

# ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE THEORY OF REFERENCE OF PROPER NAMES

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## ABSTRACT

*This article covers the leading contemporary theories of reference of proper names. It is shown that both descriptive theories of Frege and Russell and causal historic theory of Kripke have problems with explaining reference. Kaplan's theory of indexicals is also examined. It is claimed that indexicality is necessary for any reference of proper names. Without indexicality proper names have no real value. Theories of proper names are investigated in the context of their metaphysical and epistemological foundations. The notions of ontological realism and ontological antirealism are exposed. It is shown that the controversy of realism and antirealism can be clarified and get additional support from relevant theories of reference. It is maintained that the onto-epistemological basis for the descriptive theory of reference is antirealism and for the causal historic theory is realism. But the real problem for both realism and antirealism is an explanation of reference of indexicals. There are arguments which support both realist and antirealist approach to indexicals.*

**Key words:** *philosophy of language, proper names, indexicals, realism, antirealism.*

## INTRODUCTION

In the philosophy of language the dispute over the reference of proper names has not been abating yet. In the twentieth century the most well-known theories of reference are Frege and Russell variants of the descriptive theory and the causal historical theory advanced by Kripke. This article attempts to make a critical review of these theories in the context of D. Kaplan theory of indexicals. Also, we will analyze these theories in the context of contemporary metaphysics, in particular realism and anti-realism. To achieve these goals, we will rely on the methodology of analytic philosophy.

## THE DESCRIPTIVE THEORY OF PROPER NAMES

This theory goes back to G. Frege's and B. Russell's ideas. Its essence is reduced to the fact that the names are some concise definitions, descriptions that determine the object of naming. So, Frege believed that the proper names to be determined by the meaning of the sentence containing a name (Frege G., 2008, p.38). For example, if we compare the following sentences

Hillary Clinton is the US presidential candidate (1)

Hillary Clinton is the wife of the former US President (2),

It stands to reason, that depending on the meaning of a sentence (1) or (2) we will proceed from the fact whether the meaning of all the other sentences in which we meet the name "Hillary Clinton" is defined.

According to Frege, the name is associated not only with the subject which it designates but also with the meaning expressed in use of the name. This special meaning emphasis allows

us to introduce the distinction of what the signified is given in the language. It is a matter of principle in cases when the same subject has two different names. If a and b are the names of a subject, it is clear that the equality  $a = b$  is different from trivial identity  $a = a$ . For example, the phrase “Jack London – John Cheyne” is not identical from the cognitive point of view with simply “Jack London - Jack London”. Knowing of Jack London’s real name to be John Chaney is the knowledge not of a real person but of the names by which he is represented, that is, the knowledge of the different senses of the used signs.

In turn, Russell's theory of descriptions argues that any propositional sentence is a vague description, which can be expressed in the following form

$$\text{Some } A \text{ is } B \quad (3)$$

or

$$x(Ax \wedge Bx) \quad (4)$$

This approach allows Russell to solve the problem of reference to the non-existent objects (Russell, B., 1957, p. 108).

Thus, from the standpoint of the descriptive theory of proper names, proper names are not dependent in their use on referents as they represent the semantic meaning of a definite description. It is not difficult to note that, based on such position, it becomes very problematic to explain the way the name refers to the same subject, in particular, if we assume the possibility of changing descriptions. It is this difficulty of descriptivism that Saul Kripke focuses on.

### **THE CASUAL-HISTORICAL THEORY OF PROPER NAMES**

According to Kripke’s argumentation, changing the meaning of the descriptive definition would not in any way affect references of the name to the denoting objects. If it would suddenly be revealed that William Shakespeare was not the author of “Hamlet”, it would not change the fact that, saying “Shakespeare”, we mean exactly Shakespeare, but not any other playwright, who was the real author of “Hamlet”.

Kripke explains it by the fact that proper names are directly linked to the referent. In other words, the name is associated with the subject of relation of the direct reference. Therefore, Kripke defines proper names as rigid designators. It means that the names “designate the same object in all possible worlds” (Kripke, Saul, 1980, p. 48). It is clear that the term “possible worlds” refers to the worlds in which descriptive definition of the object is different from its description in the actual world.

Kripke believes that the primary naming of the object like the act of christening that implies a reference to the object or its unique description. Naming makes a precedent of referential name-object relationship, which historically is inherited by all subsequent acts of usage.

The problem of the causal-historical theory consists in the fact that the primary naming can be an event utterly remote in time, and so there is no possibility to reliably establish the correctness of the reference, for example, the name of “Aristotle” directly to Aristotle himself.

Besides, understanding the names as rigid designators leads to the fact that a certain referent should correspond to every name one way or another, which threatens either resuming the problem of reference to non-existent objects, or a significant worsening the ontological picture, as one will have to assume a special existence of imaginary and non-existent referents.

