

FILIP KAWCZYŃSKI *

DESCRIPTIVE NAMES, RIGIDITY, AND DIRECT REFERENCE

SUMMARY: In the paper, I argue against Dummett’s and Stanley’s objections to the direct reference theory. Dummett and Stanley make use of the notorious descriptive names to formulate the objection against Kaplan’s argument in favour of the direct reference theory. Kaplan argued that difference in modal behaviour of sentences is a reason to regard some singular terms appearing in the sentences as directly referential. Dummett and Stanley argue, on the other hand, that in the case of descriptive names and the descriptions used to fix the reference of the names, the modal difference between sentences arises merely from the fact that descriptive names are rigid, while descriptions are not. There is no reason then to claim that being directly or indirectly referential has anything to do with the modal differences between sentences. What I attempt to show in the paper is that Dummett and Stanley made wrong assumptions about the modal properties of descriptive names and the descriptions that are used to fix the reference of such names. In Section 1, I characterise descriptive names and discuss some controversies that they create. Section 2 is devoted to the review of Kaplan’s argument for the direct reference theory, while Section 3 presents Dummett’s and Stanley’s arguments against direct reference. In section 4, I raise two preliminary objections against Dummett’s and Stanley’s positions. In Section 5, I discuss in detail “the great mystery” of rigidity of descriptive names which in my opinion lies at the bottom of the whole issue of descriptive names and direct reference. I argue, contrary to Dummett and Stanley, that descriptive names and their mother descriptions have the same modal properties. The last section includes conclusions and presents how the results from the previous parts of the paper affect the arguments of Dummett and Stanley.

KEYWORDS: rigidity, descriptive names, proper names, modality, direct reference.

* University of Warsaw, Faculty of Philosophy. E-mail: f.kawczynski@uw.edu.pl.
ORCID: 0000-0001-7960-4795.

Introduction

In the paper, I argue against Dummett's and Stanley's objections to the direct reference theory. Dummett and Stanley make use of the notorious descriptive names to formulate the objection against Kaplan's argument in favour of the direct reference theory. Kaplan discusses pairs of true sentences of the form "*a* is φ " and "*b* is φ " in which "*a*" and "*b*" are coreferential singular terms. He argues that if two such sentences, which have the same truth value in the actual world, have different truth values in different possible worlds it is the evidence of some significant semantic difference between these sentences and between singular terms included in these sentences. Such a difference occurs when "*a*" is a directly referential term, while "*b*" is not. Thus, eventually the argument leads to the conclusion that some singular terms (eg. proper names or indexicals) are directly referential.

Dummett and Stanley develop arguments of different sorts, however, they both undermine Kaplan's theory in a similar manner. Namely, they argue that it is not always the case that the difference of truth values in various possible worlds reveals some semantic difference between sentences. In particular, such a modal difference does not provide a reason to claim that "*a*" is directly referential and "*b*" is not. According to their view, when "*a*" is a descriptive name and "*b*" is a description used for introducing the descriptive name, sentences "*a* is φ " and "*b* is φ " indeed can differ with respect to their truth values in possible worlds but the reason for that is not that "*a*" is directly referential, and "*b*" is not. The reason is that although "*a*" and "*b*" do not differ with respect to the way they refer to objects, they differ regarding their modal properties: a descriptive name is rigid, while description is not. In Dummett's and Stanley's views such a modal difference between singular terms is a sufficient explanation of the modal difference between "*a* is φ " and "*b* is φ ", and claiming that "*a*" is directly referential as opposed to "*b*" is unjustified.

What I attempt to show in the paper is that Dummett and Stanley made wrong assumptions about the modal properties of descriptive names and the descriptions that are used to fix the reference of such names. I argue that in fact these expressions have *the same* modal properties. In consequence, what is necessary for the explanation of the modal difference between "*a* is φ " and "*b* is φ " is the claim that "*a*" and "*b*" differ in another way—namely that the former is directly referential, while the latter is not.

In Section 1, I characterise descriptive names and discuss some controversies that they create. Section 2 is devoted to the review of Kaplan's argument for the direct reference theory, while Section 3 presents Dummett's and Stanley's arguments against direct reference. In section 4 I raise two preliminary objections against Dummett's and Stanley's positions. In Section 5, I discuss in detail "the great mystery" of rigidity of descriptive names which in my opinion lies at the bottom of the whole issue of descriptive names and direct reference. The last section includes conclusions and presents how the results from the previous parts of the paper affect the arguments of Dummett and Stanley.

1. Descriptive Names

Think of the three following names: “Saul Kripke”, “Sherlock Holmes”, and “Jack the Ripper”. For an average language user, they are probably just three typical proper names—written with capital letters and referring to individuals. For a philosopher of language, these expressions differ radically. The first one is an *ordinary proper name*—it refers to an existing object and was introduced to language (probably by Kripke’s parents) as referring to that particular object. On the other hand, “Sherlock Holmes” is a so-called *fictional name*—it is an empty expression by design. We can assume that when Arthur Conan Doyle introduced the name, he has no intention that the name would refer to any real individual. It was stipulated as an empty name so it is impossible that it would turn out that it is not empty. The last name is the most controversial. “Jack the Ripper” was introduced by the London Police as referring to an alleged killer who committed such-and-such crimes. Unlike “Saul Kripke” it was not brought in to refer to a known, existing individual—the name was introduced at a time when the identity of the killer was unknown (as we know it remains unknown). And unlike “Sherlock Holmes” it was not assumed that it is an empty name. It was quite opposite—the detectives made up the name to refer shortly to a person that they supposed does exist although they did not know exactly who s/he is and probably they also left open the possibility that there is no single person who committed all those crimes (in such a case the name would eventually appear to be empty). Reference of “Jack the Ripper” was fixed by the definite description “the person who committed such-and-such crimes” and it was unknown which object (if any) satisfies the description and thus which object (if any) is the reference of the introduced name. Names of that kind are called *descriptive (proper) names*.

