

**NOMINAL DESCRIPTIVISM.** The theory Bach proposes is formulated very simply: a name ‘NN’ is semantically equivalent to the expression ‘the bearer of “NN”’. It is later clarified that this is a view about the meaning of names. We see what problems this view can address. First, names have *a* meaning. To make them meaningless is to violate the unity of compositional explanations. Second, everyone agrees that names, by the fact of their use, convey information about the bearer, however minimal. This is exactly the information encoded in the nominal description.

135

**KRIPKE’S MODAL ARGUMENT RECONSIDERED.** Apply the modal argument to the case of the description theory taken as a theory about sense. The argument would run thus:

150-1

1. If ‘NN’ meant ‘the bearer of “NN”’, then ‘NN might not have been the bearer of “NN”’ would be false.
2. But ‘NN might not have been the bearer of “NN”’ is true.
3. So, ‘NN’ does not mean ‘the bearer of “NN”’.

There is a complication about the scope of the modal operator. Consider the statement:

The founder of the USSR might not have been the founder of the USSR. (10-1)

There is a sense in which it is true, and there is a sense in which it is logically false. For consider the following interpretations:

The founder of the USSR is such that: he might not have been the founder of the USSR  
 $\exists x(Fx \wedge \Diamond \sim Fx)$  [True] (10-2)

and

It might have been the case that: the founder of the USSR is not the founder of the USSR  
 $\Diamond \exists x(Fx \wedge \sim Fx)$  [Logically false]. (10-3)

Read the symbol ‘ $\Diamond$ ’ here as ‘there is a possible situation such that’. In the first case the modal operator is said to have a narrow scope, in the second case it has a wide scope. If we want to show that the expression ‘NN’ has a meaning different from a description ‘NN is *F*’, we have to consider the interpretation where the modal operator has wide scope. For we do not want to say that, because the narrow scope interpretation comes out true, the expression ‘the founder of the USSR’ has a meaning different from ‘the founder of the USSR’.

Apply this difference to the case of names. For simplicity, we can work with a particular name ‘Lenin’. We have:

Lenin might not have been the bearer of ‘Lenin’  
 The bearer of ‘Lenin’ might not have been the bearer of ‘Lenin’. (10-4)

Accordingly we obtain two interpretations:

$\exists x(x = \text{Lenin} \wedge \Diamond \sim Bx)$  [the modal operator has the narrow scope, the name has the wide scope](10-5)

and:

$\Diamond \exists x(x = \text{Lenin} \wedge \sim Bx)$  [the modal operator has the wide scope, the name has the narrow scope](10-6)

As the case of (10-1) has shown, we have to consider only (10-6). But now we have an ambiguity not reflected in the symbolism of this interpretation. When we look at the counterfactual situation:

151

- (i) Do we identify the actual individual Lenin as Lenin there, or
- (ii) Do we look at a possible individual Lenin there?

That is, do we say that *our* Lenin is not called ‘Lenin’ in a possible situation, or do we say that a possible Lenin, someone identified as Lenin in a possible situation, is not called ‘Lenin’? Kripke, of course, chooses the first option (*Naming and Necessity*, 77).

And is the second option even intelligible? It proposes to identify someone in a possible situation *as* Lenin by means of *that* possible situation. But if there is no connection between means of identification in the actual world and means of identification in a possible world, then there is also no guarantee that the two ways converge. That is, we talk about two different individuals.

*Remark 1.* Another way of making this point could be this. Suppose I say:

Lenin might have been a peasant. (10-7)

To evaluate this utterance, I should begin by identifying someone as actual Lenin, and then consider the possibility where he is a peasant. If I skip the actual identification step, it is not clear what the possibility I am supposed to examine *is*.