## INDEXICALS AND PROPER NAMES

With regard to the issue of reference of proper names it seems appropriate to consider the problems of indexical statements. The need for such consideration is in that the indexicals very often act in language as substitutes of the names (this is especially evident in the personal pronouns), at the same time, indexicals are not, like proper names, descriptively charged, and at the same time, they directly indicate to the associated object. This gives us the reason to assume that the study of indexical statements will help to clarify the nature of proper names and avoid shortcomings of either descriptive and causal theories.

In contemporary analytic philosophy, the most widespread and influential theory of indexicals is the theory developed by American philosopher David Kaplan.

Kaplan builds his own theory of indexicals proceeding from two fundamental principles (Kaplan, David, 1989, p. 481):

- The referent of pure indexicals depends on the context.

If two different men state: “I work as a schoolteacher” then each speaks exactly about himself.

- Indexicals are direct reference.

This principle means that in some context *k* is a pure indexical “I” that is the referent to the subject in this context. In other words, the indexical “I” expresses the very subject in the context rather than a fixed descriptive content or any quality of the subject, for example, “speaking”. According to Kaplan, proper names are direct reference.

However, Kaplan, following Kripke’s terminology, defines indexicals as rigid designators. It means that an object being the referent of indexical expression given a specific context in the actual world is the object of the expression in the same context and in any of the possible worlds. Roughly speaking, the term “I” used by me in relation to myself should designate me in all possible worlds.

From our point of view, the commonly held conviction that indexicals have always a referent seems to be quite arguable. However, in this case, the axioms of Kaplan’s theory will prove to be incorrect. Therefore, we will try to consistently explain the reasons for our doubts.

Imagine a situation in which we are meeting with a man completely unknown to us. We do not know anything about him; we have not seen him before and heard anything about him. But instead of introducing, the stranger says simply “I” (“Me”). Will it be really an acquaintance? It is unlikely that such a performance can be satisfied, because we already know the character of indexicalization, its independent linguistic meaning. Therefore, an indexical per se appears to be completely meaningless. Being irrelevant to the context, the character of the indexical “I” allows it to be used by any subject in any context, which makes its independent use being non-referring. In other words, if there is no reference determiner, then there is no referent (Karimov, A.R., Kazakova V.A., 2014, p. 285). Obviously, indexicals per se do not have any content, so the referent is possible only if there is some expression, indexicalization represents an instrument of language indication. Indexicals are essence auxiliary language elements having no independent content. Take the following indexical statement:

“I am John Smith” (6)

Let us assume that we are in a situation when someone utters this statement. Accordingly, we have three constituents of the sentence (6): indexical “I”, the proper name “John Smith” and immediately the very subject, which is designated as *s*. If we say that *s* is the essence referent of

the name “John Smith”, then the role performed by the indexical becomes not entirely clear. In order to clarify it, let us present (6) in the form of a structural proposition

$$[s[A[d]]] \text{ (7)}$$

Where  $d$  - the name “John Smith”,  $A$  - relation “to have”, and  $s$  – the referent. As the referent can only have a real value, then in (7), it is uncertain and can be represented as a function

$$[Fs[A[d]]] \text{ (8)}$$

The equation (8) means that someone has the name "John Smith". To this, the function has taken a particular value, it is necessary to specify that it has a referent. This function of indication is performed by the indexical “I”. It is an indexical that indicates that (8) has that we we’ll call “real value” in this paper.

$$[Fs[A[d]]]=s' \text{ (9)}$$

The expression (9) means that the propositional function <somebody has the name “John Smith”> has real value  $s'$ , which is the referent of the sentence (6). The equal sign here is expressed by the indexical and means “has a real value”.

Thus, the reference of any sentences is possible only thanks to indexicals the function of which consists solely in reference, in demonstrations and direct indication to the real value of the name.

If indexication is not carried out or not possible, then there are propositional functions as a descriptive logical connective.

Aristotle is Platon's pupil

$$[Fn[B[z]]] \wedge [Fn[C[f]]] \text{ (10)}$$

Here  $F_n$  - the function of the referent,  $B$  and  $C$  - relations,  $z$  - the name “Aristotle”,  $f$  - Platon. The conjunction (10) means “Someone has the name “Aristotle” and someone is a disciple of Platon”.

Thus, we have shown that the direct reference of the name to the object is possible only in indexication, which reveals the presence of a real value of the function of the referent. Out of indexication any names are descriptive definitions, as they do not have the possibility of reference.

## REALISM AND ANTIREALISM

The above findings can be justified at the ontological level. To do this, it is essential to consider the ontological foundations of reference theories. The most important in modern ontology are considered to be the theories of realism and antirealism. The statement of the position of realism can be reduced to the conjunction of two propositions:

1) if something exists, it exists regardless of our social or linguistic conventions, our ways of perceiving and understanding the world, our interests and desires - ours and other people's;

2) we can have a definite answer to the question about what it is. That is, this answer will be either true or false (Miller, Alexander, 2014).