“Descriptive names are usually seen as exotic birds or semantic mutants”. That is how Robin Jeshion (2004, p. 593) sums up the nature of descriptive proper names. They are famous among philosophers of language and have a rather bad reputation. The reputation comes from the fact that descriptive proper names are extremely elusive when it comes to characterising their semantic nature. It seems that the nest of these exotic birds is located exactly on the borderline between descriptive and non-descriptive directly referential expressions, and that makes them so hard to define.

A lot has been written about descriptive names and I am not going to give here a comprehensive picture of all the problems they pose.¹ Instead, I am going to focus on their features associated with the issue discussed in this paper, i.e., their relation to the direct reference theory. Let us start with the basics. Descriptive names are a peculiar subspecies of proper names. They look like proper

¹ Usually, Evans’s works (1982; 2002) are considered to be the main benchmark for the discussion on descriptive names and his works are still the main historic background for this topic (however, it should be notice that Kaplan in his [1968] analyses name “Newman I” which is something like a descriptive name). For a detailed review of issues associated with descriptive names see Reimer’s (2004) and Jeshion’s (2004).

names and behave like proper names in many aspects. Classic examples of descriptive names are: “Jack the Ripper”, “Vulcan”, or “Deep Throat”. These names have been introduced to language via descriptions. For instance, the introduction of “Jack the Ripper” could possibly take the form of:

Let us call *the person who committed such-and-such crimes* “Jack the Ripper”

The description in italics fixes the reference of the descriptive name. Hereafter I will call such descriptions *mother descriptions* of descriptive names. The detectives introduced the name to refer with it to the person who committed such-and-such crimes, whomever s/he is. They did not have (and even could not have) any particular person in mind—what they wanted to refer to is the object that satisfies the mother description, whichever object it is. Mother descriptions are always used *attributively*. That is the indispensable feature of descriptive proper names that their reference is fixed attributively, i.e., without pointing at any particular object but with the intention to refer to an object which possesses definite properties. Basically, that is what we use descriptive names for—to refer to objects in a proper-name-like way but without knowing the identity of the objects.

Now we can see the crucial “genetic” difference between an ordinary proper name and a descriptive name. The former is introduced to the language in a referential way.² The reference of a proper name is fixed within the baptism ceremony either by ostension, or referentially used definite description or another proper name of the object in question. An ordinary proper name is given to an object the existence of which raises no doubts and the object is very often pre-

² This statement should be treated as descriptive—not normative. It is basically the observation—made by Kripke, among others—that standard proper names are always given to particular objects, perceptually or causally accessible. The object that is supposed to be given an ordinary proper name is always somehow pointed at—either via gesture or via referential linguistic tools. A case that may be somehow doubtful in this context is the allegedly possible scenario in which the reference of a new name is fixed by some attributive description and the description is treated merely as reference-fixing and not as the meaning of the name. However, in fact, such a scenario is not possible, since it entails a proper name lacking any semantic value. That there is no meaning is simply assumed by this scenario. That there is no reference comes from the fact that attributive description does not fix a particular object as the reference. The description refers to whichever object that has such-and-such properties (maybe none has them) and there is an obvious crucial difference between this-particular-object and whichever-object. In other words, attributive descriptions do refer, but they do not fix the reference, as their nature involves the possibility of reference change. If there is no meaning, and no object being the reference of the name, such a name is semantically invalid in inefficient. Furthermore, if we like to treat an attributive description as a some kind of an instruction for identifying the reference of a name, we end up with a standard descriptive name, because whether we call this instruction a meaning of a name or not is a purely terminological issue. And if we understand meaning standardly (i.e., as the medium between word and object, which is supposed to determine the reference) we definitely ought to call such an instruction a meaning.

sent at the baptism ceremony. In the case of descriptive names, the object is never present at the baptism ceremony, its existence is merely alleged and its identity is unknown. And as history shows, things can go in various directions with descriptive names. According to the popular story, French astronomer Urbain Le Verrier introduced two famous descriptive names of alleged planets before anyone observed these planets—Le Verrier put forward hypotheses about the existence of Neptune and Vulcan based solely on mathematical calculations. The introductions of these descriptive names can be pictured as follows:

Let us call the planet responsible for the irregularities of Uranus “Neptune”.

Let us call the planet responsible for the irregularities of Mercury “Vulcan”.

As it was confirmed later, there really exists the planet that satisfies the description “the planet that is responsible for the irregularities of Uranus”, i.e., Neptune does exist and today we use the name “Neptune” as an ordinary proper name. On the other hand, later investigation falsified the hypothesis concerning the existence of Vulcan and today we use the name “Vulcan” as an empty name because nothing satisfies the mother description of that name. However, for some time both these names were descriptive names, with alleged references the identity of which is unknown.

The descriptive factor is crucial for the semantics of descriptive names—if nothing fulfils the mother description, the name is considered empty; if there is an object that fulfils the mother description, the name somehow transfers into an ordinary proper name.³ On the other hand, in the case of ordinary proper names descriptive elements that may occur during the baptism ceremony can play some pragmatic auxiliary role, but they do not contribute anything to the semantics of an ordinary proper name. The indispensable semantic property of ordinary proper names is that their reference is everything they have—no descriptive, intensional or attributive elements are involved. As John Searle famously put it—“proper names [...] enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to agreement on what descriptive characteristics exactly constitute the identity of the object” (1958, p. 172). Ordinary proper names do not convey any descriptive content while it is obvious that descriptive names do. The semantic constitution of descriptive names is genetically descriptive and attributive since they are brought into the language via the use of attributive mother descriptions.

