Searle on Proper Names

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DISCUSSION

SEARLE ON PROPER NAMES[1]

JOHN SEARLE has proposed a view of proper names[2] which contains the following main theses:

(*A*) No proper name is equivalent in sense to a definite description (*PN*, 158; *PND*, 488).

(*B*) Every referring use of a proper name presupposes that the name's denotation has at least one member of a certain set of uniquely identifying properties (*PN*, 159; *PND*, 490).

(*C*) An identity sentence $\ulcorner a = b \urcorner$ (where a and b are proper names) expresses an analytic proposition if the referring uses of a and b have the same presuppositions; otherwise, $\ulcorner a = b \urcorner$ expresses a synthetic proposition (*PN*, 161; *PND*, 490).

Searle offers (*C*) as a solution to Frege's famous puzzle as to how, of two identity sentences whose component names have the same reference, one of the sentences (for example, "Mark Twain = Sam Clemens") may express an informative synthetic proposition, while the other (for example, "Mark Twain = Mark Twain") expresses an uninformative analytic proposition. Frege's answer, of course, was that $\ulcorner a = b \urcorner$ is synthetic and has a different "cognitive value" from $\ulcorner a = a \urcorner$ just in case a and b have different *senses*.[3]

Searle agrees with Frege that there are informative identity sentences of the form $\ulcorner a = b, \urcorner$ and he also agrees that from this fact we must conclude that proper names have senses (*PND*, 490). Frege also thought, however, that proper names are shorthand definite descriptions.[4] As his thesis (*A*) indicates, Searle does not agree with Frege on

[1] I am grateful to H.-N. Castañeda for his suggestions on ways to improve an earlier draft of this paper.

[2] In "Proper Names," *Mind*, LXVII (1958), 166-173; reprinted in Charles Caton (ed.), *Philosophy and Ordinary Language* (Urbana, 1963); henceforth referred to as *PN*, with all page references to the Caton volume. And more recently, in his "Proper Names and Descriptions," in Paul Edwards (ed.), *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 6 (New York, 1967), 487-492; henceforth referred to as *PND*.

[3] "On Sense and Reference," *Translations from the Writings of Gottlob Frege*, ed. by P. Geach and M. Black (Oxford, 1966), pp. 56-57.

[4] Cf. Frege, *op. cit.*, p. 58, note.

this point, and so he proposes his presupposition theory of proper names (which I have roughly encapsulated in (*B*)) to provide an alternative solution to Frege's problem, a solution designed by Searle to avoid commitment to the belief that proper names are short for definite descriptions. His theory provides such a solution, Searle thinks, because it gives us (*C*), on which $\ulcorner a = b \urcorner$ is synthetic just in case the referring uses of *a* and *b* have different presuppositions. Thus his view, Searle claims, specifies a way in which proper names may be said to have distinct "senses" (that is, presuppositions) and solves Frege's problem without the assumption that proper names are equivalent in sense to definite descriptions.

Searle never explains, however, what connection there is between his theory of presuppositions and the solution to Frege's problem which it is supposed to provide: he only asserts (*C*) and leaves it to his readers to figure out why, given (*B*), (*C*) is true. He must think that the connection between (*B*) and (*C*) is obvious.

I wish to show here that it is far from obvious that there is any connection between (*B*) and (*C*). I shall examine two versions of (*B*), both of which are suggested by Searle, and which I believe exhaust the alternatives for interpreting (*B*), at least on the basis of what Searle says. Neither of these interpretations, I shall argue, is sufficient to justify (*C*), and one of them has the consequence that, contrary to Searle's thesis (*A*), proper names are equivalent in sense to definite descriptions. Thus, if I am right, Searle's presupposition theory does not provide an alternative to Frege's view of proper names which will solve Frege's problem.

Searle's Thesis (*B*)

Proper names have senses, Searle says, in that they are "logically connected with the characteristics of the object to which they refer . . . 'in a loose sort of way' " (*PN*, 161; *PND*, 490). Searle explicates this connection in the following manner.

