

‘Latinos,’ ‘Hispanics,’ and ‘Iberoamericans’: Naming or Describing?

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I

In some ways that have been largely ignored, ethnic-group names might be similar to names of other kinds. If they are, for instance, analogous to proper names, then a correct semantic account of the latter could throw some light on how the meaning of ethnic-group names should be construed. Of course, proper names, together with definite descriptions, belong to the class of singular terms, and an influential view on the semantics of such terms was developed, at the turn of the nineteenth century, from discussion of a puzzle about some differences in the cognitive value of certain statements of identity. Clearly, *that a = a* (e.g., *that Mark Twain was Mark Twain*) is trivial, and its truth could be known *a priori*, just by thinking. On the other hand, *that a = b* (e.g., *that Mark Twain was Samuel Clemens*) is of course informative and knowable only by empirical investigation.

To solve this puzzle, Frege famously proposed that those variations in the cognitive value of statements of identity “can arise only if the difference between the signs corresponds to a difference in the *mode of presentation of that which is designated*.”¹ On his view, although in the above statements of identity, the singular terms, ‘*a*,’ and, ‘*b*,’ may designate the same thing, they do so with different senses, or under different modes of presentation of that object. When the puzzling statements involving ‘*a*’ and ‘*b*’ are true, they may then be said to have exactly the same reference. But since those singular terms pick out the object of reference differently (i.e., under different senses or modes of presentation), therefore the cognitive value of these statements also varies significantly.

On this account, then, the reference of a non-vacuous proper name is secured by the name’s sense, or mode of presentation, which constitutes its semantic content. And given that Fregeans (here under the influence of Russell²) cash out that sense as consisting in whatever concept (or cluster of concepts) could be uniquely associated with that name, they might hold, for example, that the property of being the author of *Huckleberry Finn*, and that of being an American who lived his early life in Hannibal, Missouri, and later became a famous writer, amount to the senses of ‘Mark Twain,’ and ‘Samuel Clemens,’ respectively. Furthermore, since a proper name can refer to an object only in virtue of its descriptive content, a certain concept uniquely associated with it, therefore the name and the definite description that provides its semantic content are taken to be synonymous. It is now a matter of dispute whether the correct account of proper names should run long these lines, yet the Fregean view has enjoyed wide support among analytic philosophers for most of the twentieth century--reaching, according to some, the status of orthodoxy.³

Surely, if ethnic-group names are semantically analogous to proper names, then the correct semantic account of each of these linguistic types will be relevantly similar. But are they analogous? And could Fregeanism provide such an account? As standardly construed, that view of proper names rests on two major theses. First, it holds that the semantic content of a proper name is a descriptive content consisting in a concept (or cluster of concepts) uniquely associated with the name, and that it is that concept that constitutes its sense, or mode of presentation. Second, it maintains that the reference of any such name is mediated by its sense, for it is only in virtue of the latter that a non-vacuous name picks out a distinct referent. But what, if anything, could a Fregean say about ethnic-group names?

To determine whether names of this sort have descriptive semantic content, we need only explore some specific cases, since our conclusions, if correct, would of course generalize. Consider some names often used to designate Latin Americans and their descendants in other parts of the world—for example, ‘Latinos,’ ‘Hispanics,’ and ‘Iberoamericans.’ These names may be taken to have senses that are definite descriptions capturing some properties that apply uniquely to the group of people thereby designated. For isn’t it evident that such terms convey a descriptive meaning concerning that group? And, in the USA, aren’t the properties associated with these names often negative ones, such as those of being from the developing world, having poor intellectual skills or lacking proper education? Were descriptive properties part of the semantic content of these names, then some derivation of Fregeanism might seem the way to go about providing a correct account of them. We could then hold that,

- i Any non-vacuous ethnic-group name picks out its referent only in virtue of a certain semantic content associated with it, which constitutes the sense of the name.
- ii When different ethnic-group names are used to *designate* the same group of people, as in the case of singular terms, each name picks out the target group under a different sense or mode of presentation.