Now, it seems reasonable to ask why there are any controversies about descriptive names if it looks like they were just unproblematic abbreviations of their mother descriptions. The controversies come from the fact that descriptive names behave very similarly to ordinary proper names with regard to significant

³ Probably the easiest way to explain how such a transfer happens is to say that when the object in question starts to be referentially accessible, then the following uses of the name as referring to that object play the role of some kind of proper baptism.

semantic aspects. The most important is that they appear to be rigid. It seems plausible to claim that a sentence uttered by Le Verrier: “I was wrong, Neptune is not responsible for the irregularities of Uranus. It is responsible for the irregularities of Earth!” is not self-contradictory. And if “Neptune” meant nothing more or less than “the planet that is responsible for the irregularities of Uranus” the sentence should be considered self-contradictory.⁴ In other words, the world in which Neptune does not cause the irregularities of Uranus is possible and when we speak about that world we refer to Neptune when using the name “Neptune”. And so we do in all possible worlds. Their rigidity is one of the most useful properties of descriptive names—we use such names because we want to speak in a rigid manner about the individuals, the existence and identity of which we are not sure.

There are other reasons for considering descriptive names not merely abbreviations of descriptions but more like semantic siblings of ordinary proper names. For instance, Gareth Evans (1982; 2002) claims that what descriptive proper names contribute to truth-conditions/propositions of sentences including them is “stated by means of the relation of reference” (Evans, 2002, p. 180). The same can be said of ordinary proper names as opposed to descriptions whose contribution to the proposition involves an intensional, descriptive condition that is supposed to be satisfied by the object about which is the proposition. Jeshion (2004) points out another similarity between descriptive names and ordinary proper names—they both are *psychologically neutral*. Users introduce them in order to refer to an object “without necessarily thinking about the [object] via any particular mode of presentation” (Jeshion, 2004, p. 600). It corresponds well with the thesis about the rigidity of descriptive names—we want to refer to *the object*, putting aside (at least partially) its characteristics. Marga Reimer (2004, pp. 597–598) puts forward the “epistemological” argument in favour of the similarity of descriptive names and ordinary proper names. Imagine a situation in which Le Verrier tells his parents that his research concerns the planet called “Neptune”. He does not reveal any further details about the irregularities of other planets, and so on. Later on, Le Verrier’s parents tell their friends that “our son is now looking for the planet Neptune”. It seems that the parents used the name correctly and they actually referred to Neptune, although they did not know the mother description of that name and as a matter of fact they were not able to give any uniquely identifying description of Neptune. This scenario is very similar to the Kripkean “Feynman” example in which Kripke (1972, pp. 91–92) argues that since we can use proper names without knowing any precise description of their reference, proper names are semantically independent of descriptions and in particular are not abbreviations of descriptions.

I consider most of the above arguments disputable. However, the intuition that descriptive names do something different than just being shortened versions of

⁴ It is worth to mention that such a scenario is very close to Kripke’s (1972, pp. 83–85) “Gödel-Schmidt” argument against descriptive account of ordinary proper names.

descriptions is very strong. The aspect of their hybrid “descriptive and referential” nature that is crucial for my considerations is their rigidity. The rigidity combined with their descriptive charge poses a serious problem for the theory of direct reference. In particular, descriptive names can be used to construe an objection against David Kaplan’s famous argument in favour of the direct reference theory.

2. Kaplan’s Argument for the Direct Reference Theory

Kaplan’s (1989, pp. 512–514) argument concerns indexicals and is aimed at showing that indexicals are directly referential expressions, i.e., expressions whose contribution to a proposition is their reference (and not any descriptive condition, concept, etc.). Imagine that Alfred is hosting a party and two of his friends have already come: Maria, who sits at the table, and Wanda, who lies on a couch. When new guests arrive Alfred wants to introduce his friends to the guests; he says that “Wanda lives in Cracow” and then points at the woman sitting at the table and utters:

(A) She lives in Warsaw.

Intuitively the proposition α expressed by (A) is about Maria and not about any woman who happens to be sitting at the table. The proposition α is true iff Maria lives in Warsaw, not iff *any woman sitting at the table* lives in Warsaw. The direct reference theory is consistent with such an interpretation of α . If we assume, in accordance with this theory, that “she” is a directly referential expression then what this pronoun contributes to the proposition is Maria herself. Thus, α is a singular proposition, i.e., it includes Maria as one of its constituents: $\langle \odot, \textit{living in Warsaw} \rangle$, where “ \odot ” symbolises Maria herself (the real human being, the concrete macroscopic object). According to the rival descriptive account, (A) does not express a singular proposition since the indexical “she” is not considered directly referential but descriptive. Descriptivist claims that (A) expresses the proposition β : $\langle \textit{the woman that Alfred is pointing at, living in Warsaw} \rangle$ which does not include Maria herself, but instead, it includes attributive condition and so the proposition is about the woman pointed by Alfred, whomever she is. This proposition is true iff the person who satisfies the description “the woman that Alfred is pointing at” lives in Warsaw—it does not matter which particular person it is.

Let us assume that it is the case that Maria lives in Warsaw. Now, it may be said that since both α and β appear to be true there is no criterion for choosing which of them is the actual proposition expressed by (A) and maybe they differ only formally, and actually, they are the same proposition. Kaplan refers to counterfactual situations/possible worlds to justify the directly referential account and to show that the descriptive position is wrong. Think of the possible world W' in which Maria and Wanda switch their places and for some reason, they also dressed up for each other—probably to make a joke of Alfred. The joke turned

out to be successful and Alfred believes that Maria sits at the table, while in reality, it is Wanda dressed up for Maria. How would we interpret the proposition expressed by (A) with regard to W' ? Kaplan (1989, p. 513) emphasises that we do not interpret a proposition that would be expressed by Alfred in that possible world. We take into account the proposition actually expressed in the real world and evaluate it with regard to the world W' . And it appears that with regard to W' the proposition expressed by (A) should be considered true. In (A) Alfred stated that Maria lives in Warsaw, and with regard to W' , it is still true that Maria lives in Warsaw (no matter where she sits or lies, to say so). So while there is no reason to deny that α is true with regard to W' , it is obviously incorrect to assess β as true with regard to W' . If we agree that in (A) Alfred stated that the woman at whom he is pointing, whoever she is, lives in Warsaw, then with regard to W' he said something false, because now it is Wanda at whom he is pointing and Wanda does not live in Warsaw.

