

Critical Notice

SCOTT SOAMES, *Beyond Rigidity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press 2002. Pp. ix + 379.

In this admirable book, Scott Soames provides well defended answers to some of the most difficult and important questions in the philosophy of language, and he does so with characteristic thoroughness, clarity, and rigor. The book's title is appropriate, since it does indeed go 'beyond rigidity' in many ways. Among other things, Soames does the following in the course of the book. (1) He persuasively argues that the main thesis of Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* — that ordinary names are rigid designators — can be extended to the more general thesis that simple proper names are synonymous with neither nonrigid nor rigidified descriptions, and so have no descriptive content whatever. (2) He thoroughly defends and places in the context of a larger semantic theory the Millian thesis that the sole semantic contents of most proper names are the names' referents, so that sentences containing such names semantically express singular Russellian propositions. (3) He provides and defends at length an innovative pragmatic account of why substitution of co-referring proper names in cognitive contexts intuitively fails to be truth preserving, even though it seems to follow from the Millian thesis that such substitution must be semantically valid. And (4) he thoroughly and persuasively defends a semantic theory of natural kind terms that explains how, following Kripke and Putnam, theoretical identities involving such terms can express *a posteriori* necessities, even though on Soames's theory, and contrary to the Kripke-Putnam view, such terms are neither names of natural kinds nor rigid designators in any interesting sense.

In my remarks here, I will concentrate on Soames's original and provocative discussions of two large subtopics, both of which are rele-

vant to Soames's pragmatic account of apparent substitution failure. The first of these subtopics is that of *assertion*. In Chapter 3, Soames argues forcefully that given the satisfaction of certain contextual conditions, sentences can be used to assert propositions other than, and in addition to, the propositions that the sentences semantically express, given their literal meanings. In particular, Soames contends, sentences containing simple Millian names can be used to assert propositions that specify the names' referents *descriptively*, even though these descriptive propositions are not semantically expressed by the sentences used. I agree that sentences can be used to assert propositions that are not semantically expressed. But I will argue that Soames is wrong to claim that sentences containing Millian names can be used to assert descriptive propositions of the relevant sort.

The second large subtopic I will consider is that of what Soames calls *partially descriptive names*. At various points in the book, including all of Chapter 5, Soames discusses a large and unduly neglected class of syntactically complex terms, and contends both that these terms are properly characterized as names and that they are semantically equivalent to definite descriptions of a certain sort. Thus on Soames's view, these terms constitute an important *exception* to the Millian thesis that proper names' referents are their sole semantic contribution. But I will argue that Soames is wrong about this. Many of the complex expressions he considers are not names at all, while those complex expressions he considers that really are names are not descriptive in Soames's sense. So if I am right, the Millian thesis in fact has no exceptions.

Soames's theses about assertion and partially descriptive names seem to play a major role in his defense of his overall semantic view. Their importance, especially that of his view of assertion, would seem to derive from their role in Soames's attempt to do justice to descriptionist intuitions about proper names, especially intuitions concerning apparent failure of substitution of co-referring names in cognitive contexts. After I've presented my objections to Soames's theses about assertion and partially descriptive names, I will assess what effect the falsity of his views about assertion has on his pragmatic explanation of apparent substitution failure.

I Soames on Assertion

One important fact about the notions of *asserting* and *saying* that needs to be kept firmly in mind is that people often assert and say things that they do not mean or intend to assert or say. Linguistic ignorance provides good examples of this, such as the case of Professor Malaprop who in the presence of the visiting dignitary utters the sentence 'The Dean is an enthusiastic philanderer, you know,' thereby saying and asserting that the Dean is a profligate womanizer, while innocently *meaning* only that the Dean is an enthusiastic *philatelist*, or collector of stamps.

Cases like this strongly suggest that our intentions to convey or communicate information do not, or at least do not by themselves, determine what we are asserting or saying by the words we use. The explanation of this would seem to be that, once we have committed or subjected ourselves to a given set of linguistic conventions, rules, or practices, those conventions, rules, and practices will generate consequences about what we've asserted or said by the words we've used, and these consequences typically override whatever intentions we might have had to the contrary.

Now the fact that adopted conventions tend to override personal intentions does not strictly *prove* that commitment to conventions, rules, or practices which determine what is asserted or said is a *necessary condition* for asserting or saying to occur. Nevertheless, in my view, such commitment to conventions, rules, or practices is in fact necessary for both asserting and saying, and I will provide evidence for this view below. As I see it, this is the major point of conflict between my view of assertion and Soames's. In Chapter 3, he presents a wealth of evidence in the form of various scenarios designed to support his view that propositions may be asserted even when not semantically expressed by the sentence uttered. In many of these cases, including most of those that involve the use of simple Millian names, there is no convention, practice, or rule available to determine what is supposed to be asserted or said, and so Soames's conclusions about these cases contradict my constraint that commitment to such conventions, practices or rules is necessary for assertion or saying to take place. I will argue on independent grounds that Soames's conclusions about these cases are wrong, and that in fact no proposition is asserted beyond the one that is semantically expressed. In all the other cases, where something may be asserted other than what is semantically expressed, there is, I contend, always a readily available convention, practice, or rule by virtue of which this happens.