The Fregean may treat ‘Latinos,’ ‘Hispanics,’ and ‘Iberoamericans’ as names that designate roughly the same group of people, but, as in the case of ‘Mark Twain’ and ‘Samuel Clemens,’ they pick out their referent under different senses. The semantic content of co-referential names is again understood in terms of some descriptive properties associated with any such name, and in some cases, taken to vary significantly. ‘Latinos,’ for example, could be said to designate the target group in virtue of a certain property that uniquely applies to that group and differs from the properties associated with the other names used to pick out the same group. But now the Fregean must say just *what that property is*, and it is here that this account founders, for, as we shall see, some common candidates could not be truly predicated of the members of the referent group. I shall argue that, if an ethnic-group name can pick out its referent only in virtue of its *sense*, construed as a descriptive property associated with that name, then it is difficult to see how speakers could succeed in using a name of that sort in thought or language to refer to any group of people at all. But since speakers do ordinarily succeed in using such

names referentially, this strongly suggests that the correct semantic account of them must run along non-descriptive lines.

II

Some issues concerning the correct semantics of ethnic-group names in general--and, more especially, possible consequences of that semantics for the use of such names to designate Iberians, Latin Americans, and their descendants in other parts the world--have recently attracted attention among philosophers.⁴ This is of course welcome. Since these names play an important role in everyday linguistic communication and social interaction, some serious discussion of them seems long overdue. Let us first consider the assumption that these names are semantically analogous to proper names. Why should we think this? In fact it is not difficult to find examples from everyday usage in which ethnic-group names are used as proper names. A friend of mine, for example, ordinarily calls her husband 'Turk' (he was born in Istanbul, to Turkish parents). And my father's nick-name is 'Gringo,' a term commonly used in Argentina to refer to persons of Italian origins. In each of these cases (which are by no means atypical), an ethnic-group name is transformed and used, affectionately, as the proper name of a person.

Furthermore, the soundness of the analogy seems reinforced by the fact that speakers appear to associate descriptions of the form 'the group of people who...' with ethnic-group names, and these attempt to single out properties that apply uniquely to the designated groups. As J. S. Mill noted, speakers do associate a description with a proper name, especially when it is first introduced and initiates a chain of communication involving that name. A town may be called, 'Dartmouth,' observes Mill, if it lies at the mouth of the Dart. Yet it would ordinarily keep the name even after the river had changed its course.⁵ (The claim is thus weaker, and therefore more plausible, than the Fregean view according to which any such name would be *synonymous* with a certain definite description.) More recently, it has been pointed out that some terms with clear descriptive associations, such as *The Holy Roman Empire* and *The United Nations*, are in fact of proper names—a claim supported by the explicit failure of the associated descriptions to be true of their referents in these cases!⁶

But ordinary usage offers numerous other examples illustrating the analogy of concern here. A notable case is that of the former president of Argentina, Carlos Saúl Menem, for it clearly shows that an ethnic-group name can play the role of a proper name and succeed in picking out its referent, even when the descriptive content explicitly associated with it *fails to be true of that referent*. Although Argentinians know that Menem is of Syrian parentage, many call him, 'Turk' — a term that succeeds in picking out Menem, even though the property of being Turkish is false of him (those who initiated that communication chain surely realized that being a Syrian is not the same as being a Turk)! Here, again, an ethnic-group name has been transformed and functions as the proper name of a person in thought and language.

Let us consider one more case. Some Spaniards have coined the (derogatory) term, 'Sudaca,' to pick out Latin Americans in general, even though the word is short for 'South American,' as most users of the term know very well. Yet Spanish speakers who

employ it thereby refer successfully not only to Peruvians, Chileans and other South Americans, but also to Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, and Cubans, as well as Central Americans of several nationalities—for all of whom, of course, the property of being South American fails to obtain. I submit that cases of this sort make the analogy between ethnic-group names and proper names quite compelling.

III

Could a Fregean account of proper names, then, serve as a reliable guide to the semantics of ethnic-group names, such as ‘Latino,’ ‘Hispanic,’ and ‘Iberoamerican’? That it could appears supported by the clear fact that speakers do associate with each of these names certain descriptive properties, which we may spell out roughly as follows:

- | | | |
|------------------|---|--|
| ‘Latinos’ | = | The property of belonging to a certain group of people who are in some fundamental ways related to European Latin countries. |
| ‘Hispanics’ | = | The property of belonging to a certain group of people who are in some fundamental ways related to a former Roman territory located in what is now Spain and Portugal. |
| ‘Iberoamericans’ | = | The property of belonging to a certain group of people in the American continent who are in some fundamental ways related to the Iberian peninsula. |