For Kaplan, the fact that α and β have different truth values with regard to various possible worlds is an undeniable reason to claim that they are not the same proposition. Identical propositions are supposed to share the same modal profile, i.e., they have the same truth values with regard to possible worlds. If two propositions do not share the same modal profile, they are different and the difference comes from the difference in semantics of expressions that build up sentences expressing these propositions. Hence, α and β are different propositions and they cannot be expressed by the same sentence. The proposition β is supposedly expressed by (B) “the woman that Alfred is pointing at lives in Warsaw”. The predicate is obviously the same in (A) and (B), yet the role of the grammatical subject in (A) is played by the indexical and by the definite description in (B). The difference in the modal behaviour of the propositions expressed by those sentences must then be a consequence of the different modal properties of the expressions playing the role of grammatical subjects. Since α is true with regard to both the real world and W' , while β is true only in the real world, it seems natural to consider indexical “she” to be rigid and the description appearing in (B) to be non-rigid. That led Kaplan to the conclusion that indexicals are directly referential expressions. Kaplan did not think that every rigid expression is directly referential (1989, pp. 494–495). He excludes *rigidified expressions*—i.e., expressions made rigid by the use of artificial formal methods (for more on this topic, see Section 5)—from the class of directly referential expressions. However, whenever we observe some natural—i.e., not introduced by formal rigidifying, but being a consequence of the semantic constitution of a given type of expression—we should consider these expressions directly referential. If an expression is naturally rigid it means that its only contribution to proposition is its reference.

3. The Descriptive Names Argument Against the Direct Reference Theory

The twofold nature of descriptive names happened to be one of the main problems for the direct reference theory. In what follows I present two versions of the descriptive names argument against the direct reference. Both of them focus on undermining the point of Kaplan's reasoning in which he claims that the difference in modal profiles of propositions is sufficient to consider these propositions not identical. The arguments by Michael Dummett and Jason Stanley are aimed at showing that in the case of propositions expressed by a sentence with a descriptive name and a sentence with the mother description of that descriptive name, we can speak of the same proposition which nevertheless has different truth values in various modal contexts.

3.1. Dummett's Argument

Dummett distinguishes the *assertoric content* of a sentence and its *ingredient sense* (1991, pp. 47–50). To know the assertoric content of a given sentence is to know which among adequate specifications makes this sentence true and which makes it false. An adequate specification for a given sentence is, roughly, a description of the world that is detailed enough to judge if the assertion conveyed by the sentence is correct or not. On the other hand, the ingredient sense is the content that a simple sentence contributes to the assertoric content of a complex sentence. According to Dummett, two sentences with the same assertoric content can express different ingredient senses. For instance, sentences like “Catiline was accused by Cicero” and “Catiline was accused by Tully” have the same assertoric content—they are true (resp. false) in virtue of exactly the same set of adequate specifications. However, these sentences can differ with respect to the ingredient senses they express, since similar complex sentences including these simple sentences may have different assertoric content. For example, “Alfred knows that Catiline was accused by Cicero” can be true in virtue of some adequate specification which for “Alfred knows, that Catiline was accused by Tully” will appear inadequate or will turn this sentence false. Dummett believes that ignoring the difference between assertoric content and ingredient sense was responsible for Kripke's mistake in the analysis of modal contexts. Dummett illustrates this with the following example including the descriptive name “St. Joachim”:

[Kripke] maintains that even if the name “St. Joachim” is introduced as denoting the father of the Blessed Virgin, whoever that may have been, the sentences “St. Joachim had a daughter” and “the father of Mary had a daughter” have a different modal status, since “St. Joachim” differs from “the father of Mary” in being a rigid designator, and we may therefore truly say, “St. Joachim might not have had a daughter”, but not, “the father of Mary might not have had a daughter”. He infers that “St. Joachim had a daughter” and “the father of Mary had a daughter” express different propositions. The word “proposition” is treacherous. What the two unmodalised sentences share is a common assertoric content; if Kripke is

right about the modalised sentences with “might have”, the unmodalised ones differ in ingredient sense, being (logically) subsentences of the modalised ones. The difference between them lies solely in their different contributions to the sentences formed from them by modalisation and negation; in a language without modal operators or auxiliaries, no difference could be perceived. (Dummett, 1991, p. 48)

Dummett’s argument boils down to pointing out that two sentences, one of which includes a descriptive name and the other includes the mother description, do not differ concerning their assertoric content. They differ solely with regard to the ingredient sense that they convey in modal contexts. What is crucial here is that it is the assertoric content that should be identified with what is traditionally regarded as a (“treacherous”) proposition or a semantic value of a sentence. Assertoric contents are truth-bearers and play the role of terms of logical relations (e.g., entailment)—these are functions by which the notion of proposition is usually defined. It may be said that the assertoric content of a sentence reflects the “essential semantic nature” of the sentence.

Kaplan considered the fact that two sentences have different truth values in different possible worlds to be proof that there exists some significant semantic difference between these sentences and between singular terms included in these sentences. Namely, he claimed that sentences in question express different propositions while the singular terms appearing in these sentences refer to objects in virtue of different semantic mechanisms. In particular, Kaplan claimed that the semantic mechanism of some terms is directly referential. Dummett thinks that it is a hasty judgment. He states that there is no significant semantic difference and that the difference in truth values can be explained with the notion of ingredient sense. Thus, Dummett’s solution stands in opposition to Kaplan’s theory—if there is no semantic significant difference, there is no justification for the thesis concerning direct reference.⁵

3.2. Stanley’s Argument

Stanley (2003) developed an updated and somehow modified version of the descriptive names argument against the direct reference. He appeals to Gricean pragmatic approach to language and makes use of the distinction between *what is said* and *what is communicated*. Stanley does not provide definitions of these notions as he claims that in pragmatics we deal with some kind of “local holism” when it comes to terminology and that the notions in question are mutually de-

⁵ It should be noted that a conception very similar to Dummett’s solution was presented by Evans in his (2002). Evans put it in more epistemological terms, however, the main idea is basically the same as in Dummett’s and it leads to a similar conclusion: “[r]ather we should accept that the two sentences are composed out of different parts of speech—quantifier versus a name—and that this is a difference in their construction to which modal operators are sensitive even though it leads to no difference in content” (Evans, 2002, p. 178).

