

PRAGMATIC DESCRIPTIVISM? A possibly different version of nominal descriptivism is defended by Jeshion. Names lack descriptive content. Their semantic content consists of the individuals themselves. Their referring role is not mediated by a description, but rather by the occasion when the reference is fixed, such as baptism. Furthermore, there is no minimal descriptive content associated with a name in the language. Thus the meaning of ‘Lenin’ is not given by ‘the bearer of the name “Lenin”’. Nevertheless every competent speaker does know about ‘Lenin’ that it names the individual called ‘Lenin’. So presumably the role of nominal description is shifted into the domain of pragmatics, away from the domain of semantics. 375

If Jeshion’s view is meant to be contrasted with Bach’s, then I do not see how the contrast is drawn. After all, Bach, too, insists that nominal descriptions are not representational descriptions. Though here, again, I am not sure how one can insist on that: nominal descriptions do convey information about the speaker. As far as the fixation of reference is concerned, there is a clear agreement between Jeshion and Bach. And if Jeshion intends to deny that names have semantic meaning, then the condition she imposes on *every competent speaker* of the language *just means* that the meaning is given by that very condition.

UTILITY OF NAMES. Why to use names? There are two parts to this question: (i) Why do we call any thing by a name? (ii) Why do we not call every thing by a name? 371

To the first question, Locke answered that sometimes we need to refer to the object repeatedly. Thus, to facilitate this reference, we invent a name. In essence, we use names when we have a concern in the continuing identity of object through time. And in principle, it is possible to name every object; but that would be beyond the limited capacities of human cognition, and would not serve any purpose.

Locke’s view does not explain why certain objects do not have names. I have an iPad that I use repeatedly, have a need to refer to on multiple occasions. Yet I have never thought of attaching a name to it. A description ‘my iPad’ satisfies my referring needs. Strawson expanded Locke’s view by adding the condition that the circle of speakers having to refer to the object has to be sufficiently wide. If sufficiently many people had to refer to my iPad, eventually we would come up with a name for it (perhaps ‘Paddy’?). 372

The Locke-Strawson utility view insists on the efficiency of names as their primary semantic function. Names fulfil this function in the situations of repeated reference to the object where other expressions fail. For instance, ‘my iPad’ would not do as a referential device, because *you* would not be able to use it to refer to *this* object here. ‘Sandy’s iPad’ would not do either, because it would be awkward (pompous) for *me* to use it. ‘The iPad’ is bad, because other people may have an iPad, and so forth. The name ‘Paddy’ would alleviate these difficulties.

OBJECTIONS. The utility view does not explain when a small group of users feel the need to introduce a name when other devices are doing just fine. There may be only two speakers having to refer to their pet dog, or even just one. That does not prevent them from naming the dog ‘Toffee’, where the expression ‘the dog’ would do just as well. On the other hand, many speaks have the need to refer to this building we are in, but no one, as far as I know, wanted to dub it with a name. 377

SIGNIFICANCE OF NAMES. Jeshion defends a view on which we attach names to objects whose value, in our eyes, goes beyond being one of a kind of objects. In naming an object we recognise its irreducible individuality. We name pets, precisely because we value them as individuals, not just as another dog or cat. We do not name buildings (normally), precisely because we do not care about what they are, beyond being merely that, buildings. Tomato plants, knives, and clothes items are in the same range. 373, 379

By contrast, if you feel a particular attachment to your car, you may call it by a proper name (say, ‘Necmettin’ or ‘MJ’). Same for other items, not usually assigned names.

Jeshion cites two further specific arguments. If a person, for example, is called simply ‘you there’, ‘she’, or ‘young man’, this may provoke a protest (‘I have a name!’, ‘She has a name’, and similarly even ‘This dog has a name!’). I agree with this argument. 380

The second argument is that names are capitalised. This, Jeshion says, is in order to indicate the significance of their bearers. I am less inclined to accept this claim. More plausibly, capitalisation serves a syntactic need. The names are capitalised to mark them off from other items of the language. This is useful in indicating, e.g., that these expressions should not be translated. In many languages, moreover, such as Hebrew and Ancient Greek, names are/were not capitalised. Jeshion acknowledges that, but does not ask whether this tells us *anything* about the attitudes of Hebrew and Greek speakers.

THE STATUS OF THE SIGNIFICANCE. It is, I think, not very clear whether the view is advanced as a pragmatic, psychological, or anthropological view. Thus, in using the name ‘Lenin’, does a speaker convey his commitment to, or recognition of, Lenin’s individuality? This is hardly plausible. Or does the view describe the psychological ‘urge’ the speakers have in their interactions with certain objects? The psychological evidence cited by Jeshion seems to lend support to this line of interpretation. We are ‘biologically geared’ to regard some objects as significant, but not other.

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This explanation strikes me as essentially incomplete. Conceivably, the capacity to relate differently to animate and inanimate objects has evolved. It is not very mysterious why people should have evolved it, because these kinds of objects call for different kinds of interactions with them. Isolating one from the other delivers advantages in predicting their respective behaviours. There is a correlation between recognising an object as animate (an ‘agent’) and assigning it a name. But it does not follow that children assign names *because* they recognise individuality in those putative agents. The fact that adults and children give such explanations is not conclusive on its own.

Consider a barest sketch of an anthropological explanation from magic. Names are attached to animate objects, because they are a device capable of manipulating those objects. You can put a spell, a curse, or a blessing on a person merely by using his name. By assigning a name, you can fix the qualities of a person. These are recurring themes in the Bible, as they are in primitive societies. The practice of using names should receive such an anthropological explanation. And possibly, psychological mechanisms should have been mobilised to serve the need.

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