One of Soames's main concerns is to show that sentences containing simple proper names are frequently used to assert propositions other than the singular propositions that are semantically expressed. An ex-

ample that he gives of this is the use of names in introductions, as when Soames introduces himself to a stranger, saying

(1) I am Scott Soames ('The Introduction,' 74).

Here, as Soames correctly points out, it surely seems that the stranger would be speaking truly if he said 'He *told me* [*said, asserted*] that his name was "Scott Soames."' But is this really a case in which what is asserted is *other than* what is semantically expressed? This seems highly doubtful. After all, using names in introductions to specifically inform someone that a given person has the relevant name just *is* the conventional, standard way we use to assert that information. So it surely seems possible that sentences of the form 'I am *N*' or 'This is *N*' do not merely semantically express trivial identity-propositions. In addition, these sentences would seem to also have an *idiomatic* meaning, on which they conventionally express propositions to the effect that a given person bears the name in question. So this does not seem to be a convincing case in which something is asserted that is not semantically expressed.

In the case just considered, Soames seems right about what is asserted, but wrong to claim that what is asserted is not semantically expressed.¹ But in most of the other cases he describes, including all of the cases involving simple names, Soames is in my opinion simply wrong about what is asserted. In one such case, Soames imagines that he utters the sentence (2) to a graduate student in philosophy at Princeton:

(2) Carl Hempel lived on Lake Lane in Princeton (63).

Given mutual knowledge on the part of both Soames and the student that the name 'Carl Hempel' refers to the well-known philosopher of science, Soames says 'I intend my utterance to be understood by the

1 A similar difficulty arises for what Soames says about *irony* or sarcasm. Soames's example is that of someone who utters the sentence 'Sam is a fine friend,' where it is obvious to all that the predicate 'fine friend' does not apply to Sam. Here it is plausible to say that the speaker has not asserted the proposition literally expressed — that Sam is a fine friend. Rather, as Soames says, the speaker asserts 'something like the negation of that proposition' (58). But notice that typically the speaker would utter the sentence in a special sarcastic tone of voice ('Sam is a *fine friend*'), which by convention is reserved for the expression of irony. In the absence of this convention, it is not at all clear that an ironic assertion would occur. It may even be that the speaker's tone of voice functions to conventionally transform the sentence uttered into its negation, so that the spoken utterance literally expresses the proposition that Sam is *not* a fine friend. So I am not convinced that in cases of irony, something is asserted other than what is semantically expressed.

student as committing me to the claim that the well-known philosopher of science Carl Hempel lived on Lake Lane in Princeton.... I might even intend my utterance to assert [this information]' (63). Given what Soames goes on to say about other similar examples, it is clear that he would also say that in uttering (2) in the context described, he had in fact actually *asserted* the descriptive proposition expressed by

- (3) The well-known philosopher of science, Carl Hempel, lived on Lake Lane in Princeton.

But I think that Soames is clearly wrong about this. Imagine an improbable but possible scenario in which Carl Hempel turns out not to have really been a philosopher of science after all. Perhaps he managed to cleverly foster the false impression that he was a philosopher of science by fraudulently publishing a number of brilliant articles written by other people, say. Then, according to Soames, he (Soames) would have asserted something *false* in uttering sentence (2), even though (2) semantically expresses a true proposition. But this is clearly mistaken. Given that (2) is true, Soames would have asserted nothing false in uttering (2), even were it to turn out that sentence (3) is false. While the context may make it clear that the speaker (Soames) is committed to (3), it is not the utterance of (2) that makes this commitment. Rather, utterance of (2) commits the speaker only to the proposition semantically expressed by (2).²

2 In his (2004) reply, Soames claims that the cases I describe in this objection and the three others to follow are significantly different from the cases he describes. In particular, he claims that in my cases, 'the presuppositions in the conversational background include falsehoods,' while this is not true in his cases. This is a serious misinterpretation of my objections. I am objecting to what Soames says about *his* cases, and so I am simply *not* describing different cases of my own. In particular, if what Soames says about the case just described in the above paragraph in the text were correct, then the following *counterfactual* would be true in *his* case:

- (C) If Hempel had not been a philosopher of science, then the speaker (in the context Soames describes) would have asserted something false in uttering (2).

Since (C) is simply false in Soames's case, and since (C) follows from his claim that in his case the speaker would be asserting (3), this latter claim is just false. Similarly for the three other cases described below about which Soames makes similar false claims.