Let us suppose that the target group comprises Latin Americans and their descendants in any part of the world, and ask whether the properties explicitly associated with each of the names on our list could be truly predicated of all and only the members of that group. Those properties represent some of the common candidates that may be offered as the Fregean senses of the listed name. Note that in all instances, the associated property is a relational one, which the referent-group has by virtue of its connection to a certain geographical location. But to give a complete account of the Fregean senses here would require invoking other properties shared by the members of the designated group, perhaps concerning language, culture, and race. In any case, the Fregean intuition has it that a full list of relevant properties along the lines suggested above would give the different senses in virtue of which each of those names can pick out a specific referent.

A closer look at the list, however, reveals that this will not be easy. For example, the property associated with ‘Hispanic’ is clearly too narrow, since it excludes, for instance, indigenous peoples, as well as several generations of Latin Americans who have no fundamental relation with the former Roman territory located in what is now Spain and Portugal at all (of course, similar reasons would also rule out the other candidates). This is a great flaw, because when the term is used in the USA, the associated description is often precisely that of being fundamentally related, not to Spain and Portugal, but to Latin America, *and having some American Indian ethnic/racial background*. (I was startled when a member of a search committee for a job I didn’t get told me, confidentially, that, *being a white Argentinian, I did not really qualify as*

Hispanic.) Clearly, in this country, different speakers seem to associate different properties with that term. And if it were taken to be an adaptation of the Spanish words ‘*hispánico*,’ and ‘*hispano*,’ so that it would also include Spaniards in its designation, that would be at odds with actual usage. Having lived in Spain for some years, I can attest that, in the *EEC* era, many Spaniards will not welcome an attempt to group them with Latin Americans. Moreover, in Spain, it is simply not part of ordinary linguistic practice to use those Spanish words with that meaning. Moreover, there is a further problem: does the common use of the term, ‘Hispanic,’ in the USA have a designation broad enough as to include people from Portugal, which is of course also part of the peninsula the Romans named *Hispania*?

Yet ‘Latino’ is no better off, being clearly too broad when construed *à la Frege*—for if the descriptive content of that term is taken literally, wouldn’t it end up picking out also Romanians, Italians and the French? (Winston Churchill had Huguenot ancestry through his American-born mother; does that make him Latino?) Finally, on a Fregean account, my own choice of ‘Latin American’ would be arbitrary, since that name turns out to have associated properties that are both too broad and too narrow, thus failing to pick out the target referent. If the term is taken literally, it is too broad, since it would pick out the peoples of the French colonies in America (and their descendants—were Pierre Trudeau and Jack Kerouac Latin Americans?). At the same time, it is also too narrow, in that it excludes actual members of the target group—viz., indigenous peoples and Latin Americans of non-Latin origins. Under what name shall we include Carlos Menem, Bernardo O’Higgins, and Alberto Fujimori?

There is a problem, then, facing Fregeanism about ethnic-group names, for it clearly makes unjustified the adoption of *any* of the terms now commonly used to designate Latin Americans (and their descendants in other parts of the world).⁷ Moreover, it creates a mystery about ordinary linguistic communication, since none of the available ethnic-group names would appear to successfully pick out the intended group in virtue of its sense. But, on a Fregean account, if such names were analogous to proper names, then the only way they could secure their referents would be precisely through their descriptive contents. How then could this view explain the fact that, in the case of ethnic-group names, even when no available candidate expresses a property that is true of all and only the members of the target group, we nonetheless succeed in using such names in ordinary speech to refer to the people of that group? Plainly, something has gone wrong here. But there is an alternative to Fregeanism, the Millian view, which—as we shall see—can accommodate ordinary scenarios involving the use of ethnic-group names. Before turning to it, however, let us be sure that we do understand the problem.

IV

Latin American thinkers have often been concerned with problems of cultural identity, and at the heart of these issues is the large question of whether Iberians, Latin Americans, and their descendants in various geographical locations do share a common identity at all. This breaks down into at least three smaller, more precise questions:

I Do these peoples constitute a single ethnic or cultural group?

- II* If so, how could such a group be individuated?
- III* And what name, if any, is the correct name of that group?

