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Why Proper Names Are Rigid Designators

MICHAEL PENDLEURY
University of the Witwatersrand

In this paper I argue that the rigidity of proper names can be explained by appealing to a more fundamental semantic feature which I refer to as their arbitrariness. I assume and do not try to show that proper names are rigid designators. My purpose, rather, is to establish a connection between their arbitrariness and rigidity which, even though contingent, shows that rigidity is a far less accidental feature of names than it might otherwise appear. Sections I and II of the paper are brief discussions of the notions of arbitrariness and rigidity respectively. In section III I begin by saying why it seems that these two features of names must be connected, and then proceed to identify the link between them by means of a fairly detailed argument. My final section, IV, is a response to the objection that my argument does not do justice to the important distinction between a name and a use of a name to denote a particular thing.

I would like to stress at the outset that this paper does not aim to convert those who deny that proper names are rigid designators, or to answer their objections to this thesis. In my view these objections are answerable, but that is another topic. It is also worth emphasizing that the paper operates within the framework of the causal approach to name reference. Although my arguments for the arbitrariness of proper names go against many versions of descriptivism, there are no doubt some sophisticated versions of descriptivism which escape them. The diehard descriptivist will not accept my explanation of rigidity, but I hope that he will view it as a contribution towards the detailed articulation of the only significant rival to his approach.

There is one further preliminary issue I would like to address: Isn’t it just obvious to most people who accept the causal approach and who think that proper names are rigid designators that their rigidity is due to their arbitrariness? My answer is that it is perfectly natural to think this, and I claim no originality for the thought. But thinking a thought is one
thing, and establishing its truth is another — even if it may seem obvious to many. What I take to be novel about this paper is the detailed case it offers in support of the claim that the arbitrariness of proper names explains their rigidity. Whatever the reader thinks of my arguments, the paper does illustrate that it is not necessary to rely only on hunches and intuitions on this issue.

I. Arbitrariness

What I am calling the arbitrariness of proper names is their fundamental feature from a semantic point of view. Indeed, we could define a proper name simply as a singular term which is arbitrary in the relevant sense. All linguistic expressions are of course arbitrary in so far as they might not have meant what they do, but the arbitrariness of names goes way beyond this. There are two crucial points to be made here.

First, the most basic proper names are (in effect) simple expressions without semantically significant parts. Thus the content of a name need not be constrained by the contents of other expressions which comprise it through the rules of semantic composition for the language. Proper names differ from definite descriptions in this respect, but note that they do so in exactly the same way as, e.g., an unmodified (root) verb (such as ‘walk’) differs from a compound verb phrase (such as ‘has been walking today’).

Second, proper names differ from other semantically simple terms, such as the indexicals ‘I’ and ‘you’, in that the denotations of proper names are not constrained by general semantic conventions and matters of fact in the same way as the denotations of such terms. A proper name, after all, is nothing but a singular term which has been assigned to its bearer (i.e., its denotation in the actual world) by fiat (or which, from the perspective of language users, might as well have been so assigned). It is this property — which presupposes but goes beyond semantic simplicity — that I am referring to as ‘arbitrariness’.

1 There are of course complex names, e.g., ‘Bertrand Russell’, but following recent tradition in the philosophical discussion of proper names, I ignore this here and on occasion treat a complex name as if it is simple. I adopt this policy because we cannot hope to come to terms with complex names before understanding the more basic case of simple names, and also because I suspect that the significance of complex names depends more on social and legal practices than on strictly linguistic conventions.

2 For the sake of simplicity I ignore non-denoting names in this paper (except at one small point in section IV).

3 This qualification is necessary in order to account for the fact that an object can acquire a name by accident, i.e., without an explicit dubbing. For example, a name applied to someone in error might stick because it seems especially apt, amusing, or memorable — or because the parties to the discussion are simply unaware of the error.

520 MICHAEL PENDLEBURY
It is worth noting that general terms as well as singular terms may be arbitrary. For example, if I were to stipulate that 'frank' is a general term which applies to my dog, the planet Jupiter, the word processor on which I am now working, and to nothing else, then 'frank' would be an arbitrary general term, i.e., arbitrary with respect to what it denotes.\textsuperscript{4} Everyday general terms such as 'table' and 'cat' are clearly not arbitrary in this sense, for they do not (and could not) apply to the items they denote simply because they have been assigned to them. 'Table' does not denote the piece of furniture supporting my word processor because someone stipulated (or might have stipulated) that the term is to apply to it, but because it satisfies the concept expressed by the term. And if the term 'cat' denotes (the set of) individual cats (as I think), then for parallel reasons it too is not arbitrary with respect to its denotation. If, however, 'cat' is an abstract singular term denoting cathood, then it is after all arbitrary.