Perhaps Soames would object that it does *not* follow from his view that the counterfactual (C) would be true in his case. Perhaps he would insist that, on the contrary, had the descriptive presuppositions in the conversational background been *false*, then the speaker of (2) would *not* have asserted any proposition involving these descriptive presuppositions in uttering (2). But this response commits Soames

Three other cases described by Soames have this same defect. In one case ('The Emergency,' 74), Soames says (1) ('I am Scott Soames') in response to two university officials who enter an auditorium and announce that they are looking for Scott Soames. Soames says that it would then be correct to report that he (Soames) had *said* that he was the person they (the university officials) were looking for. But this is wrong. Perhaps the university officials had really been looking for another professor with the same name. Does it follow that, given the context of utterance, Soames said something false when he said 'I am Scott Soames'? Of course not.

Similarly, in another case ('The Terrorist,' 79), a terrorist says to a negotiator

(4) I will detonate the bomb if my demands are not met,

where it is obvious to all that the bomb's explosion will kill thousands of people. According to Soames, it would be correct to report that the terrorist had *said* the following:

(5) I will kill thousands of people if my demands are not met.

But again, this is wrong. Suppose that in fact the terrorist's demands are not met and so he detonates the bomb, but Superman improbably smothers the bomb at the moment of detonation and no one is killed. Does it follow that the terrorist had said or asserted something false when he said (4)? Again, obviously not.

The third of Soames's examples with this same defect is the especially important case of an identity-sentence containing two distinct names ('The Party,' 75). Carl Hempel was known to friends and colleagues as

to a view of assertion that is quite different from the view suggested in his book. On the latter view the shared and mutually understood background assumptions and intentions of the conversational participants can result in something descriptive being asserted as well as conveyed and implicated, even though it is not semantically expressed. But on this new view, the relevant descriptive background assumptions must not only be mutually shared and understood; they must also be *true*, in order for anything descriptive to be asserted. Although I can't provide an adequate discussion of this new view here, I think that the view is extremely implausible and *ad hoc*. Notice that in all four of Soames's cases, the propositions allegedly asserted (though not semantically expressed) would clearly still be *conveyed* and *implicated*, even if (some of) the presuppositions in the conversational background were to turn out false. It is thus certainly hard to see what reason there could possibly be for claiming that these same propositions, though still conveyed and implicated, would no longer be *asserted*, if some of the background assumptions were to turn out false.

'Peter Hempel.' At a party, a professor, Paul, gestures in Hempel's direction and asks a new graduate student, Mary, 'Have you been introduced to Peter Hempel?' The student then asks, 'Who is Peter Hempel?' and Paul responds by saying

(6) Peter Hempel is Carl Hempel.

Given mutual knowledge of Paul and Mary (i) that the name 'Carl Hempel' is associated by each with the property of being a famous philosopher of science, and (ii) that Mary sees that Paul is gesturing at a man standing over there and referring to him as 'Peter Hempel,' Soames claims that it would be correct for Mary to later report that Paul had *said* the following to her:

(7) The man, Peter Hempel, standing over there is the famous philosopher of science Carl Hempel.

But again, Soames's claim is false. Had Carl Hempel not really been a philosopher of science, or had the man standing over there at whom Paul gestured not really been Peter Hempel (perhaps he was wearing a Peter Hempel mask), Soames's claim implies that Paul would have said something false in uttering the true sentence (6). But this is wrong. Given the context, Paul may have *conveyed* or *implicated* something false by uttering (6), since he may have conveyed or implicated the (hypothetically) false information expressed by (7). But even so, Paul would have neither asserted nor said anything false in uttering the true sentence (6).

In all four of the cases just described, Soames claims that in addition to the proposition semantically expressed by the sentence uttered, the speaker would have asserted and said something else that in the context, the speaker would (perhaps) have conveyed or implicated. But we've just seen that the additional conveyed or implicated information is simply *not* asserted or said. In my opinion, the aspect of Soames's view that leads him to falsely claim otherwise is his assumption that what is said or asserted can be determined solely by purely pragmatic features of the context of utterance, including the speaker's intentions and the mutually shared background knowledge and assumptions of the conversational participants. The moral of our discussion so far would seem to be that this assumption is false. Purely pragmatic features of the context are simply not sufficient for assertion and saying to take place. There must in my view also be a commitment by the speaker to conventions, practices, or rules that are independent of context and that at least partly determine what is asserted or said.

II Kent Bach's 'Standardized Nonliterality'

The cases we've looked at so far do not really support Soames's thesis that we often use sentences to assert things other than what the sentences semantically express. But two of Soames's cases do I think provide evidence for this thesis. In the first of these ('Coffee, Please,' 78) a man goes into a coffee shop, sits down, and says to the waitress, 'I would like coffee, please.' While the speaker's words do not indicate what *form* the coffee is to be in (liquid, grounds, or beans), or what *amount* he wants (a cup, gallon, or barrel), it would surely be correct to say, as Soames points out, that the customer had ordered a cup of coffee and in fact had *said* that he wanted a cup of coffee. So here it seems that what the speaker says goes beyond what is semantically expressed. In the second case ('Smoking and Drinking,' 78), the speaker says 'I enjoy a cigarette after breakfast every morning and a brandy before retiring in the evening.' In this case, what the speaker more specifically means, as well as both says and asserts, is of course that he enjoys *smoking* a cigarette and *drinking* a glass of brandy.