The first utterance means that the world is such as it is, *irrespective of knowing the subject*. From the point of view of realism, it is unfairly to attribute the things that do not really exist in the reality. Realistic metaphysics is closely related to the correspondence theory of truth, which is meant in the second term of conjunction. If something either exists or does not, then the statement about it can be either true or false. Aristotle, the father of formal logic, expressed it in

the famous principle of non-contradiction, which implies a bivalent theory of truth values of statements (Greenough, P. and Lynch, M. eds., 2006).

In contrast to realism, anti-realism retains the first term of disjunction but declines the second. From the viewpoint of antirealism:

- 1) something exists before and irrespective of our social and linguistic conventions;
- 2) but the answer to the question what exactly exists is determined by the language of description, which (the language) depends on our social and linguistic conventions, our ways of perceiving and understanding the world, our interests and desires - ours and other people's (Brock, S and Mares, E., 2007).

Antirealism puts language in front of the reality so that it is impossible to say what is really beyond the scope of context awareness, beyond language reality that establishes the reference to the objects. Antirealism reasoning can be illustrated by an example. Assume that the automobile speedometer shows 100 kilometers per hour, and someone asks, how fast the automobile moves. From the standpoint of antirealism, this question is meaningless because the answer to it depends on whether, with respect to what we measure vehicle speed: to a stationary or a moving object (Putnam H., 1990).

This argumentation is not conclusive for the realist. The realist's answer to this example could be the following. Assume that the measurement method depends on the subject and may influence the validity of the correspondent utterance. In other words, the dependence of the truth of the statements on the method of measurement - the feature of a statement, that is the language. But who denies that the features of the statement depend on the statement? The truth of the statements and the very statement lie in the same plane - in the plane of language. The reality in this case is affected in no way. As the automobile's speed depends on the very automobile - the engine power, the driver's actions, etc. To say that the speed of the automobile depends on the measurement is to make a classic fallacy of ambiguity (Putnam, H., 1981).

It is quite permissible to assume that anti-realism is a more natural for the descriptive theory of reference of proper names and realism – for the theories of direct reference and the causal-historical theory. Consider to what extent this assessment is correct. The descriptive theory comes from the fact that the referent is determined by a set of specific descriptions. In other words, the names do not relate directly to the reality, and only through the senses in people's minds. On the contrary, the causal-historical theory sets that, regardless of the descriptions, the names rigidly fix their referent, irrespective of what notions the subject associates with this name (these ideas can even be mistaken, it does not matter). Thus, if the criticism of the descriptive theory of reference is true, then this argument against anti-realism in metaphysics per se is strong. However, not everything is simple. Difficulties are associated with indexicals. On the one hand, Kaplan believes that they rigidly fix their referent via the character and make direct reference. "I" is always the one who speaks. "Here" is always there, where someone says something. However, we have found that in general it is doubtful that indexicals have a referent. Indeed, they per se do not have any content. We have also suggested that indexicals are essential for reference of any terms as they perform the function of indication ("John is me"). And since the content of the indexical expressions is determined exclusively via context, it follows that it is impossible to express the situation of reference without description (who says). For example, I say "I am in Paris". To understand the meaning of this expression one is to clarify the nature of the indication to "I". But the indication is impossible without the knowing the context (for example, "the author of this article", etc.). Thus, based on these

considerations, one can draw an unexpected conclusion that the reference of indexical expressions is inexplicable, if not to refer to antirealist position.

What objections could a realist make? Firstly, it is possible to throw doubt on the relationship between the reference and indexical. The realist would say that the names directly point to the objects without indexicals. Secondly, there may be a fine line of argumentation. If to argue that the actual world is always the same, i. e., one in which I say “I”, then when Obama says “I am the US president”, he automatically points to himself. Of course, in a possible world  $W_1$ , somebody else could say “I am the president of the United States”, and then it would indicate to him. But in the actual world the fact is that the US president is Barack Obama. And this very fact rather than any descriptions matters. Therefore, “I is the US president” said by Obama in our world has the reference exactly to Obama. Let's say that someone believes that Obama is a known terrorist (Osama). When he mentions about Obama, all the same he suggests the American president (even though he mistakenly believes him to be a terrorist)

## CONCLUSION

In this article, we have discussed the differences between descriptive and causal-historical theories of reference, and shown that the reference of proper names is not possible without indexical that performs the function of indication. We have also seen into the ontological foundations of these theories. To do this, we have analyzed the argumentation between realism and anti-realism and found out that the descriptive theory is based on anti-realism, the causal-historical theory – on realism. We have also realized that the ontological explanation of indexicals is controversial, because there are arguments in favor of both realism and anti-realism.

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