A Note to "Meaning in Time"

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1. Introduction

As the title suggests, this paper is something of a leftover – or perhaps a new branch – to my "Meaning in Time: on temporal externalism and Kripkenstein's skeptical challenge" (Reinikainen 2022). In that work I essayed to portray my understanding of the skeptical challenge uncovered by Saul Kripke's (1982) reading of Wittgenstein's later works in a nutshell as to its nature and solution. Here, my task is to dig a little deeper into the key phrase of the earlier paper, namely the claim that meanings, facts grounding meaning facts, and ascriptions of meaning have an important historical dimension to them. These specifications are due not only to existing thoughts I could not fit into the earlier paper, but also due to conversations I had the pleasure to exchange in the Philosophical Society of Finland 2022 colloquium in Oulu – especially with Teemu Tauriainen – to which I had the honor to contribute.[1]

At bottom, I believe that the skeptical challenge is best understood as logical as opposed to metaphysical in nature. Yet certain metaphysics of meaning are more compatible with its conclusions than others. By "metaphysics of meaning" I mean primarily the question of what is the *nature* of meaning, assuming already that there are such things as meanings. In particular, the main contestation of this paper is that the causal-historical account of reference originating from Kripke (1980) and as developed by Michael Devitt (1996) is well-suited to make sense of the somewhat esoteric-sounding expression "historicity of meaning". In sum, we can explain the historicity of meanings by the historicity of the referents, for

[1] The paper also benefitted, especially in its clarity of exposition, from the insightful comments made by two anonymous referees.

meaning is (by its nature) an aspect of causal-historical reference. (Put more conservatively, that is one important property of a word one can mean by "meaning".)

Initially I shall explicate the account on its "home-turf", or in the case of proper names. The more programmatic purport of the paper, however, is to expand the account from proper names to other term types, most importantly natural kind terms, and ultimately to all terms. Perhaps that is an overreach already in programmatic terms, but if so, the failure will be all the more fruitful.

The paper will proceed as follows. In the second section I shall briefly sketch the skeptical challenge as uncovered by Kripke, with focus paid on the claim that the challenge is best understood as "logical" as opposed to "metaphysical" in nature. Although I purport to make the discussion self-standing, I will make some use of the exposition launched in the earlier paper.

The third section expounds on certain key features of Devitt's (meta)semantic program as well as on the point of why it is naturally posed to explain the historicity of meaning, taken as one major conclusion of the skeptical challenge. The core here is Devitt's "shocking idea" that, given a broadly Fregean approach to meaning as well as semantic externalism, at least some meanings (i.e., modes of presentation of the referents) must be understood as causal-historical in nature. If true, this thought will naturally explain the historicity of meaning, I shall argue. In summary, the argument is this:

(1.) Meanings (of proper names) are causal-historical modes of reference.

(2.) Causal-historical modes of reference are temporal and exist in time.

(3.) Hence, meanings (of proper names) are temporal and exist in time; they have a history.

Historicity of meaning in this sense allows us to resolve the problem of finitude by understanding the facts that determine meaning facts as themselves temporal and finite in nature. This lets us give up absolute determinacy of meaning, which is the pivot of the problem of finitude.

2. The Skeptical Challenge as a Logical Problem

This section will briefly elaborate on the skeptical challenge about meaning as discovered by Kripke (1982). The exposition draws from my (2022); how exactly so will not be discussed in detail, but I trust that the reader will see the resemblance.

In its "raw" form, i.e. the form in which Kripke chose to cast it (as a helpful guide to introductory classes on Wittgenstein!) the skeptical challenge asks us to explain in virtue of what facts is it the case that a subject, let's call him Jones, who has up to a given moment learned to do addition with numbers less than 57, when asked to calculate "58 + 67", should answer (given his previous training and intentions) "125" and not, say, "5". That is to ask, what determines that Jones has up until now been following the addition function with his use of "+" as opposed to a seemingly arbitrary "quaddition" ("$\oplus$") function, according to which

$x \oplus y = x + y$, if $x, y < 57$

$= 5$ otherwise. (Kripke 1982, 8–9.)

There are three separate though interlinked problems from which the skeptical challenge consists of, at least according to the received view in the literature. These are called: the problem of finitude, the problem of error, and the problem of normativity. For the aims of this paper, it suffices to focus on the problem of finitude, which in any case I believe to be the most important problem as I will argue in my oncoming doctoral dissertation.

The problem of finitude is intuitively graspable on the basis of the example. We can begin with the observation that, whatever fact it is that determines which function (if any) Jones is following, it must be a fact that is at least partially about Jones. Why is that? Because it is Jones's arithmetical behavior that is under discussion. Even if it turned out to be the case that Jones is an adder by virtue of a divine decree, this decree would have to be *about Jones* for it to determine his behavior with the "+" sign. The second key observation is that Jones, *ex hypothesi* a normal human, is a finite being. He is only capable of exhibiting finite mathematical behavior, or finite dispositions to mathematical behavior. For example, he is not capable of calculating with *very* large numbers.