In order to use a word as the name of a particular object, the user of the name must be able to identify the object in a way sufficient to distinguish it from other objects (*PND*, 490). A knowledge of at least some individuating facts about, say, Aristotle is a prerequisite for using his name. Searle suggests that the connection between the name "Aristotle" and Aristotle himself can be established on different bases for different persons, according to the varying manners in which they have learned who Aristotle is, and according to the varying funds of

knowledge about Aristotle they possess. But if nothing had ever possessed any of the unique properties which have commonly been attributed to Aristotle, it would follow, according to Searle, not only that Aristotle never existed, but also that no one could use the name "Aristotle" to refer to a unique object (*PN*, 160-161; *PND*, 490).

In "Proper Names" Searle puts this point by saying that the referring use of a proper name "presupposes" the truth of certain uniquely identifying statements (*PN*, 159), and in his *Encyclopedia* article, he makes the same point by saying that such statements provide the "descriptive backing" for proper names (*PND*, 490). No particular one of these descriptions need necessarily be true of the name's bearer; yet it is necessary that at least *some* of these descriptions be true of the bearer:

> It is a necessary condition for an object's being Aristotle that it satisfy at least some of these descriptions. This is another way of saying that the *disjunction* of these descriptions is *analytically tied* to the name "Aristotle" [*PND*, 490; my italics].[5]

Searle does not tell us so explicitly, but he seems to mean that the relation of presupposition between the referring uses of names and sets of descriptions is the same as the "analytic tie" which connects names and *disjunctions* of descriptions.

Let us suppose, to facilitate discussion, that some names presuppose two-membered sets of properties; and let "Cicero" presuppose the set $\{F,G\}$. Then to say that the referring uses of "Cicero" presuppose the set $\{F,G\}$ would be to say at least that each referring use of "Cicero" presupposes that the denotation of "Cicero" has the disjunctive property $Fx \vee Gx$. In addition, as we have seen, the referring uses of a proper name presuppose that the name's denotation has at least one uniquely identifying property. On this interpretation, then, each referring use of "Cicero" presupposes that: there is an x such that "Cicero" denotes x and x is either the only individual that is F or x is the only individual that is G. Or for short,

(1) Each referring use of "Cicero" presupposes that: "Cicero" denotes $(\imath x)Fx \vee$ "Cicero" denotes $(\imath x)Gx$.[6]

[5] Cf. also *PN*, 160: "it is a necessary fact that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive disjunction, of properties commonly attributed to him . . . ."

[6] We shall assume here and throughout that denotation is a many-one function so that, for example, if "Cicero" denotes both $(\imath x)Fx$ and $(\imath x)Gx$, then $(\imath x)Fx = (\imath x)Gx$. This seems to correspond to Searle's use of the term "refers"; cf. his remarks on the irrelevancy to his account of the fact that different people

What Searle is saying, it appears, is that in general we would specify what the referring uses of a given proper name presuppose (and hence, the way in which a given proper name has a sense) by using an instance of the following schema, which I offer as a first interpretation of Searle's thesis (*B*):

(*B*1) Each referring use of a proper name α presupposes that: α denotes $(\imath x)P_1x \vee \alpha$ denotes $(\imath x)P_2x \vee \ldots \vee \alpha$ denotes $(\imath x)P_nx$,

where, we understand, each of the P_i's will belong to the set of properties presupposed by α.

Now in order for Searle's view to solve Frege's problem one must be able to use it to account for the fact that, of two identities which contain coreferential proper names, it is possible for one to be analytic while the other is synthetic. Searle thinks that one can do this. On the basis of his thesis (*C*) and given (1) as an instance of (*B*1), it ought to turn out that "Cicero = Tully" is analytic if "Cicero" and "Tully" have the same presuppositions. Let us test this claim.

Suppose "Cicero" and "Tully" have the same presuppositions, and suppose that (1) states what "Cicero" presupposes. Then we would state what "Tully" presupposes as follows:

(2) Each referring use of "Tully" presupposes that: "Tully" denotes $(\imath x)Fx \vee$ "Tully" denotes $(\imath x)Gx$.