finied by describing relations between them. These relations are captured in what Stanley calls *The Expression-Communication Principle* (2003, p. 329). In the shortest form the principle states that if two sentences are always used to communicate the same, they express the same proposition. In detail, the principle goes as follows:

For all S, S', c, c' , such that c and c' agree on all contextual features relevant for determining what is said by S and S' , S relative to c , and S' relative to c' , express the same proposition if and only if an utterance of S would communicate the same thing as an utterance of S' in every context c'' meeting the following four (sic!) conditions:

- (a) c'' agrees with c and c' on assignments to all contextually sensitive items in S and S' .
- (b) It is common knowledge that all participants understand the terms in S and S' and know the values of the context-dependent elements in S and S' relative to c'' .
- (c) It is common knowledge that each lexical item in S and S' would be intended to be used in accord with its actual literal meaning.
- (d) It is common knowledge that the speaker would be perspicuous (i.e., not flout the maxim of Manner). (Stanley, 2003, p. 329)

Stanley (2003, p. 333) refers to Evans's example of the descriptive name "Julius" which was introduced to the language via the mother description "whoever who invented the zip" (Evans, 2002, p. 181) and examines the following pair of sentences:

- (1) Julius like figs.
- (2) The inventor of the zip likes figs.

According to Stanley (1) and (2) express the same proposition and why it is so is well explained by the *Expression-Communication Principle*. Since "Julius" is a descriptive name semantically equal to the mother description, (1) and (2) are always used to communicate the same and they meet conditions (a)–(d). However, these sentences can have different truth values in various possible worlds, since "Julius" is assumed to be a rigid designator, while "the inventor of the zip" is a non-rigid description. For example, consider a possible world in which Kripke is the inventor of the zip. When the name was introduced to the language in the actual world—in which Kripke did not invent the zip—its reference was fixed to someone else than Kripke. Thus, as the name is a rigid designator it refers to someone else than Kripke in every possible world. Imagine that in the possible world in question Kripke likes figs, while Julius, the man who invented the zip in the actual world, hates these fruits. With regard to such a possible world (1) turns out to be a false while (2) is true. But still, due to the

Expression-Communication Principle (1) and (2) should be regarded as expressing the same proposition.

Similarly to Dummett, Stanley breaks up the connection between propositions and modality. If two sentences function differently on the modal ground, it does not mean that they express different propositions, but rather that propositions should not be considered bearers of modal properties. In other words, different behaviour in possible worlds reveals nothing about propositions. So if for Kaplan modal differences were a reason for some claims about propositions and eventually about the semantic characteristic of singular terms, Stanley knocks the modal weapon out of Kaplan's hands.

4. Minor Problems

In what follows I am going to present several doubts concerning the validity of Dummett-Stanley's argument from descriptive names against the direct reference. I start with minor issues that somehow dull the edge of Kaplan's argument but I think are not knocking-down objections. Then I move to the heart of the whole problem, namely the rigidity of descriptive names, which seems to be the biggest challenge for the adherent of the direct reference theory.

4.1. Inaccuracy

Let us start with a very general remark that the descriptive names argument actually does not undermine the direct reference itself—it undermines only the universality of Kaplan's argument. Shortly speaking, from the fact that some expressions are rigid designators Kaplan derived that they are directly referential. According to the descriptive names argument, on the other hand, there are expressions—namely descriptive proper names—which are not directly referential even though they are rigid. However, that there are some rigid and not directly referential expressions does not entail that there are no directly referential expressions. Ordinary proper names, demonstratives or descriptions used referentially can still be considered directly referential. The descriptive names argument diminishes the power of Kaplan's argument but it does not reject it.

4.2. Methodological Concerns

It is always a risky philosophical strategy to use an example of some extraordinary objects against a theory of ordinary objects. This strategy is adopted in the descriptive names argument. As I said in section 1 descriptive names are extremely odd semantic creatures. The question concerning their more-like-descriptions vs more-like-proper-names nature remains unanswered. And both answers seem equally justified. On the other hand, the direct reference theory is well established and quite commonly accepted (at least for some expressions).

Arguing against it with such unusual semantically wobbly expressions like descriptive names is not fully convincing.

According to the descriptive account of descriptive names (Jeshion, 2004), a descriptive name is semantically equal to the mother description. And since the mother description is not a rigid designator, the name itself also is not rigid. In such a case the descriptive names argument fails because the essential part of the argument is breaking up the connection between modal properties of sentences and propositions expressed by them. If a descriptive name and the mother description, both non-rigid, behave in the same way in possible worlds, there is no reason to break up the connection. Of course, even within the descriptive account, it can be stipulated that descriptive names are rigid even though the relevant descriptions are not. Such a strategy, however, is utterly unjustified and the alleged rigidity appears to be a rabbit from a hat.

In the referential account of descriptive names, they are considered a very special type of referential expression. Like all proper names, also descriptive names are then regarded as rigid designators. In such a case the descriptive names argument stays relevant. However, as said before it appears to be methodologically dubious because it turns out to be relevant only for this very special type of expression and irrelevant for the vast majority of them.

5. The Main Problem: Rigidity of Descriptive Names

It is clear that the heart of the descriptive names argument is the issue of the alleged rigidity of descriptive names. Denying that descriptive names are rigid completely undermines the argument. In my opinion, regardless of whether we accept a descriptive or referential approach to descriptive names, there are no good reasons to admit that these names are rigid.