It is important to be clear that the skeptical question concerns Jones's *actual* dispositional states and behavior, con-

trasting these items with the *logically possible* states in which he alternatively, and incompatibly, can be in. The point of the problem of finitude is that because the actual item must be finite, it will always remain compatible with an indefinite number of alternative, mutually incompatible possible states in the sense of realizing any of them. The possible states can be formally rendered as functions, though following Wittgenstein, Kripke often calls them "rules" or just "meanings". What Kripke calls the "straight" solution to the challenge must, among other things, explain in virtue of what fact Jones's mathematical behavior is governed by one such unique rule (1982, 66). Strictly speaking it need not turn out that Jones is in fact an adder for the skeptical challenge to be solved: it could turn out that he is a quadder instead, though this would be surprising. So long as there is a determinate fact which he is, the challenge will have been solved. Relatedly, the limit of 57 where addition is revealed to be quaddition is arbitrary and can be replaced with any number with which Jones has not *ex hypothesi* yet calculated with.

In my "Kripkenstein semanttista realismia vastaan" ["Kripkenstein against semantic realism"] (Reinikainen 2021) I argued that semantic dispositionalism – perhaps the most popular straight solution candidate to the challenge – fails on the problem of finitude. The argument in "Meaning in Time" (2022) aimed to be more encompassing in claiming that there simply is no straight solution to the problem of finitude; it is an insoluble paradox. However, I also argued that the challenge turns into a paradox only against a certain assumption, which is not necessary, about the "rules" or "meanings" among which the skeptic demands determination. In particular, it is implicit in Kripke's exposition that such rules or meanings must be "absolutely determined". While the literature knows a number of definitions that plausibly fill the role, I continue to find Alexander Miller's formulation as the most concise and helpful:

> In the case of a descriptive expression such as "+," whatever fact that is proposed as making it the case that "+" means the addition function must be inconsistent with the hypothesis that "+" means some other function, such as quaddition. In the generalized version of the argument, which applies to both descriptive and non-descriptive language, this becomes: whatever fact that is proposed as making it the case that rule R_a is the rule governing Smith's use of expression E must be inconsistent with the

> hypothesis that the rule governing his use of E is R_b, where R_a and R_b are such that for some possible use Δ of E, Δ is correct according to R_a but incorrect according to R_b. (Miller 2010, 460.)

The main lesson of the skeptical challenge is that we should reject absolute determinacy of meanings, facts determining meaning facts, and meaning ascriptions. What this means is that the semantic values of expressions (e.g., the addition function for "+", or the set of all tables for "table") cannot be individuated by rules that would govern all logically possible applications of the expression such that it would be determined for every potential application whether it was correct or incorrect according to the rule. Although there is nothing, I don't think, in the skeptical challenge that would forbid us from modeling semantic values theoretically (i.e. for the purposes of descriptive semantics relying on model theory) as if they were absolutely determined, insofar as these models are applied to expressions as used in actual natural languages, they will always remain indeterminate due to the fact that the semantic values of actual expressions must be determined diachronically, or temporally, and are nowhere absolutely finished.

What, then, does it mean for the meanings and reference of words to be "temporally determined"? While a full answer to that question will have to wait, here we can make some progress by looking at the idea in rough principle. In a somewhat extreme sense, temporal determination of meaning means that whether a given particular referent belongs to the extension of a given term is a temporal matter in the sense that it will have to be decided in time whether the referent belongs to the extension or not.

This might seem wildly implausible: surely it is a different issue whether an object "fits" a standard (of reference) and whether we can know that it does. While knowing whether the animal in the bushes is correctly called a "dog" is something that happens in time, and must be decided in that sense, the issue of whether "dog" correctly applies to the thing in the bush is independent of epistemic issues, assuming the usual meaning of "dog".

To get the point right, the indeterminacy with which the skeptical challenge trades does not (primarily) concern (i) the epistemic issue of whether and how we can know that a given object fits a given standard or not, nor (ii) that objects can

fit standards factually "by themselves", i.e. independently of our beliefs and knowledge, but rather (iii) the point that what standard (semantic value) is selected by a token expression in context cannot everywhere be decided by a further standard. The way a rule is to be applied in practice cannot everywhere be settled by further rules, for these too would then require rules for their application etc.

The logical nature of the problem of finitude means also that the arithmetical example is in no way special in kind. The same basic question can be raised wherever we have a standard of correctness of some kind, as I will next illustrate with an example. Consider that I am in the middle of purchasing some dry goods that I have yet to see for myself, and make the following statement while measuring a length in the air between my index finger and thumb:

If it is *this* long, I will buy it.

Now, at the time of making the assertion, did I mean the distance as measured between the insides of my fingers or between the nails? (Assume for sake of argument that this comes to relevance later.) Plausibly, at the moment I did not explicitly intend one standard of length over the other. But is there still some other fact which might settle which length (or any number of other logically possible alternatives) was meant in the moment aside from my intentions? What kind of a *fact* could even in principle be suitable here? Psychological facts about humans, trade conventions, and other contextual matters might provide plausible answers. Ultimately it could nonetheless turn out that the issue is vague: there was no fact of the matter which length was the intended standard at the time of the utterance. Even if me and my trade partner later come to an agreement as to which length was meant, this as such does not mean that the matter was determined at the moment of utterance.