Now suppose that the presuppositions in (1) and (2) are fulfilled in the following manner: "Cicero" denotes $(\imath x)Fx$, "Tully" denotes $(\imath x)Gx$, but $(\imath x)Fx \neq (\imath x)Gx$. Since this situation is consistent with (1) and (2), it is possible that "Cicero" and "Tully" have the same presuppositions and yet denote different individuals. But as far as Searle is concerned, this must be a serious defect in (1) and (2) and, hence, in schema (*B*1); because for him two names with the same presuppositions must, if they denote at all, denote the same individual. This follows from his thesis (*C*) on which "Cicero = Tully" expresses an analytic proposition if "Cicero" and "Tully" have the same presuppositions. But on (1) and (2), when "Cicero" and "Tully" have the same presuppositions (and the presuppositions are fulfilled), it may not be true, let alone analytically true, that Cicero = Tully.

It is clear then that instances of (*B*1) will not serve Searle's purposes.

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are named "John Smith" (*PND*, 490). Also, we assume that a name denotes an object just in case it is the name of an existing object. In short, the term "denote" as used here is a translation of Frege's term "*bedeuten.*"

Searle needs specifications of what proper names presuppose which are at least strong enough to guarantee that names with the same presuppositions denote the same individuals, but which are also disjunctive in form. The only specification of what the name "Cicero" presupposes which fulfills these requirements is:

(3) Each referring use of "Cicero" presupposes that: "Cicero" denotes $(\imath x)$ $(Fx \vee Gx)$.

(3), unlike (1), does not have the defect of allowing two names with the same presuppositions to denote different individuals. We should notice that Searle nowhere argues for the truth of any specification of the set of properties which a given name presupposes such as (3). We must, however, assume that he had in mind such specifications as (3). For if he did not, he could not have justifiably thought that the names of distinct individuals have distinct senses (presuppositions).

Searle borrows the term "presuppose" from P.F. Strawson, who originally used it to state his thesis that referring uses of a singular term (proper name or definite description) presuppose the existence of an object to which the term refers.[7] By this Strawson meant that a sentence containing a singular term in its subject position can be used to make a true or false statement only if the singular term refers to an existing individual. It appears, then, that we can analyze the notion of presupposition in terms of entailment (or necessity of the conditional).[8] That is, an instance of the schema

(4) The sentence $\ulcorner\varphi(\alpha)\urcorner$ presupposes that p

is to be understood as equivalent to an instance of the schema

(5) $\ulcorner\varphi(\alpha)\urcorner$ is true or false $\rightarrow p$.

(Where "φ" ranges over predicates, "α" over proper names, and "$\rightarrow$" represents entailment. Strictly speaking, the antecedent of [5] should be "The proposition expressed by $\ulcorner\varphi(\alpha)\urcorner$ is true or false." The reader can add the qualification throughout, if he wishes.) Accordingly, we may read (3) as equivalent to

(3′) $\ulcorner$Cicero is $\varphi\urcorner$ is true or false $\rightarrow$ "Cicero" denotes $(\imath x)$ $(Fx \vee Gx)$.

And in general, we would specify the way in which a proper name has

[7] See his "On Referring," *Mind*, LIX (1950), 320-344. See also Frege, *op. cit.*

[8] For a discussion of the relations between presupposition, implication, and necessitation, see Bas van Fraassen's "Presupposition, Implication, and Self-Reference," *Journal of Philosophy*, LXV (1968), 136-152.

a distinct sense by using an instance of the following schema, which I offer as the second version of Searle's thesis (*B*):

(*B*2) ⌜$\varphi(\alpha)$⌝ is true or false $\rightarrow$ α denotes $(\imath x)$ $(P_1x \vee P_2x \vee \ldots \vee P_nx)$.

Before going on, we should notice that, according to Searle, there will be cases in which a single name has different presuppositions for two different persons. For instance, suppose that for person *A* "Cicero" and "Tully" both presuppose the set of properties {*F*,*G*}, while for person *B* "Cicero" presupposes the set {*F*,*G*} but "Tully" presupposes the set {*F*,*H*}. Searle claims that, in such a case, not only does "Tully" have different presuppositions for *A* and *B*, but also "Cicero = Tully" expresses an analytic proposition for *A* and a synthetic proposition for *B* (see *PN*, 161 and *PND*, 490). We might indicate the different presuppositions which "Tully" has for *A* and *B* as follows:

(6) ⌜Tully is φ⌝ is true or false for *A* $\rightarrow$ "Tully" denotes $(\imath x)$ $(Fx \vee Gx)$.