In the case of expressions commonly considered rigid, like ordinary proper names, demonstratives or referentially used definite descriptions, there exists a reasonable explanation as to where their rigidity comes from.⁶ Namely, they are rigid in virtue of how they are introduced to the language (proper names) or because of the specific way in which they are used (demonstratives, referential descriptions). Although some differences between them are obvious, what is common is that in the process of introducing/using those expressions it is always the object itself that is at the centre of attention. Reference is fixed to one particular object, not to some object, whichever it is, or to an object reached via some mode of presentation. Expression is stuck to the thing itself. For descriptive names, things appear radically different. One of their indispensable features is that the object that is supposed to be their reference is absent when the name is introduced. And there is no way to fix a name's reference to a particular object when the only way to access the object is via some mother description which is always used attributively. If Jack the Ripper or Neptune were present at the nam-

⁶ This explanation was provided mainly in Evans's works (1973; 1982; 2002).

ing ceremonies, there would be no reason to give them a descriptive name instead of an ordinary proper name. Furthermore, in many cases, speakers who introduce a descriptive name have serious doubts if the intended object even exists. Descriptive names are used to refer to objects that hung somewhere between fiction and reality. It appears inadequate to say that a speaker can stick a name to these alleged objects in such cases. Thus, the claim that descriptive names are rigid is highly dubious as it remains very vague where the rigidity of descriptive names comes from.

Edward Kanterian (2009) proposed an approach to descriptive names which is supposed to explain their rigidity. Kanterian claims that descriptive names are so extraordinary concerning their semantics properties, that in their case we should rather speak of *super-rigidity* than mere rigidity (Kanterian, 2009, pp. 414–416). Super-rigidity is ascribed to the expressions whose reference mechanism is defined by the following schema:

$$\forall y \text{ (“}e\text{” refers to } y \leftrightarrow y = \iota x \psi x)$$

According to Kanterian descriptive names are super-rigid since—as he claims—the object they refer to is not crucial for their reference mechanism. In other words, he thinks that a descriptive name fulfils its semantic function (i.e., its use is not defective) even if the object it is supposed to refer to does not exist.⁷ So the alleged rigidity does not have its source in the baptism ceremony at which the object is present. I think that although the idea may seem quite intriguing it eventually boils down to the claim that descriptive names are rigid regardless of the existence of their reference. Kanterian says that *ordinary rigidity* is a feature of non-empty descriptive names, but it would be incorrect to say that an empty descriptive name is [ordinarily] rigid—if a name does not refer to anything, it is obvious that it cannot refer to some object in all possible worlds. Hence, Kanterian concludes that *ordinary rigidity* is a contingent property of some of the descriptive names, while *super-rigidity* is the indispensable property of all of them.

Let us now try to figure out are there any expressions other than descriptive names that are *super-rigid*. It seems quite natural to say that rigidified definite descriptions are super-rigid. For example, take the rigidified description “the planet *actually* responsible for the irregularities of Uranus”. If there is such a planet in the actual world, the description would refer to this particular planet in every possible world. Thus, the description is super-rigid. It is now quite tempting to consider such rigidified descriptions to be the mother descriptions of descriptive names,⁸ e.g.:

⁷ As opposed to ordinary proper names which function properly only if their reference does exist (Evans, 1982, p. 378).

⁸ It should be mentioned here that this idea was firstly introduced by Donnellan (1981).

Let us call the planet *actually* responsible for the irregularities of Uranus “Neptune”.

In such a case it seems that because the mother description of “Neptune” is a rigidified *super-rigid* description, and it is said that descriptive names inherit semantic features from their “mother descriptions”, Neptune inherits rigidity from “the planet that is actually responsible for the irregularities of Uranus”.

However, things are not that simple. Kanterian (2009, pp. 416–419) distinguishes and discusses two ways of rigidifying descriptions. The first one involves Kaplanian “dthat” (Kaplan, 1975). Description “the planet responsible for irregularities of Uranus” rigidified by the use of “dthat” has the following form:

dthat[planet responsible for the irregularities of Uranus]

Kaplan introduced “dthat” as a “substitute of demonstration” so it has no descriptive content. According to Kaplan, the descriptive content of the description in the bracket does not belong to the proposition expressed by a sentence including the description. The proposition expressed by “dthat[planet responsible for the irregularities of Uranus] is composed of gas” can be presented as $\langle \odot, G \rangle$ where “ \odot ” symbolises the planet itself—a huge sphere of gas, not any concept or idea or description of the planet. There is no intensional descriptive content in the proposition that would correspond to the description “the planet responsible for the irregularities of Uranus”. Roughly speaking, “dthat” makes descriptions *descriptively transparent*—a description rigidified by “dthat” is just a demonstration device and it does not bear any descriptive content. Therefore, as noted by Kanterian (2009, p. 417), the descriptions rigidified with “dthat” cannot be used as reference fixing for descriptive names, since it is congenital for descriptive names that they derive their descriptive content from their mother descriptions—and if “dthat” somehow cancels such content of these descriptions, descriptive names have nothing to derive from.

The other way of making descriptions rigid was established by Martin Davies and Floyd Humberstone (1980) who introduced two modal operators: \mathcal{A} —actually, and \mathcal{F} —fixedly. The first one is a standard rigidifier, while \mathcal{F} when it interacts with \mathcal{A} , plays the role of a derigidifier. For instance, the description “ $\mathcal{F}\mathcal{A}$ (planet responsible for the irregularities of Uranus)” is interpreted as: the planet that is responsible for the irregularities of Uranus in a world that is considered as actual. When our real-world W is considered as actual, the description refers to the planet responsible for the irregularities of Uranus in W , i.e., Neptune, and the reference is rigid: the description refers to that planet in every non-actual possible world. At the same time, if some world W^* ($\neq W$) was considered as actual the description would refer to the planet that is responsible for the irregularities of Uranus in W^* (and that could be another planet than the one in W). And the reference also would be rigid but with regard to W^* , i.e., in every possible non-actual world (one of which from this perspective is our W) the

description would refer to that planet. Basically, operators \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{F} are supposed to capture two aspects of modality acknowledged in two-dimensional semantics.

Kanterian (2009, p. 418) claims that Davis's and Humberson's solution does not help in defending the rigidity of descriptive names, because the solution allows that in some possible world the descriptive name "Neptune" refers to a different object than in the real world W . That would be equal for the name to lose its proper-names-like referential rigid character.