But let us return to proper names to elaborate and defend the claim that they are arbitrary. One important challenge here arises from the existence of various social and legal constraints on what 'official' names may be given to people, places, organizations, etc., as well as from the existence of systems of naming which enable us to derive useful information about the bearers of the names in the system, as in the case of numbered streets. However, none of this is essential to the linguistic institution of naming as such. As far as language itself is concerned, one can give any name to any thing, riding roughshod if one chooses over the normal associations of the word chosen and the sensitivities and convenience of concerned parties. It would not be a linguistic error to give the name 'Fifteenth Street' to the street between Eighth and Tenth. And if we decide to call the shortest boy in the class 'Lofty', then whether he likes it or not our use of that name applies to him as long as we stand by our decision. We cannot in the same way use the definite description 'the tallest boy in the class' to denote the shortest without thereby transforming it into a name. (I am assuming here that there is more than one boy in the class.) As long as we use it as a (semantically complex) definite description, what it denotes is entirely a function of the meanings of the expressions which comprise it and the heights of the boys in the class. For a definite description has descriptive content which (in conjunction with the facts) determines what it denotes. A name, on the other hand, has none. As a former undergraduate student of mine, Colin Hossack, once put the point, 'Proper names don't fit — they stick.'

\textsuperscript{4} If, incidentally, I am right about arbitrariness explaining rigidity in the case of names, then by parallel reasoning 'frank' should be rigid with respect to its denotation. I think that most readers who consider the matter carefully will agree that it must be.

WHY PROPER NAMES ARE RIGID DESIGNATORS 521
But there is more to the arbitrariness of proper names than their lack of descriptive content. This becomes evident when we develop the contrast between names and indexicals such as 'I' and 'you', which are not descriptive terms but which are still not arbitrary in their application. We cannot correctly apply 'I' or 'you' to any old thing we choose, for the denotations of these terms relative to a context are determined by certain features of that context. 'I' denotes the speaker, and 'you' denotes whoever she is addressing. Thus even though these indexicals are not descriptive in the way that definite descriptions are, they do carry information about the persons they denote. Given that someone was the denotation of a certain utterance of 'you', it follows that that person was being addressed by the speaker in the relevant context. In inflected languages such as Latin the grammatical case of a name may of course provide similar information; e.g., the vocative form 'Brutus' contains the information that the denotation of the name is the speaker's intended addressee. This information, however, is attached to the vocative case alone, not to the name itself, i.e., to that which is common to all its inflected forms. My claim that indexicals carry information which names do not therefore stands. This information, it must be stressed, arises from the meanings of the indexicals concerned, not from non-semantic conventions and practices of a kind which might sometimes allow proper names to function as information bearers despite their arbitrariness.

Proper names, then, are semantically non-informational. This property, which embraces both their differences from definite descriptions and their differences from indexicals, is no doubt the most important sign of their arbitrariness. But strictly speaking their arbitrariness is distinct from it. For the arbitrariness of names consists in the fact that they have been or might as well have been assigned to their bearers by fiat. It is obviously because of this that they are semantically non-informational, and not vice versa.

II. Rigidity

We turn next to the notion of a rigid designator. Kripke gives a number of informal accounts of this notion in Naming and Necessity, but the best

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1 This corresponds very closely to what Castañeda calls the *propositional opacity* of proper names (in *oratio recta*). See Hector-Neri Castañeda, “On the Philosophical Foundations of the Theory of Communication: Reference,” in Peter A. French, Theodore E. Uehling, Jr. and Howard K. Wettstein (eds.) *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1979), pp. 135-46. Although my framework is very different from Castañeda’s I have benefited greatly from this interesting and insightful paper.

known is that which says that a term is a rigid designator iff it 'denotes the same thing in all possible worlds'. Although Kripke was no doubt always clear about his intentions, this account could easily mislead, and has in fact done so. We can capture Kripke's intended notion of rigidity much more precisely, even though less dramatically as follows:

(R) A term $t$ is a rigid designator iff, relative to a possible situation $S$, the truth or falsity of a sentence containing $t$ generally depends only on what $t$ denotes in the world in which the sentence is uttered (in our case the actual world) and not on any other feature of $t$ — including what it would or might have denoted in $S$.

The 'generally' here contrasts with 'always', and is meant to allow for the fact that sentences containing terms which are explicitly or implicitly mentioned, and terms in the scope of psychological verbs like 'believes', are to be excluded.