But the historical and demographic facts now widely accepted make clear that the answer to (I) and (II) must be as follows:

- I'* A closer examination of the ethnic background and cultural heritage of Iberians, Latin Americans, and their descendants abroad shows that there is no *single* characteristic common to all the members of this group that could be used to distinguish them sharply from people of other groups.
- II'* But that does not entail that it is impossible for social science to determine (a) a broad set of properties possessed, in different combinations, by members of that group, and (b) the number of those properties that would be sufficient for membership of the group. In fact, since Iberians, Latin Americans and their descendants abroad have been fundamentally related in some periods of history, these empirical questions seem in principle answerable by science.

Question III, however, brings us back to the chief problem of concern here. And it is, again, whether a Fregean account is after all adequate to explain what seems to go on in ordinary discourse. For the Fregean, the 'correct' name to refer to a group must be one whose descriptive content is true of all and only the members of that group. But, after considering some common candidates for names to apply to Latin Americans, we have found that each fails to express a property that could be predicated in that way. If Fregeanism is to be our theory then, it appears that there could never be any ground for preferring one ethnic-group name over another. Let us call this conclusion, 'name nihilism' (*NN*). A simplified version of the argument for *NN* runs as follows:

- NN* 1. Latin Americans, and their descendants abroad, constitute an ethnically and culturally diverse group of people.
- 2. An ethnic-group name can secure its referent only in virtue of a certain descriptive property (or cluster of them) that is true of all members of the referent-group.
- 3. Given (1), there is no single property (or cluster of them) that could be truly predicated of all Latin Americans, and their descendants abroad.
- Therefore,*
- 4. No ethnic-group name *could* succeed in picking out that group of people.
- 5. Furthermore, some available names have ethnocentric connotations, so that their use would be questionable on ethical grounds.
- Therefore,*

- 6 It is reasonable to conclude that the adoption of a term to name Latin Americans and their descendants abroad would always be unjustified and even ethically wrong.

If these premises of this argument are well-supported, then nihilism about ethnic-group names appears unavoidable. Premise (1) seems grounded on sound empirical evidence. (2) assumes that Fregeanism is a correct theory, together with the plausible hypothesis that ethnic-group names are semantically analogous to proper names. To support (3), the nihilist may remind us that no adequate single term has so far been found to name Latin Americans and their descendants in other parts of the world. As we have seen in our previous discussion of the descriptive view, available ethnic-group names proposed to pick out all and only members of that group do so through descriptive properties that do not in fact apply to all its members. It appears, then, that Fregeans are committed to (4) because, if sense determines reference, then it would be absurd to hold that descriptive contents which fail to be true of a certain group could nonetheless succeed in picking out that referent.

Finally, (5) is a premise that few would want to dispute. It is well known that, in the USA, names such as ‘Latino,’ ‘Hispanic,’ ‘Chicano,’ and ‘Tejano,’ are sometimes used as epithets of contempt associated with imagined bad traits of character and with the low social or economic status of the members of the group. Latin Americans themselves often resent being identified by these names, and with good reason. First, some of the names connect them with Spain and Portugal; and why should the victims of colonialism accept ethnic-group names that remind them of (and even glorify) their former oppressors? But, secondly, these terms-- and even worse names we can think of-- have questionable connotations of a different sort often used to convey prejudiced views of the groups as, for example, impoverished, lazy, shiftless, and ignorant.

All of these considerations, taken together, provide a formidable argument against the use of any ethnic-group names at all, since they appear to undermine the justification for any such use. In the absence of better reasons to the contrary, the name-nihilist can then conclude that the adoption of any term to name Latin Americans (and their descendants abroad) would be unjustified and even ethically wrong.

V

There might, however, be a route of escape from the quicksand of the name-nihilist argument. For the adoption of an ethnic-group name could sometimes have desirable consequences for those identified by it. The availability of an adequate group-name may, for example, contribute to empowerment, pride, and even actual liberation from oppressive relations of dependence and exploitation.⁸ And that would of course count as a *pragmatic* consideration to be taken into account in assessments of the adequacy of ethnic-group names. Yet that is still not enough to defeat the name-nihilist’s argument. For although that consideration undermines the assumption that it is *practically* wrong to use such names, it leaves untouched the larger claim that, on a

descriptive account of the semantic content of those names, their use is always unjustified. Even so, a fundamental problem remains for any defender of that account. For if it is true, then ordinary scenarios involving ethnic-group names must remain a mystery. Under normal circumstances, there is no failure of reference when any such name occurs in our thought or discourse. If descriptive semantic content determines reference, how could names whose content fails to be true of their referents nonetheless succeed in picking out those referents regularly?