(7) ⌜Tully is φ⌝ is true or false for *B* $\rightarrow$ "Tully" denotes $(\imath x)$ $(Fx \vee Hx)$.

Searle's Thesis (*C*)

Now let us test (*B*2), as we did (*B*1), to see whether it can be used to solve Frege's problem. Let us see, that is, whether (*B*2), unlike (*B*1), can be used to justify Searle's thesis (*C*). Here is Searle's clearest statement of (*C*):

> [I]t is easy to explain identity statements using proper names. "Everest is Chomolungma" states that the descriptive backing of both names is true of the same object. If the descriptive backing of the two names, for the person making the statement, is the same, or if one contains the other, the statement is analytic; if not, it is synthetic (*PND*, 490).

Now consider the example we have been using, "Cicero = Tully." On the surface, Searle seems to be making the following rather dubious claim:

(8) "Cicero = Tully" states that the descriptive backing of "Cicero" and the descriptive backing of "Tully" are true of the same object.

If (8) is true, then "Cicero = Tully" gives us, among other things, some information about the names "Cicero" and "Tully." Yet it is

not obvious that "Cicero = Tully" is about words at all. In fact, Searle himself tells us that it is not (*PN*, 154). So Searle must be making some other claim.

Let us continue to suppose that for *A* "Cicero" and "Tully" presuppose the same set of properties {*F*,*G*} while for *B* "Cicero" presupposes the set {*F*,*G*} but "Tully" presupposes the set {*F*,*H*}. Then for *A* the descriptive backings of "Cicero" and "Tully" are the same, while for *B* the two names have different descriptive backings. Since, following schema (*B*2), "Cicero" and "Tully," for *A*, both presuppose that their denotation is the only individual which has the property $Fx \vee Gx$, Searle might mean here that "Cicero = Tully" is analytic for *A* because it *states* that the identifying property $Fx \vee Gx$ belongs to one and the same object—that is because

(9) "Cicero = Tully" states for *A* that
$$(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx).$$

And for *B* the explanation would be that "Cicero = Tully" is synthetic because:

(10) "Cicero = Tully" states for *B* that
$$(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Hx).$$

But this cannot be the right explanation. For consider (9). It tells us that the sentence "Cicero = Tully," for *A*, expresses the proposition that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$. From this it follows that "Cicero" and "Tully" are, for *A*, equivalent in sense to the definite description "$(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$." But this, notice, violates Searle's thesis (*A*), for it means that we can define the sense which a proper name has for a given person, and that proper names are abbreviated descriptions, which Searle denies.

But perhaps what Searle meant was that (in our case) "Cicero = Tully" for *A* *presupposes* that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$, while for *B* it *presupposes* that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$. On this interpretation, "Cicero = Tully" is synthetic for *B* because:

(11) "Cicero = Tully" is true or false for $B \rightarrow (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$.

But surely this is wrong, for it is possible that (11)'s antecedent is true and its consequent false. Suppose that the identity expressed for *B* by "Cicero = Tully" is false. Then (11)'s antecedent is true: "Cicero = Tully" expresses a proposition for *B* which is either true or false. And using schema (*B*2) in accordance with *B*'s presup-

positions, it follows that "Cicero" denotes $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$ and "Tully" denotes $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$. But then, since "Cicero = Tully" expresses a false identity, it will also be false that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$. Hence, since "Cicero = Tully" expresses for *B* a proposition which is possibly false, it is possible that (11)'s antecedent is true and its consequent false. Hence, (11) is false.

The only other possibility which Searle might have had in mind is that for *A* "Cicero = Tully" expresses a proposition which *entails* that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$, while for *B* it expresses a proposition which *entails* that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$. Now according to Searle, when an identity is analytic there are two possible sorts of cases: (*i*) the sets of properties presupposed by the two names are the same, or (*ii*) one of the sets contains the other. (We take it he means by "contains" "properly includes.")