In these last two of Soames's cases, the sentence uttered semantically expresses a given proposition, but the speaker means, says, and asserts a more specific or qualified version of that proposition. This is an extremely common phenomenon that has been recently identified and exhaustively discussed by Kent Bach, who calls it 'standardized nonliterality' (Bach 1998) and also identifies it as a species of what he calls 'conversational implicature' (Bach 1994), as opposed to Grice's (1975) notion of conversational implicature. (See also Recanati 1993, Chapter 13.) The following are some of the many examples that Bach gives of this phenomenon, where the words in brackets are not part of the sentence uttered, but could have been added by the speaker to make explicit what is meant:

- (8) Nobody [*important*] goes there anymore — it's too crowded. [Yogi Berra]
- (9) You're not going to die [*from this cut*].
- (10) I have eaten breakfast [*today*].
- (11) Most people [*who voted in the last presidential election*] voted Democratic.
- (12) I will be home later [*tonight*].

I think it is clear in all these cases that the speaker would be asserting the more specific qualification of the proposition literally expressed, and would in fact *not* be asserting the literally expressed proposition at all.

For instance, when (9) is uttered by a mother who is comforting her slightly injured but loudly crying child, the mother is clearly *not* asserting falsely that her child is immortal, but is rather asserting truly that the child will not die from the minor injury in question. It also seems to me that the mother would not be *saying* that the child is immortal either, but would rather be saying what she is asserting. (Here I apparently disagree with Bach, who holds that what is *said* is what is literally expressed, though what is *asserted* may go beyond what is literally said. See Bach 1994, 137; and 2001.)³

So cases of standardized nonliterality establish the truth of one of Soames's main theses about assertion, namely, that what is asserted in uttering a sentence may be something other than what is semantically expressed. But it is important to note first, that this is the only kind of case that Soames provides, and one of only two kinds of case that as far as I know anyone has ever provided, which shows that one can assert what is not semantically expressed.⁴ And second, it is important to note that instances of standardized nonliterality are clearly instances of an extremely common, standard, and conventional *practice*, whereby speakers assert and say things by 'speaking loosely,' that is, by uttering sentences that literally express only general versions of what is specifically meant, but where the required qualifications are obvious to all in the context. Thus the existence of standardized nonliterality is consistent with the point of view about asserting and saying that I endorsed above, on which commitment by a speaker to conventions, practices, or rules that in part determine what is asserted or said, is necessary for asserting or saying to take place.⁵

Finally, and what is perhaps most important for evaluating Soames's overall view of the semantics of proper names, we as yet have no good

3 For a detailed defense of a contrasting view of sentences like (8)-(12), on which such sentences can semantically express their restricted qualifications, see Stanley and Szabó (2000).

4 The only other kind of clear case that I know of besides standardized nonliterality is that of speaking and writing in *code*, which as my colleague Larry Lombard pointed out to me, can be used to make assertions that are not literally expressed. Of course, the use of code also requires commitment to conventions or rules.

5 Note also that in all cases of standardized nonliterality, the speaker never asserts more than one thing, since the speaker never asserts what is literally expressed. So in my opinion, contrary to Soames's view, the general situation is that one almost never asserts more than one proposition in uttering a sentence. The only (minor) exception to this is the case where one asserts more than one proposition by asserting the conjunction of those propositions.

reason to believe that speakers ever use simple names in simple sentences like (2) and (6) to assert descriptive propositions such as those expressed by sentences (3) and (7) above. In fact, we have some reason to believe that this sort of thing *cannot* happen, since there seem to be no general practices or conventions by virtue of which speakers could use names this way.⁶

III Partially Descriptive Names

Soames defends at some length the original thesis that many syntactically complex expressions are what he calls ‘partially descriptive names.’ On Soames’s theory of such terms, a partially descriptive name *n* has the same content as a definite description of the form ‘the *x*: $Dx \ \& \ x=y$,’ relative to an assignment of an object *o* to the variable ‘*y*,’ where *o* is the referent of *n*. According to Soames, the referent *o* of such a term is determined in part by *o*’s having the property P_D expressed by the term’s descriptive element ‘*D*,’ and ‘in part by the same nondescriptive mechanisms that determine the reference of ordinary nondescriptive names — for example, by a historical chain of transmission leading back to *o*’ (51, 88, 110).