Yet opponents of the descriptive account have problems of their own. The attempt to raise pragmatic objections against name-nihilism rests on the assumption that adopting an ethnic-group name could sometimes have beneficial consequences. But that is an empirical claim that would need to be confirmed by evidence. Are we really justified in believing that the adoption of some such names does in fact produce desirable social outcomes? Might it not as easily produce the reverse result? For hasn't the practice of naming groups of people also been an essential tool in the most notorious instances of ethnic discrimination and racism? There are good grounds for skepticism here, since it is truly difficult to say with confidence whether naming ethnic groups really helps those groups or hurts them. Resolution of this question, however, can only come through *empirical* methods, and so is not really a matter for philosophers at all, but for the social sciences.

It appears, then, that the 'pragmatic' reply is not really sufficient of itself to refute the descriptive account, and that therefore nihilism about ethnic-group names may thus be indefeasible. But is it? The problem of finding grounds for correctly applying those names—especially those that might be used to name Latin Americans and their descendants—does have a solution. For the problem arises only if such names are taken to pick out their referents in virtue of their descriptive contents. If we suppose instead that the referents of such terms are secured *directly*, without the mediation of any descriptive content at all, then it is a simple matter to see how a name could after all succeed in picking out a group of people, even when its descriptive contents are not true of that group. Each of the cases discussed earlier that proved so embarrassing to the Fregean counts in fact as evidence supporting a direct theory of reference for ethnic-group names. On this view, a non-vacuous term of that sort picks out its referent, whether or not the descriptive property (or cluster of properties) conventionally associated with it could be truly predicated of the referent-group at all. It is clear, for instance, that speakers in the USA regularly succeed in using terms, such as 'Hispanic' and 'Latino,' to refer to a certain group of people, *even when they have in mind different, and sometimes incompatible, descriptive properties* that they associate with these names.

But if ethnic-group names are then relevantly analogous to proper names, we must consider rejecting the Fregean model and adopting instead its best known competitor, the so-called *new theory of reference* (which, of course, is not at all new). In 1843, J. S. Mill wrote,

If, like the robber in the Arabian Nights, we have a mark with chalk on a house to enable us to know it again, the mark has a purpose, but it has not properly any meaning. The chalk declares anything about the

house...The object of making the mark is merely a distinction. I say to myself, All these houses are so nearly alike that if I lose sight of them I shall not again be able to distinguish that which I am now looking at, from any of the others... Morgiana chalked all the other houses in a similar manner, and defeated the scheme: how? Simply by obliterating the difference of appearance between that house and the others. The chalk was still there, but it no longer served the purpose of a distinctive mark

When we impose a proper name, we perform an operation in some degree analogous to what the robber intended in chalking the house... A proper name is but an unmeaning mark which we connect in our minds with the idea of the object, in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts, we may think of that individual object.⁹

Already we have seen that there are good reasons to think that ethnic-group names are in some sense semantically analogous to proper names (see section II above). If, then, Mill is right, and the latter are plausibly understood as “unmeaning marks” used to refer to certain objects, it would follow by analogy that the same could reasonably be said of ethnic-group names. On a direct theory of reference, any such name may be considered a mark that we regularly “put” on a certain group of people, “in order that whenever the mark meets our eyes or occurs to our thoughts,” that group may be made a possible object of discourse. But then nihilism about ethnic-group names must be false, since those names turn out to be indispensable to thought and language. They are referential, and, as with proper names, demonstratives and some definite descriptions, their role is to attach thought and language to the world. To the name-nihilist, the use of ethnic-group names is not just ethically wrong, but a kind of linguistic confusion: that it *lacks any semantic grounds at all*. Yet that conclusion cannot be right, for it conflicts with one of our most pervasive and well founded intuitions: that non-vacuous names of that kind are referential (they are used to designate groups of people) and therefore indispensable in

ordinary communication and thought. Can anyone seriously doubt that we do sometimes need to make *groups of people* the objects of our thought and language—just as we need to refer to other things in the world?