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7 In this account of rigidity and throughout the paper I tacitly make use of the important distinction between, in David Kaplan's words, context of use and circumstance of evaluation (see his "Demonstratives and Aftershocks" in Themes from Kaplan, Oxford University Press, 1989). The result of making these notions explicit in (R) is as follows:

A term $t$ is a rigid designator iff, relative to a circumstance of evaluation $S$, the truth or falsity of a sentence containing $t$ generally depends only on what $t$ denotes in the context of use (which in our case includes the actual world) and not on any other feature of $t$ — including what it would or might have denoted in $S$.

Only a formal system employing 'double indexing' which is sensitive to both contexts and circumstances could do justice to this definition of rigidity. (For more on double indexing, see Kaplan's "Demonstratives." ) (R) is therefore at odds with standard formal accounts of rigidity in the literature, e.g., the semantics for quantified $S^5$ given by Graeme Forbes in The Metaphysics of Modality (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985) and by Kit Fine in "Model Theory for Modal Logic Part I: the De Re/De Dicto Distinction" (Journal of Philosophical Logic 7 [1978]: 125-56). A double indexed formal semantics for proper names which does justice to (R) is presented in Harry Deutsch's paper, "On Direct Reference" (in Themes from Kaplan). Although I do not agree with all the details of his arguments or his system, I think that in general Deutsch's approach is on the right lines. The central point, which he accommodates, is that what makes a proper name a rigid designator is that, while its denotation may vary between contexts of use, once its denotation is fixed within a given context of use, it will have the same denotation relative to every circumstance of evaluation. My main thesis is that names have this property not as a brute fact, but because they are arbitrary terms. (I am much indebted to Robert Steinman for drawing my attention to the significance of (R) for formal work on rigidity, as well as for some of the phraseology used in this note.)
An important feature of (R) from the point of view of this paper is that, at one crucial point, it makes use of the notion of a possible situation rather than that of a possible world. The difference between the two is that a possible situation can be incomplete — i.e., indeterminate in some respects — whereas a possible world is always completely determinate. Closely connected with this is the fact that a situation may be a proper part of innumerable many other more inclusive situations, whereas a world, which is nothing other than a maximal situation, is never a proper part of any more inclusive situation or world. My reason for making use of situations rather than worlds at the crucial point of (R) is not that there are many smallish situations which are more homely and more accessible to our limited imaginations than whole worlds. I appeal to them, rather, because (i) the issue of rigid designation arises only because we sometimes have occasion to evaluate sentences and clauses relative to what Kripke calls 'counterfactual situations', and (ii) most (and perhaps all) of the counterfactual situations relative to which we do evaluate sentences are as a matter of fact incomplete and partially indeterminate situations rather than whole worlds. Thus in evaluating the 'niliar counterfactual

(1) If Oswald had not shot Kennedy, somebody else would have,

we are asking (very roughly) whether the sentence

Someone other than Oswald shot Kennedy

is true relative to the possible situation in which Oswald did not shoot Kennedy. And this situation is clearly indeterminate in indefinitely many respects, as we can see from the fact that we do not try to imagine or construct a complete world in which Oswald did not shoot Kennedy when we evaluate (1). Any actual utterance of (1), however, occurs in a complete world (our world), and this explains why it is appropriate (although not necessary) for (R) to mention a world rather than a situation with respect to the context of utterance.

Now, although I am taking it for granted rather than arguing that proper names are rigid designators, a supporting example may help to make this claim more plausible. It will also do the more important job of clarifying (R). My example is borrowed from Gareth Evans, who notes that even if we use 'Julius' as a 'descriptive name' for whoever invented the zip — i.e., even if the denotation of our use of 'Julius' has been fixed by the

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8 Although this will do for present purposes, it is in fact grossly inadequate as a characterisation of the truth conditions of (1). See my paper, "The Projection Strategy and the Truth Conditions of Conditional Statements," Mind 98 (1989): 179-105.

9 See Gareth Evans The Varieties of Reference (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 60. The account of rigid designation I give above also owes a good deal to Evans.
description 'the inventor of the zip' and the name is meant to be understood in that light — we still do not regard the following as true:

(2) If you had invented the zip, you would have been Julius.

If, as I think, he is right about this, then it is clear that when we evaluate the clause 'you would have been Julius' relative to the situation in which you are the inventor of the zip, we do not consider what 'Julius' would or might denote in that situation, but only what it does denote in the actual world. Thus in terms of (R) we are treating 'Julius' as a rigid designator.