Let us look at case (*ii*) first. Consider a person *C* for whom "Cicero" presupposes the set $\{F,G,H\}$, while "Tully" presupposes the set $\{F,G\}$. So $\{F,G\} \subset \{F,G,H\}$, and according to Searle "Cicero = Tully" expresses an analytic proposition for *C*. Call this proposition "$(\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_C$." Then we have

$$(12)\ (\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_C \rightarrow (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx \vee Hx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx).$$

A disjunction of the form "$Fa \vee Ga \vee Ha$" will not usually entail "$Fa \vee Ga$." Such an entailment will hold in unusual cases such as when $(x)\ (Gx \leftrightarrow Hx)$, or when Hx is a contradictory property. But obviously it will most often be true that "$Fx \vee Gx$" and "$Fx \vee Gx \vee Hx$" denote different and pairwise independent properties. Let the present case be such. Then, even though $\{F,G\} \subset \{F,G,H\}$, it will be contingent that $(\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx \vee Hx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$. But of course then, by (12), it will be contingent that $(\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_C$, for no analytic proposition can entail a contingent one. So cases of type (*ii*) do not give us analytic identities.

Now consider the situation for person *A* as an instance of case (*i*). According to Searle, "Cicero = Tully" expresses an analytic proposition for *A*. Call this proposition "$(\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_A$." The explanation of why "Cicero = Tully" is analytic for *A* must be that (*a*) we have

$$(13)\ (\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_A \rightarrow (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\imath x)\ (Fx \vee Gx),$$

and (*b*) the consequent of (13) is analytic. But even so, it will not follow from (13) that $(\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_A$ is analytic, because an analytic proposition is entailed by any proposition whatever. So cases of type (*i*) also fail to give us analytic identities.

There appears, then, to be nothing in what Searle says which justifies an inference from the fact that two names a and b have the same presuppositions to the conclusion that $\ulcorner a = b \urcorner$ is analytic. So Searle's thesis (C) remains without support.

Even if we assumed, however, that the truth of (13) somehow shows that "Cicero = Tully" expresses an analytic proposition for A, there would still be an important element missing from Searle's account. For, as the reader probably has not failed to notice, we still do not understand what connection there is between Searle's theory of presuppositions, as represented by ($B2$), and entailments such as (12), (13), and

$$(14)\ (\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_B \rightarrow (\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Hx),$$

(where $(\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_B$ is the synthetic proposition which for B is expressed by "Cicero = Tully"). Without understanding this, of course, we are still in the dark as to why Searle thought his theory could solve Frege's problem.

Searle himself does not tell us what this connection is. But it is reasonable to suppose that for him entailments like (14) must be derivable from presupposition statements given us by ($B2$) such as

(15) "Cicero = Tully" is true or false for $B \rightarrow$ "Cicero" denotes $(\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$ and "Tully" denotes $(\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$.

Let us just assume that (14) is derivable from (15).

Even so, there is still something else which we have yet to understand. Consider the peculiar locution " 'Cicero = Tully' is true or false for B." What it seems to mean is that the proposition which for B is expressed by "Cicero = Tully"—the proposition we called $(\text{Cicero} = \text{Tully})_B$—is either true or false. But now the obvious question is: *what is this proposition*? It is clearly not the proposition that Cicero = Tully, since on Searle's assumptions there is *no* such proposition. And why should its being true or false and its expression by "Cicero = Tully" *entail* that "Cicero" denotes $(\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$ and "Tully" denotes $(\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$?

I think that the answer to these questions is clear. The only available candidate for the proposition which for B is expressed by "Cicero = Tully" is the proposition that $(\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Hx)$. Likewise the only candidate for the proposition which for A is expressed by "Cicero = Tully" is the proposition that $(\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Gx) = (\iota x)\ (Fx \vee Gx)$. It is not surprising that Searle wanted to say that, for instance, "Cicero = Tully" always states that two disjunctive proper-

ties belong to the same object. There is, on his view, really nothing else for it to state. But, as we pointed out before, this has the consequence that proper names are equivalent in sense to disjunctive definite descriptions, and thus violates Searle's principle (*A*).

Our result, then, is this. (*B*1) is too weak to specify the distinct senses had by names of distinct objects, and so does not really allow Searle to claim that proper names have senses even "in a way." Neither (*B*1) nor (*B*2) can justify (*C*) and, what is worse, the very attempt to use (*B*2) to justify (*C*) is understandable only on the assumption that proper names are equivalent in sense to definite descriptions. If I am right, we may fairly conclude that Searle has not proposed a view of proper names which is a genuine alternative to Frege's view and which at the same time can be used to solve Frege's problem.

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