Soames gives a host of examples of terms which he considers to be partially descriptive names, among which are the following (where the semantic content relative to an assignment of the variable ‘*y*’ occurs in parentheses after the term):

6 On the other hand, there is one sort of case involving names that might provide examples of standardized nonliterality, namely, identity-sentences, as in Soames’s case of introduction (‘I am Scott Soames’) as well as identities like his example ‘Peter Hempel is Carl Hempel.’ In both of these cases, one could argue, the proposition semantically expressed is a trivial identity claim, so that, in Bach’s words, the claim expressed ‘lacks relevant specificity,’ and it is such lack of relevant specificity that according to Bach generates interpretations based on standardized nonliterality. (See Bach 2000, 265. See also McKay 1981, 294-5 and Grice 1975.) We’ve already seen that the more specific proposition asserted by an identity sentence can’t be anything as elaborately descriptive as Soames’s sentence (7). But perhaps at a minimum what is asserted may at least be partly quotational as in:

- (i) I am [*named*] Scott Soames.
- (ii) Peter Hempel is [*named*] Carl Hempel.

(Here I assume that the quotation marks are implicit, as is common in everyday speech.) As I suggested above, using identity-sentences like (i) in introductions is such a common everyday practice, that I am inclined to believe that the form has become an idiom, and thus has become a way of semantically expressing linguistic information. But even if this is right, it seems likely that the idiom originated as standardized nonliterality. Moreover, identities like (ii) may still provide examples of standardized nonliterality.

- (15) *Princeton University* (the x : x is a university & $x=y$)
- (16) *Trenton New Jersey* (the x : x is in New Jersey & $x=y$)
- (17) *Professor Saul Kripke* (the x : x is a professor & $x=y$)
- (18) *New York City* (the x : x is a city & $x=y$)
- (19) *Snoqualmie Falls* (the x : x is a waterfall & $x=y$)

While many of Soames's examples clearly are proper names that contain descriptive words as parts (including 'Princeton University,' 'New York City,' and 'Snoqualmie Falls'), many of his examples are not really names at all. Consider the expression 'Trenton, New Jersey,' for instance. This expression is not a name, but is rather a sequence consisting of two names, separated by a comma. (Soames consistently leaves the commas out of such expressions, but I think they are important.) If this sequence were itself a name of the city Trenton, then Trenton would have at least *two* names. But this is surely false. Before it became a part of the state of New Jersey, Trenton already bore the name 'Trenton.' But it did not acquire a *new* name when it became a part of New Jersey. Nor did it ever acquire a second name 'Trenton, New Jersey' at any time thereafter. Nor are there *two* 'historical chains of transmission,' one of which links the name 'Trenton' to the city, while the other links another name 'Trenton, New Jersey' to the same city.

When we use a sequence like 'Trenton, New Jersey' in a sentence like

- (20) Trenton, New Jersey is a small city,

We are simply providing the location of the city Trenton by referring to the state in which it is located. So (20) is just a conventional way of saying what could also be said by writing

- (21) Trenton, which is located in New Jersey, is a small city.

Notice that, if 'Trenton, New Jersey' were a second name of the city, then more elaborate ways of specifying its location such as 'Trenton, New Jersey USA' would provide still further names of the city. But this clearly does not happen.⁷

⁷ In his (2004) reply, Soames reasonably takes me to be suggesting here that expressions such as 'Trenton, New Jersey' are instances of some 'productive grammatical construction,' so that phrases of the form 'A, which is located in B,' where A and B

Another type of expression on which Soames relies as a source of examples of partially descriptive names are terms which are formed by prefixing *titles* to proper names, terms such as 'Professor Saul Kripke.' However, once again it is clear that such terms are not names at all, though they certainly do *contain* names. Again, Kripke did not acquire a new, second name when he became a professor. Nor are there two 'historical chains of transmission,' one of which links the name 'Saul Kripke' to Kripke, and another that links the complex expression 'Professor Saul Kripke' to Kripke.

One possibility, not considered by Soames, is that titles are operators that form descriptive terms when prefixed to proper names. On this idea, 'Professor Saul Kripke' is equivalent in content to the description 'the x : x is a professor & x = Saul Kripke.' On this view, terms formed by titles are quite similar semantically to Soames's partially descriptive names. But the difference of course is that, contrary to Soames's view, such terms would simply not be names at all. Rather they would be definite descriptions that *contain* names, similar to such terms as 'John's mother.'

But this suggestion also, while it is plausible, faces an apparently insuperable difficulty, one that is raised by Soames himself for his own view of these terms. It's just a fact that we continue to refer to people by use of their titles, long after they've ceased to hold the offices or play the social roles on the basis of which the titles were originally conferred. Thus, as Soames points out (113), we continue to use the term 'Princess Diana' to refer to Princess Diana, even though she is dead, and so is no longer a princess. Or consider past presidents of the U.S., including those who are still alive. We continue to refer, for example, to Presidents Ford and Carter by use of their titles, even though neither is currently a

are terms, can always be collapsed into units of the form 'A, B.' But as Soames correctly points out, there is surely no such general construction, since if there were, a meaningful sentence like (20a) could be transformed into the ungrammatical (20b):

20a. *Trenton*, which is located in *the Garden State*, is a small city.