It should be stressed that what a term denotes in a situation (in the usage of this paper) might differ from what it denotes relative to that situation. This distinction was made by Kripke and has received some attention in the literature, but it is also frequently ignored, which inevitably results in confusion. It is therefore worth our while to get clear on the distinction here, even though there is nothing essentially new to be said about it.

Denotation in, which (R) takes as undefined, can be explained as follows: What a term $t$ denotes in a situation $S$ is in effect what it would denote if it were used by speakers in situation $S$ in the same way as we use it in the actual world. Thus in the situation in which you are the inventor of the zip, the relevant use of the name 'Julius' denotes you; in the actual world it denotes whoever actually invented the zip; and in the situation in which Oswald did not kill Kennedy, 'Julius' has no determinate denotation. This does not mean that it is subject to denotation failure in this situation in the way that 'Pegasus' is in the actual world. The point, rather, is that the situation is completely unspecified with respect to what 'Julius' denotes in it, or whether it denotes anything at all in it.

Denotation relative to a situation $S$ can be explained in terms of situation-relative truth and falsity as follows: If a term $t$ occurs in a sentence $P$ and the truth or falsity of $P$ relative to $S$ depends on only one feature of $t$ — that $t$ denotes object $o$ in the actual world (or the world in which $P$ is uttered) — then that occurrence of $t$ denotes $o$ relative to $S$. If, on the other hand, the truth or falsity of $P$ relative to $S$ depends on what $t$ denotes in $S$, then that very object is also the denotation of that instance of $t$ relative to $S$. Thus relative to the situation in which you are the inventor of the zip, the name 'Julius' denotes not you but the person who invented the zip in the actual world. (This should be clear from the above discussion of (2).) In contrast, the definite description 'the inventor of the zip' denotes you relative to that situation rather than the person who invented the zip in the actual world.
With the notion of denotation relative to a situation in hand we can reformulate (R) as follows:

\( (R^*) \quad \text{A term } t \text{ is a rigid designator iff, in general, what } t \text{ denotes relative to a situation } S \text{ is what it denotes in the world in which the term is uttered (in our case the actual world) rather than what it denotes in } S. \)

Given a pinch of salt, this can in turn be rephrased as follows:

\( (R^{**}) \quad \text{A term is a rigid designator iff it denotes the same thing relative to all possible situations — viz., what it denotes in the actual world.} \)

This is just what Kripke means when he says that a rigid designator is a term which denotes the same thing ‘in all possible worlds’, for his ‘in’ as it occurs here is exactly equivalent to ‘relative to’. And, given that \( (R^*) \) is a straightforward reformulation of \( (R) \), this in turn shows that a rigid designator as defined by \( (R) \) is also a rigid designator in Kripke’s terms, and vice versa.

I want to stress that it is not a good idea to treat \( (R^*) \) and \( (R^{**}) \) as anything but convenient abbreviations of \( (R) \) itself, for it is not easily possible to get a firm hold on the notion of situation-relative denotation other than through situation-relative truth or falsity. This is manifest in the fact that our intuitions about what a term denotes relative to a situation are apt to be rather less clear and determinate than our intuitions about the situation-relative truth or falsity of a sentence in which it occurs. Thus in thinking about rigidity it is best not to lose sight of \( (R) \), and this is why the argument of section III relies so heavily on it.

III. The Argument

3.1 Before turning to the details of my argument, it is worth pointing out that there is good reason to believe, first, that the rigidity of proper names must have an explanation, and, second, that the arbitrariness of proper names must figure centrally in that explanation.

With regard to the first point, let me observe that it is possible to explain why certain expressions other than proper names are rigid designators. Although this is not the place to spell out such explanations in detail, the following two examples are worth mentioning:

(a) The rigidity of an intrinsically rigid definite description, ‘the F’, is a consequence of the fact that the property of F-ness is such that one only one thing has and could have it. (I am thinking here of a definite description like ‘the only even prime number’.)
The rigidity of simple English indexicals like 'I', 'you', and the demonstrative 'that' is a necessary consequence of the fact that they are purely referential expressions. By this I mean that the (situation-relative) truth or falsity of any sentence containing such a term in a non-quotational context depends only on the denotation of that term in the actual world, and not on any other feature of it. Any term which is purely referential in this sense is straightforwardly a rigid designator according to (R). (Note, however, that not every rigid designator is purely referential, for a rigid designator may not function as a purely referential expression in psychological contexts. Proper names, I believe, are a case in point.)

Explanations such as these suggest that there must be some explanation of why proper names are rigid designators.

