of the set of descriptions — being true of that individual. Applied to proper names, Strawson's conceptual approach thus becomes the 'descriptive theory', and it is in this form that I will consider the conceptual treatment of proper names in the pages to follow. As we will see, the descriptive theory is not without its difficulties — especially in view of the possibility that not all the descriptions in the set associated with a name apply to the same individual. It is, however, at least a *clearer* theory than its Fregean predecessor.

We come now to the tradition characterized by

- (b) taking the objective approach with proper names and the conceptual approach with definite descriptions.

This lacks the historical continuity we saw in the succession of Frege, Russell, and Strawson. Indeed, its two leading figures — John Stuart Mill and Saul Kripke — are separated by virtually a century. I will briefly present Mill, and then turn to an introduction of Kripke.

(i) *Mill*¹² Mill's writings are nearly contemporary with Frege's, but the two are apparently quite independent. At any rate, Mill held, roughly, that all terms in language *except* proper names have at least a 'connotation', and generally a 'denotation' as well — the denotation being determined by the application of the connotation to the things in the world. ('Connotation' and 'denotation' here are used in their familiar sense, and correspond to what I have been calling 'conceptual content' and 'reference'.) Of proper names, however, Mill held that they have only a denotation — their meaning being exhausted by the objects for which they stand. Names without bearers, then, are simply meaningless sounds (or marks). It was Mill's fate to offer his account of proper names at a time when the questions of meaning-knowledge and the meaning-relation were receiving ever increasing attention. Since the Mill account offers no help with these questions as they apply to proper names, it was rejected out of hand — even as purely *semantic* theory. Of course, his explanation of *other* singular terms anticipates the Fregean

¹² I base this account on Mill, esp. Book I, Chapter II.

conceptual approach, and has to varying degrees been incorporated into it, at least by Frege's followers.¹³

(ii) *Kripke*¹⁴ Kripke's theory of singular terms is, in a sense, a return to Mill — in response to the intervening Fregean approach. However, he offers considerable innovation, at least in his characterization of proper names. There are two facets to this.

First, he introduces the notion of a 'rigid designator'. Put simply, a rigid designator is a term that refers to the same individual no matter what we suppose about the world. Or — to use the notion of 'possible world' (cf. 'imaginable circumstance', 'possible state of affairs', etc.) — a rigid designator is a term that picks out the same individual with respect to all possible worlds. A *non-rigid* designator, on the other hand, will pick out different individuals with respect to different possible worlds, or imaginable states of affairs. Given these concepts, we may now better articulate the semantic difference between the objective treatment of proper names and the conceptual. Let us go back to the example of (9), whose alternative — objective and conceptual — truth-conditions we formulated with (13) and (14).

(9) Jimmy Carter is talking with God.

(13) (9) is true if and only if the individual named by 'Jimmy Carter' has the property denoted by 'is talking with God'.

(14) (Where 'peanut farmer in The White House' gives the meaning of 'Jimmy Carter') (9) is true if and only if the individual denoted by 'peanut farmer in The White House' has the property denoted by 'is talking with God'.

As we noted, (13) and (14) differ, since, in an imaginable circumstance — or possible world — the peanut farmer in The White House might not be Jimmy Carter. We may now put the matter in this way: Given (14), 'Jimmy Carter' is a non-rigid designator, since in different possible worlds different individuals may be the peanut farmer in The White House. Given (13), however, 'Jimmy Carter' is rigid. It refers to the same individual no matter what, since its reference — not being determined by any associated description — cannot vary with our suppositions about what descriptions fit which individuals. (13) and (14) are non-equivalent, then, given the general non-equivalence of rigid and non-rigid designators. (13), of

¹³ Cf., e.g., Lewis, 1946.

¹⁴ Kripke, 1972. Cf. also, Donnellan, 1972, and Kaplan, "Dthat".

course, represents Kripke's view, *viz.* that proper names are rigid designators, referring to just the individual they name in the actual world. It is worth remarking that — as the use of 'possible world' here might suggest — Kripke's introduction of 'rigid designator' has important connections with his treatment of *modal* sentences, e.g., sentences beginning with 'It is(n't) necessary that . . .', or 'It is(n't) possible that . . .'. His theory of singular terms is not entirely independent of these modal considerations, so I will have occasion to discuss these in some detail.¹⁵

Kripke's second innovation is to allow a *non-semantic* association of a proper name with a description — for the purposes of what he calls 'fixing the reference'. In fixing the reference, the associated description determines what the name refers to in the *actual* world. It is not, however, the same as a Fregean sense, since the reference is nonetheless rigid. That is, with respect to all possible worlds, the referent is the individual the description picks out in the actual world, no matter what fits the description in *other* possible worlds. For example, suppose the reference-fixing description for 'Jimmy Carter' is 'U.S. President in 1978'. Then, 'Jimmy Carter' still picks out Jimmy Carter where we are considering a possible situation in which Jerry Ford is now President. Of course, were 'U.S. President in 1978' the Fregean sense of 'Jimmy Carter', then the name would pick out Ford rather than Carter in this situation. Allowing these associated reference-fixing descriptions is Kripke's way of giving us a handle on the questions of meaning-knowledge and the meaning-relation for proper names — without compromising the objective approach to the semantics of proper names. Given these descriptions, we have at least the foundation for an account of how a speaker or hearer has the meaning of a name in mind, and they way a name is attached — or 'fixed' — to the referent. I will develop this in detail in what follows.¹⁶

I should add that at the same time, this idea of 'reference-fixing' gives us a way of dealing with terms apparently *having* descriptive content which we nonetheless want to handle objectively — and treat 'rigidly' — rather conceptually. For example, with 'the slimiest toad' we could say of the associated description — *viz.* 'slimiest toad' — that it did not constitute Fregean sense, but functioned merely to fix reference. It is not clear that Kripke wants to take ad-

¹⁵ *Infra*, Chapters XI, XII.

¹⁶ *Infra*, Chapters I, X.