20b. **Trenton, the Garden State* is a small city.

However, I didn't mean to suggest that this sort of general construction exists (in English). Rather, I think that expressions of the form 'A, B' are instances of a more specific sort of construction (that is probably used in U.S. dialects of English alone) in which 'A, B' is short for 'A, which is located in B,' but where A and B must be *official* names of a municipality and state or country, respectively. I'd suggest that the specific construction in question derives from the standard form of addressing mail, as mandated by the U.S. Postal Service. Evidence for this hypothesis is provided by the fact that, at least in American English, an expression of the form 'A, B' is well-formed when, and only when, both A and B are official names of a municipality and state or country respectively, so that 'A, B' can form part of a mailing address of the sort allowed by the U.S. Postal Service.

president of the U.S. This kind of fact convinces me that terms formed by prefixing titles to proper names just derivatively refer directly and nondescriptively to whatever the proper names in question refer to. (I will return to this topic below, and discuss Soames's own response to this problem.)

The two sorts of expressions so far considered as possible examples of partially descriptive names both fail to qualify as names, and those complex terms containing titles also apparently fail to perform any descriptive function. A third group of complex expressions that Soames classifies as partially descriptive names really are proper names all right. But I think it is fairly easy to see that like terms containing titles, these names are also not really descriptive, even though they contain descriptive words as parts. Consider Soames's example 'New York City,' for instance. On Soames's view, this name has the semantic content of the description 'the x : x is a city & $x=y$,' where variable 'y' is assigned New York City. However, a brief perusal of the index of my road atlas quickly revealed many very small towns or non-cities, whose names nevertheless contain the word 'city.' One such town, for example, is Mackinaw City, Michigan, population 859. Since these names refer to small towns that are not cities, the names are not partially descriptive, contrary to Soames's view.

But perhaps the most serious difficulty for Soames's view of these names is raised by the fact that in many cases the descriptive words occurring in the names, like 'city,' 'university,' and 'falls,' express properties with respect to which an object can change over time. As a result, the descriptions for which the names are allegedly short will cease to have referents at times when the names' (earlier) referents have ceased to have the properties in question. Yet it seems clear that the names may continue to refer even after the referents have ceased to have those properties. Thus surely there are times in the future at which the following sentences could express truths:

(22) Princeton University has become a college again.

(23) Snoqualmie Falls has permanently dried up.

After saying (22), the speaker might well go on to suggest changing the referent's name back to 'Princeton College,' so as to avoid misleading the public. Yet at the time of utterance, prior to any change of name, (22) seems perfectly acceptable, even though in order for (22) to be true, the referent of 'Princeton University' must have by then ceased to be a university. In the case of (23), the change is even more drastic, since given its truth, Snoqualmie Falls is not only no longer a waterfall at the time of utterance, but it has thereby ceased to exist. Yet again, (23) nevertheless

would be a perfectly acceptable thing to say, and the name 'Snoqualmie Falls' would continue to refer as before to the now nonexistent waterfall.

I think that this consideration shows that these complex names which Soames calls 'partially descriptive' are semantically just like simple Millian names, and are not really descriptive at all, contrary to Soames's view. The descriptive words that these names contain really play no descriptive semantic role, and their meanings are irrelevant to determining the names' referents. In this respect, these names are like the name 'The Holy Roman Empire,' whose referent, as the old saw goes, was neither holy, Roman, nor an empire.

As I mentioned above, Soames himself raises this same problem for his view that the term 'Princess Diana' is a partially descriptive name. Soames then goes on to suggest that this problem must have *some* solution compatible with his view, since the same problem arises for descriptions like 'my mother' (113). Just as the term 'Princess Diana' can continue to refer to Diana, even though she is no longer a princess (since she no longer exists), so Soames's uses of the term 'my mother' continue to refer to his mother, even though (Soames claims) no one who is now a mother is his mother (since his mother no longer exists).

But I think that Soames's comparison here is illegitimate, since it rests on a false claim about motherhood. As in the case of all kinship relations, one continues to be another person's mother, father, parent, or grandparent even after one has died and ceased to exist. Here is one argument to show this. Even *now*, I am a son, and hence a child, of Clarice McKinsey, who died many years ago. But since the relation *being a child of* is the converse of the relation *being a parent of*, the fact that I am *now* a child of Clarice McKinsey is logically equivalent to the fact that she is *now* a parent of me. Since she is not my father, it further follows that she is *now* a mother of me, and hence is now a mother, in spite of the fact that she no longer exists.⁸

The reason why persons do not cease to be mothers when they die is that for one person *x* to be another person *y*'s mother at a time *t* is simply for *x* to have given birth to *y* at *t* or earlier. Thus my deceased mother is still *now* a mother, since it is now true that she gave birth to me at some time in the past. Thus, unlike the properties of being a university, being a princess, and being a waterfall, the property of being a mother is a