It is of course true that a speaker can choose to use, e.g., an everyday definite description rigidly even though it is not intrinsically rigid, and in this case no special explanation of its rigidity is called for. But the case of proper names is not like this — we do not choose to apply them rigidly, for generally speaking we do not have the option not to. It is just because we feel that there could not be non-rigid names — singular terms which are not rigid designators but which are otherwise indistinguishable from names — that we should seek an explanation of their rigidity.

But why should arbitrariness come into that explanation? The reason is simply that arbitrariness is, as I have claimed, the fundamental semantic property of proper names. Indeed, it is a constitutive property of names, for to use any expression as an arbitrary singular term is ipso facto to use it as a name. It is therefore implausible that any satisfactory explanation of an intrinsic feature of names as significant as their rigidity could be given without mentioning their arbitrariness, or at least something which flows from it. Readers who find this doubtful should ask themselves whether they can imagine an arbitrary singular term in ordinary language which would not quite naturally function as a rigid designator.

In doing this they should keep in mind that we are dealing with only one particular type of arbitrariness. If we arbitrarily assign the letter 'X' the same meaning as the definite description 'the inventor of bifocals' and

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10 This is, incidentally, a brutish sort of fact about English indexicals (and presumably the indexicals of most other natural languages), for it is not a necessary property of all possible indexicals in all possible languages. For example, there is nothing logically impossible about a language in which the first person singular within the scope of a psychological verb like 'believes' denotes the same thing as the subject of that verb rather than the person who utters the sentence.
then use 'X' non-rigidly, we do not thereby undermine the conjecture that arbitrariness underlies rigidity in the case of names. For 'X', so understood, is merely an abbreviated definite description and not a name — it is not arbitrary with respect to its denotation in the way that a name is. Its sense has indeed been assigned to it by fiat, but given its sense its denotation is not arbitrary.

Note also that individual variables in contingent identity systems of modal logic" may be arbitrarily assigned to different objects in different possible worlds, and therefore need not be rigid on a given variable assignment. Thus mere arbitrariness may not lead to rigidity. Such variables, however, are also not arbitrary in the same way as proper names, which are in effect arbitrarily assigned denotations in the actual world without special regard to what they might denote in other situations. Sometimes an original act of fixing the denotation of a name in the actual world will also have the effect of fixing its denotation in innumerably many other situations as well, as was the case with Evans's act of fixing the denotation of 'Julius' by means of the definite description 'the inventor of the zip'. Most dubblings, however, are not at all like this, for they characteristically imply nothing about what the relevant name denotes in most situations in which we might be interested (if it does not denote the same thing there as in the actual world). My explanation of why proper names are rigid designators depends upon this point.

3.2 I am going to present my demonstration that the arbitrariness of proper names underlies their rigidity in rather tedious detail in subsections 3.2 — 3.5 so that not too much is left to the reader's imagination or good will. My first step is to establish the truth of the following claim:

(A) Given that names are arbitrary, the situation-relative truth or falsity of a sentence containing a semantically significant name must depend on either the actual denotation of the name or its denotation in the situation relative to which the sentence is being evaluated, and cannot depend on any other feature of the name.

(A) is meant to apply only to occurrences of names which are neither explicitly nor implicitly in psychological or quotational contexts. As is clear from my initial comments on (R) in section II, the behaviour of


528 MICHAEL PENDLEBURY
names in such contexts is not relevant to the question of whether they are rigid designators, and I accordingly ignore it in what follows. The reader may supply the appropriate qualifications when the generalizations which result are too strong if taken at face value.

The argument for (A) is simple. Suppose we have a sentence $P$ containing a semantically significant name $n$ and are interested in the contribution which $n$ makes to the truth or falsity of $P$ relative to a possible situation $S$. What is immediately clear is that the orthographic and phonological features of $n$ as well as its purely psychological associations are irrelevant to the truth or falsity of $P$ relative to $S$. By hypothesis, $n$ does not occur in a context in which these features matter. The only remaining features of $n$ which are potentially relevant are the following:

(i) The information which $n$ carries — or the properties which are associated with it — in virtue of semantic conventions alone.

(ii) The denotation of $n$ in $S$.

(iii) The denotation of $n$ in the actual world.

Names, however, are arbitrary, and $n$ is therefore semantically non-informational. Alternative (i) is accordingly ruled out, and the truth or falsity of $P$ relative to $S$ must depend on either (ii) or (iii), which is just as (A) would have it.