I believe Kanterian is wrong on this point. Contrary to him I think that the two-dimensional approach involving \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{F} allows us to consider descriptive names as rigid and equal to rigidified mother descriptions. In my opinion, Kanterian demands too much from descriptive names as he requires them to be rigid in the same way as ordinary proper names are. As said before, obviously this is the heart of the whole problem with descriptive names—the way they differ from ordinary proper names with respect to rigidity. Let us take a short look at the rigidity of ordinary proper names. As it is exposed in two-dimensional semantics, proper names are rigid to the highest degree of rigidity, to say so. "Nixon" refers to Nixon in absolutely every possible world (in which he exists), no matter which world is considered as actual. It is impossible to construct a possible world in which "Nixon" does not refer to Nixon. Why is it so? Because ordinary proper names have no descriptive content and no semantic content other than their reference. Anytime we would like to consider a world in which "Nixon" does not refer to Nixon, we are inevitably transferred into talking about a different proper name than the one we initially considered. Referring to Nixon is an indispensable feature of the name "Nixon" and if we deny that feature, we do not talk about that name anymore. When an ordinary proper name is disconnected from its reference, it loses its identity.

Things look significantly different when it comes to the descriptive names because the definitional property of these names is that they bear descriptive content.⁹ It is true that along with ordinary proper names, descriptive names belong to the class of expressions whose contribution to propositions is exclusively their reference; however, descriptive names, unlike ordinary proper names, have also that descriptive charge which is their congenital feature. Descriptive content is sensitive to context and since descriptive content determines reference, reference of descriptive expressions, in general, is (to a various extent) sensitive to context. Thus, it is a fundamental mistake to require descriptive expressions (e.g., descriptive names) to be semantically equivalent to non-descriptive expressions. Especially, when it comes to semantic properties—like rigidity—which concern changing of reference in contexts/possible worlds. As it is captured by two-dimensional semantics there are several "degrees" of rigidity. On the one side of the spectrum we have ordinary proper names which are "rigidly rigid"—both their semantic functions, i.e., character and content are con-

⁹ If descriptive content was taken away from a given proper names that name would become an ordinary proper name. The history of "Neptune" shows how it may happen.

stant. On the other side, we have definite descriptions used attributively which are not rigid at all—their character and content are not constant. In between there are expressions with hybrid modal semantic properties, e.g., indexicals are considered to be “indexically rigid”—their character is constant but the content is not. It means that reference of such expression is relativised to the circumstances of utterance or in other words—to the world which is considered as actual. If we consider as actual the world in which I utter “I am hungry”, indexical “I” refers to me. If the world in which such a sentence is uttered by Barrack Obama is considered as actual, then the indexical refers to Obama. However, once a reference is fixed in the currently-actual world, it is thus fixed for all possible worlds. So if the world in which I utter the above sentence is considered as actual, it does not matter with regard to which possible world the proposition expressed by the sentence will be evaluated, the proposition is always about me because the reference of “I” has been fixed to me. Definite descriptions rigidified by the use of \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{F} behave similarly to indexicals. Their reference depends on which world is considered as actual, but once the reference is fixed it is constant across various possible worlds. Description “ \mathcal{FA} [the president of the USA in 2010]” refers to Obama if our real world is considered as actual. And if its reference is fixed this way, it refers to Obama in every possible world. If the world in which the results of the 2008 election are different and John McCain wins was considered as actual, then the description in question would refer to McCain in that world as well as in every possible world. This kind of indexical rigidity is the most we can expect from any descriptive expression. A higher degree of rigidity would be the “rigid rigidity” which is characteristic of ordinary proper names and as I argued, they are so strongly rigid precisely because of a lack of any descriptive content. There is no way to ascribe descriptive names with such a strong rigidity since they have descriptive content. The indexical rigidity, however, appears to work perfectly for descriptive names and I believe it is the strongest rigidity we can attribute to them. For that reason, I think it is adequate to claim that the mother descriptions descriptive names are \mathcal{FA} -rigidified descriptions. Such an account explains the rigidity of descriptive names which thus turns out to be the indexical rigidity. We should remember that the indexical rigidity is not “weak”. It is not as strong as the rigidity possessed by ordinary proper names, but still a strong one: indexical rigidity guarantees that a descriptive name refers to the same object in every possible world, once its reference is fixed. Moreover, as far as I am concerned, the indexical aspect of rigidity corresponds very well with the nature of descriptive names. When we introduce a descriptive name we do not know or are not sure which particular object is the one that satisfies the given mother description and thus—which particular object is the bearer of the descriptive name. In other words, we do not know or are not sure which world should be considered as actual—and that is manifested in the indexical aspect of the rigidity of descriptive names. When Le Verrier introduced the descriptive name “Neptune” he did not know which planet did cause the irregularities of Uranus. He did not know if it was the new planet Neptune or Saturn or Earth, i.e., he did not know

whether the actual world is the one in which the new planet causes irregularities or the one in which Saturn causes irregularities, and so on. Hence, I think that we should not consider this indexical aspect of rigidity of descriptive names as something unwanted. It is my firm belief, that this indexical aspect is absolutely crucial to the nature of descriptive names as well as their rigidity across possible worlds.^{10, 11}

6. Conclusion

My main concern in the previous section was the mystery of the rigidity of descriptive names. The conclusion I have arrived at is as follows: descriptive names are indexically rigid, in a manner similar to indexicals or definite descriptions rigidified by the operators \mathcal{F} and \mathcal{A} . Once the reference is fixed to an object, the descriptive name refers to that object in every possible world. However, depending on the context (resp. the world considered as actual) the reference of a descriptive name can be fixed to various objects. The indexical rigidity of descriptive names takes its origin in the rigidity of mother descriptions which are

¹⁰ At this point, someone may ask why we need descriptive names if semantically they are just equivalents of rigidified descriptions. This issue goes beyond the topic of this paper, so I will address it shortly: even if semantically they are equivalent, they are definitely not equivalent psychologically or epistemologically. I believe that Jeshion (see Section 1) is right when she says that psychological neutrality is what we need descriptive names for. We should not underrate the importance of such neutrality. In other words, we do not need descriptive names to obtain rigidity—rigidity is something that (rigidified) descriptions can provide us with. The descriptions, however, are not able to stay psychologically neutral, as they inevitably present the reference in some particular aspect.