8 Another relevant fact is that persons often come to bear kinship relations to others only *after* they have died. Thus some people do not become grandparents, or even fathers, until after they've died. But surely, if one can *become* a grandparent or a father after one has died, then one can also *be* a grandparent or a father after one has died.

property with respect to which an object cannot change: *once* a mother, *always* a mother.⁹

Since the referent of any use of the term 'my mother' always satisfies the descriptive content of the term at whatever time the term is used, the fact that uses of the term can refer to objects that no longer exist cannot justify any claim like Soames's to the effect that terms like 'Princess Diana,' 'Princeton University,' and 'Snoqualmie Falls' might be descrip-

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- 9 In his (2004) reply, Soames claims that, while my solution may work for cases involving the description 'my mother,' the same sort of solution cannot be provided for cases involving other descriptions, such as

25a. The longtime Princeton professor, David Lewis, is dead.

b. My first philosophy teacher is dead.

c. England's beloved princess, Diana, is dead.

But Soames is wrong about this. For instance, the same sort of solution that I give in the text for the description 'my mother' also works for such descriptions as 'my first philosophy teacher.' For like the property of being one's mother, the property of being one's first philosophy teacher is time-relative and so is a property that once acquired can never be lost. That's because for x to be y's first philosophy teacher at a time t is for there to be some time t' ($\leq t$) such that x teaches philosophy to y at t', where no one other than x teaches philosophy to y at any time that is earlier than or equal to t'. Obviously, given this definition, once x becomes y's first philosophy teacher, x will be y's first philosophy teacher at *all* times thereafter, including times at which x is no longer a teacher, as well as times after x has died. The same solution works for Soames's case (25a), since for x to be a longtime Princeton professor at a time t is for there to be a long period of time ending at t or earlier during which x is a Princeton professor. This also is a time-relative property which, once acquired, can never be lost.

Soames's own general solution (suggested in *Beyond Rigidity*, 114, 332) is that context supplies an implicit past time indicator in cases like (25). Thus, the description in (25b) is understood as 'The person who *was* my first philosophy teacher.' But this proposal has the unfortunate consequence that the meaning of a description like 'my first philosophy teacher' will vary, depending on when it is uttered. Yet when I say during my first philosophy course, 'My first philosophy teacher is brilliant,' the meaning of the description I use certainly seems to be precisely the same as the meaning it has when (many years later) I say (25b).

(25c) also presents a problem for Soames's proposal, since on that proposal (25c) fails to imply that Diana is beloved at the time of utterance. Yet surely, anyone uttering (25c) would intend to imply that Diana is *still* England's beloved princess, and not merely that she *was*. Of course, this raises the further problem that for (25c) to both be true and to have this implication, Diana must remain a princess after death, a possibility that Soames denies. I'm inclined to think that the most plausible alternative is just to accept that there is a sense in which Diana can still be a princess after death. On this sense, she is still a princess because she still retains the *title* of 'Princess.' (Note that the only other sense in which Diana was a princess is that she was married to a prince. She of course lost this property when she and Charles were divorced. Yet even after the divorce, she was considered a princess. Apparently, this must be simply because she kept the title.)

tive and yet continue to refer to objects that have ceased to satisfy their descriptive contents.

I conclude that Soames has produced no real examples of partially descriptive names. All of the examples he gives either fail to be names because they are mere sequences (as in the case of 'Trenton, New Jersey') or they are names but fail to be descriptive (as in the case of 'Princeton University'), or they both fail to be names and fail to be descriptive (as in the case of 'Princess Diana').

IV Soames's Pragmatic Explanation of Substitution Failure

One of Soames's main goals in the book is to provide a pragmatic explanation of the universal intuition that substitution of co-referring names in cognitive contexts can fail to preserve truth, an explanation that is consistent with Soames's semantic views about simple names and cognitive verbs, according to which such substitution *must* in fact preserve truth. In giving this explanation in Chapter 8, Soames makes heavy use of his thesis that sentences containing simple names are often used to assert descriptive propositions that the sentences do not semantically express.

Soames illustrates his explanation (212-14) with the example of the friends Tom, Dick, and Harry, who all know Carl Hempel by sight and call him 'Peter Hempel,' though they are ignorant of his prominent career as a philosopher. They have also all heard the name 'Carl Hempel' and know that it refers to a famous philosopher of science. One day, Harry reads an obituary and says to Tom, 'Carl Hempel died last week.' Later, Tom reports the belief that Harry expressed by saying to Dick:

(24) Harry believes that Carl Hempel died last week.

Since 'Carl Hempel' and 'Peter Hempel' are coreferring Millian names whose sole semantic contents are their common referents, it follows that the sentence embedded in (24), 'Carl Hempel died last week' expresses the same proposition as the sentence 'Peter Hempel died last week.' And since on Soames's view, cognitive verbs like 'believes' express relations between persons and propositions, it follows that since (24) is true, (25) must also be true:

(25) Harry believes that Peter Hempel died last week.