3.3 Next I wish to secure the following empirical claim:

(B) Typical, everyday cases of our evaluating a sentence containing a proper name relative to a possible situation belong to one of two types: either the name has no determinate denotation in the relevant situation or its denotation in that situation is the same as its denotation in the actual world.

Although this makes no difference to my argument, I believe the former case to be the more common. For example, the antecedent of a typical counterfactual conditional — which is what specifies the situation relative to which the consequent is to be evaluated — does not tell us what any name in the consequent denotes in that situation. Counterfactuals often use names, but typical counterfactuals do not mention names at all, or talk about their denotations. Of course a situation such as that specified by the antecedent of a counterfactual may, as a matter of semantic and conversational conventions, be determinate in respects which have not been explicitly specified. But the denotation of a relevant name in the situation is often left indeterminate.
Suppose that we are discussing the question of how things would have turned out if you had been the second son of Bertrand Russell’s parents. We therefore seek answers to counterfactual questions such as this:

(3) If you had been the second son of Bertrand Russell’s parents, would you have become an atheist?

In trying to answer such questions we naturally take certain notable features of Russell’s parents and their lives, as well as equally notable features of your character, for granted. Our counterfactual situation is therefore (more or less) determinate in such respects even though they remain unmentioned. But the situation is not determinate with respect to what the relevant use of the name ‘Bertrand Russell’ denotes in it. In support of this, I observe that in evaluating the conditional

(4) If you had been the second son of Bertrand Russell’s parents, then the name ‘Bertrand Russell’ (as we use it) would have applied to you,

most ordinary speakers will not easily be persuaded that the consequent has a determinate truth value relative to the situation specified by the antecedent, and those few who believe that it has will differ in their judgments as to whether it is true or false. (I am not, incidentally, offering (4) as an example of a typical counterfactual conditional, for it is certainly not that. The role of (4) in my argument is simply to serve as evidence for the claim that the possible situation specified by the antecedent of a more typical counterfactual conditional such as (3) is often indeterminate with respect to what a given name denotes in that situation.)

Consider now another counterfactual conditional which is surely quite typical of those we hear and utter every day:

(5) If Hitler had invaded England in 1940, then Churchill would not have been Prime Minister in 1945.

Our interest is in the denotations of the names ‘Hitler’ and ‘Churchill’ in the situation explicitly and implicitly specified by (5). One possibility is that both these names have no determinate denotation in that situation. Another is that ‘Hitler’ has a denotation but ‘Churchill’ does not. Although the first of these two possibilities is very unlikely, I think that neither of them can be absolutely ruled out. However, I do not need to argue the point, for it seems to me quite clear that if the name ‘Hitler’ or the name ‘Churchill’ has a determinate denotation in the situation specified by the antecedent of (5), then it must have the same denotation in that situation as it has in the actual world. After all, no other denotation
has been specified, and — given that it is arbitrary — what could the name itself contribute towards the specification of the situation other than its denotation? Thus when we evaluate the claim

Churchill would not have been Prime Minister in 1945 relative to the situation in which Hitler invaded England in 1940, we must either treat the name ‘Churchill’ as having no denotation in that situation, or treat it as denoting the same man in that situation as it denotes in the actual world. This is just as (B) suggests, and I think the reader will find other everyday cases confirm (B) equally well.

3.4 Given (A) and (B), it is a very short step to (C), which is as follows:

(C) In a typical case of our evaluating a sentence P containing a proper name n relative to a possible situation S, the truth or falsity of P relative to S depends on the denotation of n in the actual world and not on any other feature of n.

(What this tells us, in other words, is that in typical cases the denotation of a name relative to a possible situation is the same as its denotation in the actual world.) The argument for (C) goes like this: Given (A), the truth or falsity of P relative to S must depend either on the denotation of n in the actual world or the denotation of n in S, and not on any other feature of n. Given (B), either the denotation of n in S is the same as its denotation in the actual world or n has no determinate denotation in S. Let us consider each case in turn. If the first disjunct holds then, by (A), the truth or falsity of P relative to S depends on the denotation of n in the actual world, as is claimed by (C). If the second disjunct holds, then the truth of P relative to S cannot depend on the denotation of n in S since there is no such denotation. Thus, by (A), there is nothing left for it to depend on other than the denotation of n in the actual world. So in either case (C) holds.

3.5 What we have so far, then, is the following: Because of the arbitrariness of proper names, the truth or falsity of a sentence containing a name relative to a counterfactual situation of the kind with which we are typically concerned in ordinary discourse can depend on only one feature of the name — its denotation in the actual world. And to say that the contribution of a term to situation-relative truth or falsity is of this kind is just to say that the term is functioning as a rigid designator. Thus in typical cases when situation-relative truth and falsity (and thus rigidity) are at issue, the rigidity of names is an inevitable consequence of their arbitrariness.