VI

How, then, could the name-nihilist's conclusions have appeared so reasonable at the outset? Surely it is because they are entailed by some common Fregean assumptions about the semantic content of names, made explicit in the second premise of the argument for *NN*. Yet, as Milleans, we can reject that premise, without being thereby committed to denying that speakers do associate all sorts of descriptive contents with ethnic-group names-- something supported by overwhelming empirical evidence about ordinary linguistic behavior. What we deny instead is that such names can secure their referents *in virtue of* those descriptive contents.

Reasons supporting a direct theory of reference for proper names, some definite descriptions, and demonstratives are well known and need not be rehearsed here.¹⁰ But arguments along similar lines, if sound, would also support a Millean view of ethnic-group names. Clearly, speakers often associate with those names descriptive properties that fail to be true of the people picked out by them. Moreover, since such properties are sometimes satisfied by some other groups, we could then argue (as often done by direct-reference theorists)¹¹ that if Fregeanism provided the correct account of those names, then such descriptive properties would determine their actual referents. Thus, when speakers use those names they would actually be referring to whatever groups satisfy the

associated descriptive properties. But since they don't, Fregeanism about ethnic-group names cannot be correct.

Note that the argument for this conclusion is entirely semantic, appealing only to ordinary intuitions about which group of people actually gets picked out when speakers use (in thought or language) ethnic-group names whose associated descriptions fail to be true of the referent-group but are satisfied by some other group. The common intuitions in those cases turn out to be incompatible with a Fregean account of the reference of such names. To see this, consider the term, 'Iberians.' Some may associate with this name the property of being the group of Europeans who first landed in America. Those speakers are of course in error, since that property happens to be false of these people but true of another group, the Norsemen. The semantic argument for the Millian view here would go something like this: if Fregeanism about ethnic-group names is correct, then when speakers use the term, 'Iberians,' they in fact mean, 'the first Europeans landing in America,' and are therefore referring to whatever group satisfies that description—viz., the Norsemen. But since that is plainly *not* what people ordinarily intend as the referent of 'Iberians,' therefore, even in cases where speakers associate descriptions that failed to be satisfied by that group of people, it would follow that Fregeanism about ethnic-group names cannot be right.

And for anyone still entertaining doubts about this conclusion, further evidence for it is not far to seek. Many other examples, including the previously discussed scenarios involving some descriptions associated with 'Latinos,' 'Hispanics,' and 'Iberoamericans,' could be offered to support a Millian account of those names. As we have seen, even

when speakers conceive of certain ethnic-group terms as associated with descriptions that actually fail to be true of those groups, they nonetheless succeed in picking out those very groups. ‘Gallego’ is a (derogatory) ethnic-group term often used by speakers in Argentina to designate people from Spain. Literally, of course, it means, ‘person from Galicia,’ a province of Spain, but as used by those speakers, the term picks out all Spaniards, and has associated with it a cluster of unflattering properties. Needless to say, none of those properties could be truly predicated of the target group—some failing to be true of *even some* of its members.

This, then, is yet another case where an ethnic-group name has succeeded in picking out *all* members of the target group (in this case, all Spaniards) even when the descriptive content in the minds of those using the term *is not true of the target group*. But if such names are analogous to proper names, that would seem perfectly unremarkable to readers of, for example, Mill and Kripke¹² (among others), who have offered strong arguments to the effect that descriptions associated with proper names have no bearing at the semantic level. If the direct theory of reference is correct, then what the Fregean takes to be the *meaning* of a proper name is better treated as belonging to pragmatic aspects of language concerning use.

I submit that the overall effect of these examples amounts to convincing evidence that a Millian alternative can more readily accommodate some ordinary scenarios of thought and language involving ethnic-group names. The details of the argument need to be worked out, but it does appear that this approach neatly solves the problem of how to decide on the proper ethnic-group name for Latin Americans and their descendants in

other parts of the world. There are, of course, numerous descriptive properties associated with names such as ‘Latino,’ ‘Hispanic,’ and ‘Iberoamerican,’ and those properties play a role in initiating communication chains involving those terms—as the direct-reference theorist would say, they “fix the reference.” But they have been shown to operate at a pragmatic level, having no bearing on the semantic content of such names—for clearly those names can secure their referents *without* the mediation of any such descriptive properties. Yet if the reference of a name is unmediated by descriptive semantic content, how is it possible that it refers at all? Although a detailed account of the grounding of reference is needed in the case of ethnic-group names, we already know that *that* answer cannot be provided by a descriptive theory. We must therefore look at contextual factors in how those names are introduced into discourse. As in the case of proper names, a plausible story would have the reference of ethnic-group names grounded in communication chains going back to the introduction of the names themselves in thought and language.