¹¹ Worth mentioning and at the same surprising is what Kanterian proposes as his answer to the question of what are the mother descriptions for descriptive names. As said before, he rejects \mathcal{FA} -rigidified descriptions as candidates for that and he (2009, p. 419) suggests that instead, we should focus on the fact that a description that plays a role of a mother description is not only *mentioned* but actually *used*. That, in his opinion, preserves the rigidity of descriptive names, because if the description is used, and not merely mentioned, it is always used in some particular context and thus it refers to some particular object. A descriptive name that takes its reference from its mother description will thus always (in all possible worlds) refer to the object that was the reference of the description in that particular context. In my opinion, this solution is substantially the same as the account involving \mathcal{A} and \mathcal{F} . If a description—either an \mathcal{FA} -rigidified one or a bare description—is merely mentioned, and not used, by definition it does not refer to anything, so it does not deliver reference to a given descriptive name. If, on the other hand, a description is used in a given context as referring to a particular object, it ... refers to a particular object; and constitutes it as a reference of a descriptive name. And once the reference is fixed, it stays constant across possible worlds, although we can always think of a different context (i.e., consider another world as actual) in which the description would pick another object. I cannot see any substantial difference between Kanterian's account and Davies's and Humberstone's position. I think that even though Kanterian does not directly use modal operators, he in fact states exactly the same as what can be shown by the use of these operators.

FA-rigidified descriptions. What are the consequences of such an account for the argument against the direct reference theory? Initially, it may seem that delivering the explanation of rigidity of descriptive names enforces the arguments against the direct reference. The assumption that descriptive names are rigid was essential for both Dummett's and Stanley's arguments. More precisely, the clue of these arguments is the observation that although two sentences—one with a descriptive name and the other with a mother description of that name—behave differently in modal contexts, the sentences express the same proposition because a descriptive name is equal to its mother description with respect to the semantic properties. At first glance, my attempt to reinforce the rigidity of descriptive names could be taken as supporting the positions of Dummett and Stanley. That is obviously a misimpression. Their arguments are valid only if we agree that descriptive names and their mother descriptions have different modal properties. As I argued above, that is not the case. Both descriptive names and their mother descriptions are indexically rigid—they function identically in possible worlds. If the mother description of the name “Julius” is not “whoever who invented the zip” but “*FA*[whoever who invented the zip]” sentences examined by Stanley:

- (1) Julius like figs,
- (2') *FA*[The inventor of the zip] likes figs

not only express the same proposition but share the same modal profile. If the possible world in which Kripke invented the zip is considered as actual “Julius” as well as the mother description in question refer to Kripke in that world and all possible worlds. Thus, (1) and (2') are true in all the worlds in which Kripke likes figs, and false in all the worlds in which it is not the case that Kripke likes figs. And if the world in which I am the inventor of the zip is considered as actual the situation is analogous and (1) and (2') are true in all the worlds in which I like figs and are not true in all the worlds in which it is not the case.

Stanley as well as Dummett proclaimed the break up between propositions and modal properties of sentences. As I believe and as I attempted to argue they were wrong. And they were wrong because descriptive names turn out to be non-rigid, but because their assumptions about modal properties of propositions expressed by sentences with mother descriptions were incorrect.

For the sake of fairness, it has to be said that although the account proposed in this paper stands against Dummett's and Stanley's arguments, it does not consolidate Kaplan's argument for direct reference. Descriptive names understood as equivalents of rigidified descriptions are not the expressions for which Kaplan would derive their direct reference from their rigidity. As I mentioned earlier Kaplan excludes “artificially” rigid expressions from the scope of his argument. I argued that descriptive names are not “naturally” rigid like proper names or indexicals. Instead, they are designed to be rigid by founding them on their rigidified mother descriptions. All in all, descriptive names turn out to be neutral

about direct reference—they do not support it, but as was argued above, they also do not undermine the idea. What else could we expect from exotic birds.

REFERENCES

- Davies, M., Humberstone, L. (1980). Two Notions of Necessity. *Philosophical Studies*, 38, 1–30.
- Donnellan, K. (1981). The Contingent A Priori and Rigid Designators. In P. French, T. Uehling, H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language* (pp. 45–60). Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dummett, M. (1991). *The Logical Basis of Metaphysics*. Cambridge, MA: HUP.
- Evans, G. (1973). The Causal Theory of Names. *Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume*, 47(1), 187–208.
- Evans, G. (2002). Reference and Contingency. In G. Evans, *Collected Papers* (pp. 178–213). Oxford: OUP.
- Evans, G. (1982). *The Varieties of Reference*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jeshion, R. (2004). Descriptive Descriptive Names. In M. Reimer, A. Bezuidenhout (Eds.), *Descriptions and Beyond* (pp. 591–612). Oxford: OUP.
- Kanterian, E. (2009). Puzzles about Descriptive Names. *Linguistic and Philosophy*, 32, 409–428.
- Kaplan, D. (1968). Quantifying In. *Synthese*, 19(1), 178–214.
- Kaplan, D. (1975). Dthat. In P. Cole, J. Morgan (Eds.), *Syntax and Semantics* (Vol. 9, pp. 221–243). New York: New York Academic Press.
- Kaplan, D. (1989). Demonstratives. In J. Almog, J. Perry, H. Wettstein (Eds.), *Themes From Kaplan* (pp. 481–563). New York: OUP.
- Kripke, S. (1972). *Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Reimer, M. (2004). Descriptively Introduced Names. In M. Reimer, A. Bezuidenhout (Eds.), *Descriptions and Beyond* (pp. 613–629). Oxford: OUP.
- Searle, J. (1958). Proper Names. *Mind*, 266(67), 166–173.
- Stanley, J. (2003). Modality and What is Said. In J. Hawthorne (Ed.), *Language and Mind* (Vol. 16, pp. 321–344). Oxford: Blackwell.