WHY PROPER NAMES ARE RIGID DESIGNATORS 531
Unfortunately, the argument does not stop here, for there are exceptional cases in which names behave rigidly even though this is not required by their arbitrariness. The characteristic feature of such a case is that the name involved has a determinate denotation in the relevant counterfactual situation which is different from its denotation in the actual world. Consider the situation specified by the antecedent of (~1) ("If you had invented the zip, you would have been Julius"), in which the name 'Julius' (in Evans's use) denotes you rather than the person who invented the zip in the actual world (see pp. 524-25 above). Thus the argument of 3.2—3.4 leaves open the possibility that, in evaluating the consequent of (~1) ('you would have been Julius') relative to the situation in which you are the inventor of the zip, we might have considered the denotation of 'Julius' in this situation rather than its denotation in the actual world. Of course we do not do so, and that is why even 'Julius' is a rigid designator. But so far my argument does not account for rigidity in cases like this, and it is therefore incomplete.

However, because what I am calling exceptional cases are genuinely exceptional, there is a way to complete the argument. For given that in evaluating sentences relative to counterfactual situations we are forced to rely on the actual denotations of names almost all the time, it is not in the least surprising that we should come to rely on their actual denotations without exception, even though we are not forced to. Indeed, this is just what one would predict, for two excellent reasons. The first is the human propensity for habit formation, which is particularly strong with respect to linguistic behaviour. The second, which reinforces the first, concerns the obvious benefits of a uniform convention in the communication situation. We succeed better in communicating our messages unambiguously if names are always used rigidly, or never rigidly. But, as I have argued, on almost all occasions when we use them and rigidity is at issue, their arbitrariness leaves us no option but to use them rigidly. Thus the only way to secure the advantages of uniformity here is by extending the practice of using names rigidly to the few exceptional cases where it might have been avoidable. And this we do, I would claim, unconsciously, automatically, and quite naturally. It is of course a contingent fact that we do it, but my aim in this paper was merely to establish a contingent link between the arbitrariness and rigidity of names. This task is now complete.

IV. Reply to an Objection

I would like to end by replying to the following objection to my argument:

Your reasoning completely ignores the distinction between a name and a use of a name to denote a particular thing. Of course the name 'Bertrand Russell' might have all sorts of bearers in this and other worlds, including your neighbour's cat. But we are interested not in the
name as such, but in a particular use of it to denote the famous philosopher. Once we specify that it is this use which we are interested in, there is no problem as to what the name denotes in any counterfactual situation — it must denote the Bertrand Russell. Thus your explanation of why proper names are rigid designators is completely spurious.

In response I argue (i) that the main presupposition of this objection — viz., that a use of a name is necessarily tied to a single, fixed denotation (in all possible situations) — is false; and (ii) that a correct account of the notion use of a name is consistent with sections I — III.

Let me begin by observing that it is an error to suppose that the denotation of a given use of a name is constitutive of that use. This is evident from the fact that it is possible for two distinct uses of a single name to have the same denotation. In discussing a different issue Kripke gives a good example of this:

Peter . . . may learn the name ‘Paderewski’ with an identification of the person named as a famous pianist. Naturally, having learned this, Peter will assent to ‘Paderewski had musical talent’. . . Later, in different circles, Peter learns of someone called ‘Paderewski’ who was a Polish nationalist leader and Prime Minister. Peter is skeptical of the musical abilities of politicians. He concludes that two people, approximate contemporaries no doubt, were both named ‘Paderewski’. Using ‘Paderewski’ as a name for a statesman, Peter assents to ‘Paderewski had no musical talent’.

It is clear that Peter’s ideoloc includes two distinct uses of the name ‘Paderewski’. These uses cannot, however, be separated on the ground that they have different denotations, since in fact they do not.

This suggests that a particular way of identifying the denotation of a given use of a name may be constitutive of that use. This works for descriptive names like ‘Julius’, but not for everyday names. For it would not be improper to specify a single use of such a name by appealing to different ways of identifying its denotation which are not equivalent to one another. For example, ‘the famous Roman who is so-called’ and ‘the Cicero that Peter was talking about’ might be equally good ways of answering the question ‘Which Cicero do you mean?’ and thus indicating which use of the name is at issue. And this holds even though only one use is at issue.