NOTES

1.1. G. Frege, “On Sense and Reference,” p. 57 (in P. Geach and M. Black, eds., *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, 1952. Oxford: Blackwell). Emphasis mine.

2. See B. Russell, “On Denoting” (*Mind* 14: 479-93, 1905) and “Lectures on the Philosophy of Logical Atomism” (*Monist* 28, 1918-19). Frege’s views on the sense of proper names may be considered quite different from Russell’s eliminativism, for the

latter famously took ordinary proper names (but not logical proper names) to be truncated definite descriptions. On Russell's account, the proposition expressed by

(1) Aristotle was fond of dogs.

may be analyzed as

(2) The last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs.

And (2) in turn could be recast as

(3) Exactly one person was last among the great philosophers of antiquity, and any such person was fond of dogs.

Would Frege endorse this analysis (the examples are from Kripke's Preface to *Naming and Necessity*)? In one of his well known footnotes in "On Sense and Reference," there is a discussion of the sense of the proper name, 'Aristotle,' which suggests that he would—or at least, that his position is compatible with Russell's analysis. "In the case of an actual proper name such as 'Aristotle,'" writes Frege, "opinions as to the sense may differ. It might, for instance, be taken to be the following: the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great. Anybody who does this will attach another sense to the sentence 'Aristotle was born in Stagira' than will a man who takes as the sense of the name: the teacher of Alexander the Great who was born in Stagira. So long as the reference remains the same, such variations of sense may be tolerated, although they are to be avoided in the theoretical structure of a demonstrative science and ought not to occur in a perfect language." (Frege 1952: 58) The view that, as standardly construed, the Frege-Russell account amounts to a 'description theory' of the meaning of ordinary proper names, is for instance in S. Kripke's "Naming and Necessity" (in *Semantics of Natural Languages*, D. Davidson and G. Harman, eds. Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1972), and S. Schiffer's "Naming and Knowing" (in *Midwest Studies in Philosophy 2*, in Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977).

3. See, for example, N. Salmon, *Frege's Puzzle* (Atascadero, California: Ridgeview, 1991).

4. J. Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity: A Philosophical Perspective* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000). Gracia proposes the adoption of 'Hispanics' as an ethnic-group term to name Latin Americans and their descendants in different parts of the world. But since he seems to hold a descriptive theory of the semantic content of such names, he might face the problem raised here.

5. J. S. Mill, "Of Names" (in *A System of Logic*. London: Longman, 1952).

6. S. Kripke, "Identity and Necessity" (in *Identity and Individuation*, M. Munitz, ed., pp. 135-164. New York: New York University Press, 1971) and "Naming and Necessity" (in

Semantics of Natural Languages, D. Davidson and G. Harman, eds., pp. 253-355. Dordrecht, Holland: Reidel, 1972).

7. Again, if this is correct, then the adoption of 'Hispanics' would be as unjustified as that of any other available candidate to name Latin Americans and their descendants in different parts of the world.

8. See Gracia, *Hispanic/Latino Identity*.

9. J. S. Mill, "Of Names," p. 22.

10. See, for instance, Kripke's "Naming and Necessity," Donnellan's "Reference and Definite Description" (*The Philosophical Review* 75: 281-304), and Kaplan's "Demonstratives" (in *Themes from Kaplan*, J. Almog *et al.* eds.).

11. For example, Kripke argues that "Columbus was the first man to realize that the earth was round. He was also the first European to land in the western hemisphere. Probably none of these things are true, and therefore, when people use the term 'Columbus' they refer to some Greek if they use the roundness of the earth, or to some Norseman, perhaps, if they use the discovery of America. But the don't. So it does seem that if most of the ϕ 's are satisfied by a unique object y , then y is the referent of the name. This seems simply to be false." (Kripke 1972: 209) This is a semantic argument concerning the actual reference of a certain singular term. Together with some modal and epistemic arguments, they constitute well known reasons supporting the direct theory of reference.

12. See Mill, "Of Names," and Kripke, "Naming and Necessity."