**FIXING THE USE.** Kripke's case appears solid. Yet consider how he interprets it. He claims that if we go with the second option, we simply change the meaning, or the use, of the name 'Lenin'. This is unusual. Compare the case of descriptions. I fix the English meaning of 'the founder of the USSR' and then vary its reference across possible worlds. If I were to vary its meaning across worlds, I would end up, indeed, with uninteresting results. Why cannot I do the same with names? Why cannot I fix the meaning in the actual world and vary reference in possible worlds?

Let us see where this leads us. In many contexts, when I say:

Lenin might have been the first Soviet yogi, (10-8)

I may be understood as speculating about Lenin, our actual Lenin. Typically, this is where the antecedent context includes a speculation about Lenin, his biography, his politics. But in another context, it may well be different. Suppose it is a fact (even a law!) that all actual Soviet yogi have Indian names. We argue whether Soviet yogi *might* have had Russian names. Then I say:

Ivanov might have been the first Soviet yogi. (10-9)

You ask, who is this Ivanov? Well, I say, clearly he is the first Soviet yogi in a counterfactual situation I am talking about. Fair enough, but why do you call him 'Ivanov'? Here the answer presumably is that this is how he would be identified by that name in the counterfactual situation we are considering. That is the whole point of the example, I say. And therefore, we have evidence here that the name's meaning is fixed by its use in a *countefactual* situation.

Note too that, if I tried to use the statement (10-8) to illustrate my point about Russian names, I would have misled you. That statement is naturally taken to be about our Lenin, not about alternative uses of the name 'Lenin'. Bach is aware of these complications. But he argues, as far as I understand, that they are all a matter of context—thus a matter of pragmatics, not semantics. The context ensures what our primary concern is, and the way, therefore, the sense of the name is determined.

**SUMMARY OF BACH'S CRITIQUE.** To repeat, then, Bach's main contention is that the meaning of a proper name is usually fixed by its actual use, but this is a fact of *pragmatics*. It is perverse, but still pragmatically barely possible, to fix the meaning by a counterfactual use. Hence it is not a *semantic* fact about the meaning of 'Lenin' that it is not equivalent to 'the bearer of "Lenin"'. If, therefore, the meaning of the name can be fixed by its counterfactual use, we reject the claim (10-6). And if we are able to do that, we have evidence that 'Lenin' and 'the bearer of "Lenin"' are *semantically* equivalent, just like 'the founder of the USSR' and 'the founder of the USSR' are.

*Remark 2.* This is a free paraphrase of Bach's ideas in the text. Bach's own formulations are quite opaque, I am afraid.

**SEMANTICS OR PRAGMATICS?** Now I think that Bach's contention can be challenged. We have agreed that the statement (10-9) appears dubious, unless a further clarification is involved:

A man called 'Ivanov' might have been the first Soviet yogi. (10-10)

Here the use of the name in the alternative situation necessitates putting it in quotation marks. This is entirely natural: in effect, I am *reporting* to you the use of the name in that situation, by quoting the counterfactual speakers. The use of the name without the quotation marks, as in (10-9), suggests that the name belongs in my vocabulary—and that is precisely what is not the case. So what perhaps I said originally was different:

'Ivanov' might have been the first Soviet yogi. (10-11)

Taken strictly, this is unacceptable: to put a name in quotation marks is to refer to that name, not to what it designates. But it is often acceptable as loose talk, where speakers simply drop the preceding description, so that (10-11) becomes a lazy paraphrase of (10-10).

I tentatively conclude that Bach's critique misfires. It is a matter of semantics that the use of the name in a sentence corresponds to the actual use of the name. To use the name with a counterfactual meaning—i.e. to indicate a counterfactual use of the name in a sentence—necessitates introduction of quotation marks.

Finally, observe that there *is* a legitimate use of the sentence (10-9), where the name appears without quotation marks, for fixing the meaning of 'Ivanov'. It is where the name is used as a descriptive name. But the possibility of this use has no effect on Kripke's argument.

*Remark 3.* I ignore the discussion of multiple referents in pages 154–156.