Now of course Tom, Dick, and Harry would all reject (25) as false, and on Soames's view this is an error. Yet, he contends, there is a sense in

which these speakers would be *right* to reject (25). For Tom, Dick, and Harry would perhaps all use the sentence

(26) Peter Hempel died last week.

To assert a descriptive proposition like

(27) The elderly white-haired gentleman of our acquaintance, Peter Hempel, died last week.

But, Soames also suggests (218), such speakers could then be expected to use a sentence like (26) in a belief sentence to ascribe belief in the proposition (27) which they would normally assert by use of (26). Thus such speakers would use the belief sentence (25) to assert the proposition expressed by

(28) Harry believes that the elderly white-haired gentleman of our acquaintance, Peter Hempel, died last week.

Since (28) is clearly false in the example, it is easy to see why Tom, Dick, and Harry would deny (25). For the proposition that they would assert, and would be most interested in asserting, by use of (25) is the proposition (28), which they all know to be false. This, Soames suggests, explains speakers' intuitions that substitution of coreferring names in cognitive contexts can fail to preserve truth. For in fact such substitution *can* change truth-value, by changing the value of what is *asserted* from truth to falsehood, even though what is semantically expressed remains true (214).

Of course if what I said earlier is correct, Soames's pragmatic explanation is seriously defective, for if I am right, a sentence like (26) cannot in fact be used to assert descriptive propositions like (27). This fact in turn eliminates the basis of Soames's explanation of how a belief sentence like (25) could be used to assert that a person has a descriptive belief, as in (28). So the falsity of Soames's view of assertion seriously undermines his pragmatic explanation of apparent substitution failure. But how serious an effect does this have on Soames's general semantic view? Perhaps the effect is small. Soames suggests in a footnote (361, n.7) that those Millians like me who disagree with his view of assertion can nevertheless accept an explanation much like the one he gives, simply by emphasizing the importance of the descriptive information that users of simple names often *primarily intend to convey* (when this differs from what is asserted).

Will such an alternative explanation work? I doubt it. For the basic fact is that speakers almost *never* (if at all) *primarily* intend to convey anything

descriptive when they use simple proper names in simple sentences like (26), other than a description of the name's referent as satisfying the content of the sentence's predicate. Now it is true, I think, that speakers often do *succeed* in conveying extra descriptive information by use of such sentences. For if speakers and hearers were not mutually aware of the at least roughly similar descriptions which they associate with their uses of names, then communication by use of names would certainly be difficult, if not impossible.

But in my view, the descriptive assumptions that underlie the use of proper names typically remain in the background, and play at most a reference-fixing role. (See McKinsey, 1984.) If these assumptions were typically in the foreground, as they would be if we often *primarily intended* to convey extra descriptive information by use of names, then we would not have the Kripkean intuitions that motivate the direct-reference, Millian, view of names that Soames and I both endorse. For instance, suppose that Harry comes to accept sentence (26) ('Peter Hempel died last week') and assertively utters it. Suppose also that we then ask Tom, Dick, and Harry whether what Harry *said, asserted, or primarily intended to convey* in uttering (26) would remain true in a possible world in which Peter Hempel did in fact die last week, even though in that world he happens *not* to be an elderly white-haired gentleman of their acquaintance. I take it that all would immediately respond, 'Of course it would remain true!' This Kripkean intuition, I think, shows that speakers of simple sentences like (26) containing names at least typically do *not* say, assert, or primarily intend to convey anything descriptive like proposition (27). Instead, a typical speaker of (26) for instance would primarily intend to say, assert, and convey a simple singular proposition about Peter Hempel to the effect that he died last week.¹⁰

So I think that Soames's strategy for explaining apparent substitution failure is fundamentally flawed. The reason is that this strategy requires an explanation of why extra descriptive information often becomes salient in the utterance of *simple* sentences containing names, when the fact is that such descriptive information almost *never does* become salient in such cases. I would suggest that what really needs to be explained instead is why, even though extra descriptive information is almost never salient in the utterance of simple sentences containing

10 Ted Sider and David Braun (forthcoming) have also independently contended that Soames's view is inconsistent with Kripkean intuitions about sentences containing simple names.

names, such information nevertheless seems to almost automatically *become* salient whenever such a sentence is uttered in the scope of a cognitive verb.¹¹

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11 I have elsewhere proposed theories of names and belief ascriptions which are in part motivated by the need to provide an explanation of the latter sort. See McKinsey 1994 and 1999.

This paper is a slightly revised version of a paper presented to an 'Author Meets Critics' symposium at the 2004 meeting of the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association (Pasadena, 27 March 2004). My co-symposiast was George Wilson, and Scott Soames presented replies to both of us. The session was chaired by Takashi Yagisawa. The paper here is exactly the same as the one presented, except for the addition of notes 2, 7, 9, and 10.

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