Thus the two most obvious accounts of what usually constitutes a use of a name must be rejected. What, then, is it for two tokens of a name (in the same world) to be instances of a single use of it? I would like to suggest that the answer must have something to do with those tokens' being connected with one another in an appropriate sort of way — as it were, ana-

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phorically.13 Thus if Peter utters the name ‘Suzy’ with the intention of referring to whoever Pamela referred to when she uttered that name some time earlier, then these two tokens of the name are connected in roughly the same way as two anaphoric pronouns uttered by different people but meant to refer to the same thing, and it is their being so connected that makes them instances of the same use. More briefly, if one token of a name is an antecedent of another token of the same name, then they are instances of the same use. Obviously two utterances of a name might be instances of the same use in virtue of more subtle connections than this, as when neither is an antecedent of the other but they nonetheless share a common antecedent. And there are further complications in view of the vagueness of the notion same use. But this is not the place to pursue these issues, since it is enough for my purposes if some version of the anaphoric account of name uses is correct.

Let me mention just three pieces of evidence for the claim that it is:

(a) When we read a newspaper or a novel, or when we hear a conversation involving uses of names whose denotations are unknown to us, we in fact judge two tokens of a name to be instances of the same use just when we take them to stand in some sort of anaphoric connection (which may depend to a great extent on the writer’s or speaker’s intentions). Our willingness to do this with confidence speaks strongly in favour of the anaphoric account, for whether or not we have a single use of a name is not something which goes beyond our linguistic practices and responses.

(b) The anaphoric account provides a simple, straightforward, and plausible explanation of how non-denoting name-tokens in, e.g., works of fiction can be ‘meaningful’. For the primary linguistic significance of such a name-token surely consists in its being a member (or potential member) of a whole chain of tokens of the same name all of which would have to denote the same thing if they denoted anything at all. This allows the name to function as a label attached to (but not denoting) a sort of file

of increasing ‘information about the relevant fictional character, place, or thing’.

(c) It may fairly be assumed that the correct theory of reference for proper names is some variant of the causal-historical picture advanced by Kripke in Naming and Necessity. (This, incidentally, even takes in some forms of descriptivism, such as that most recently advanced by John Searle.**) The crucial point in this picture is the claim that, at least in the basic case, a later token of a use of a name inherits the denotation of an earlier token of the same use. This rather plausible picture can only be correct if sameness of name use is a matter of some sort of connection which does not presuppose reference. And this is indeed the heart of the anaphoric account of name use.

In addition to these positive points, it also bears repeating that the most obvious alternatives to the anaphoric account are plainly inadequate.

A significant consequence of the anaphoric account is that, even though different instances of one use of a name must have the same denotation in any given situation, a single use of a name might denote different things in different situations (i.e., in different contexts which involve different situations). Consider the following situation, S:

Bertrand Russell and another infant are secretly exchanged prior to his parents’ deciding what name to give the child they take to be their second son. Throughout his life the substitute child does everything in S that Russell does in the actual world, and Russell does everything in S that the substitute does in the actual world. In all other respects S is as close as possible to the actual world. This includes the details of the linguistic behaviour of Russell’s parents, which is exactly the same in S as it is in the actual world.

I can find no reason to say that Russell’s parents’ use of the name ‘Bertrand’ in S is different from their use of it in the actual world, for the relevant chains of tokens of the name are indistinguishable. This use of the name, however, still applies to a different person in S — the child who is substituted for Russell.** Thus even if the use of a name has been fixed, it may still have different denotations in different possible situations. This undermines the objection with which I began this section.


** This is not to say that when we use the name to describe S we are referring to the substitute child rather than Russell, for we are using the name in the actual world, and its denotation here fixes its denotation relative to all possible situations whenever those who use it are located in this world.
There is, however, one final question to be dealt with: What room does the anaphoric account of name uses leave for the view that proper names are arbitrary? On the face of it, very little. For if the use of a token of a name is fixed, it is clearly not the case that that token could denote anything whatever. On the contrary, it must denote the same thing as any other token of that name to which it stands in the appropriate anaphoric relation. This does not, however, go against the view that proper names are arbitrary. More specifically, it does not go against any understanding of this view which is required for the purposes of my central argument. For what all the tokens of a given use of a name denote is not limited by semantic conventions, but is in effect determined by an act of fiat on the part of the person responsible for the original token of that use of the name. And that is all that is required to explain the rigidity of proper names.16

16 I am grateful to several people for helpful comments on earlier versions of this paper, including more than one anonymous referee, David Brooks, Mark Leon, Ernest Sosa, and especially Robert Steinman.

536 MICHAEL PENDLEBURY