I think one reason why Kripke chose to use addition as the paradigmatic example in his presentation was to avoid mixing in the type of "mundane" or ordinary kind of indeterminacy such as vagueness that we encounter, e.g., in lay measurement. To apply the problem of finitude proper in this case, we would first need to think of the standard used (i.e., the intended length) as having the form of a rule, in other words, a logical form. (To simplify, we can think of the "logical form" along Miller's characterisation quoted above.) The logical form itself may contain vagueness of many sorts: the

rule may not specify whether the intended length is to be measured from inside my fingers or between the nails. However, the important point is that some possible lengths are intuitively excluded by this form containing vagueness. For example, it is not vague whether the intended length was the distance from my index finger to the tip of my nose, or to my toes, or to the Eiffel Tower. These lengths, we would say, are simply different standards governed by different rules, just like quaddition is a different standard from addition even though they share the same "input" (in the length case, my index finger). The problem of finitude arises precisely when we ask what facts exclude these alternative standards in the context of the utterance. The eventual point is to see that no "finite, temporal" fact can carry out this task.

That we don't ordinarily think that most possible standards *need* to be excluded to begin with to ensure smooth interaction is not an objection to the skeptic, which precisely goes to show that the problem is logical in nature. The skeptical challenge targets the assumption that our words and expressions, or even bodily gestures, in order to be meaningful, must select unique standards in the way of absolute determinacy, in which case it is always possible to raise the alternative possible standards. If the standard that is selected in context for the truth (or more generically "semantic correctness") of an utterance token must determine an infinite partition of correct-incorrect possible applications of the term while excluding an indefinite number of other partitions, there is no fact of the matter which standard is ever uniquely selected in a given actual context, simply because every actual context is finite.

This brief recapitulation was not meant to provide a foolproof argument, merely an illustration of the motivation for taking the problem of finitude seriously. In the fourth section, assuming that thoughts along these lines can be defended through various objections, I shall examine how Devitt's causal-historical account of reference can explain "historicity of meaning"; before that, the next section will provide a short introduction to Devitt's relevant ideas.

3. Devitt's Shocking Idea about Meaning

Behold:

> *The Shocking Idea*. The meanings of some words, including names and natural kind words, are causal modes of reference that are partly external to the head. (Devitt 2001, 477.)

Why is the idea "shocking", exactly? Or rather, whom is it likely to shock (or at any rate, mildly displease)? For one, it is shocking to anyone who thinks all meanings must be descriptive, or "in the head" of the speaker and her audience. It is shocking to anyone who thinks that meanings, as theoretical terms, must be ontologically distinct from empirical or observational terms. In the following I shall say a few words to alleviate these shocks, then go over Devitt's elaborations of his account as well as motivations for it.[2]

The first cause of shocked-ness is due to the familiar internalism-externalism debate in philosophy of language. Briefly, while internalists think that the referents of words are determined only by properties (or other items) internal to the speaker, externalists think that at least the referents of some words are determined by properties (or other items) that are external to the speaker. The causal-historical theory of reference advocated by Devitt identifies the external properties as causal-historical chains of "borrowing" and "grounding" that circulate in the speech community. It is worthwhile to point out, as Devitt does (1996, 162), that supposing one accepts a) externalism and b) the Fregean idea of meanings as modes of reference, one has no choice but to accept, *ceteris paribus*, the shocking idea. For if the meaning of a word is whatever determines reference, and if the referents of some words are determined by causal-historical chains of reference, then it follows that the meanings of some words are causal-historical chains of reference.

This note is too short to even summarize reasons for why one should (not) buy into either externalism or the Fregean

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[2] There are other reasons to find the idea shocking that I will not touch on here. One such is the thought that meanings must offer normative reasons to use words one way rather than another, combined with the sentiment that merely empirical facts like causal-historical chains of reference are unfit to serve as genuine reasons for action or belief. Another is "direct reference theory", which states that proper names have no meaning at all, causal or descriptive.

approach to meaning, but I think that since both commitments are reasonable by themselves, that alone should take some edge off the shockingness of the shocking idea. How about the idea that, since meanings are (quite clearly) theoretical terms, and since the causal-historical chains are (at least in some sense) observable, we cannot identify the former with the latter? To be clear, I do not actually know of any objections to Devitt along these lines, but since I think it could be a natural remark to make, I want to give one reason how to deal with it.

To begin with, "meaning" is very clearly a theoretical term in the sense that we posit them in various theories for explanatory purposes. Some of the purposes include explaining observable effects like intentional behavior. However, this neutral observation as such does not forbid the identification of "meanings" in some observational vocabulary; in other words, there is no problem in "meaning" having both theoretical and observational uses. This would only be a problem under the assumption that there is an ontological difference between theoretical and observational terms such that the referents of theoretical terms exist in a different sense than the referents of observational terms do. But as Robert Brandom has argued, this is often not (if at all) the case. Rather, the difference between theoretical and observational terms is epistemic (or "methodological") in nature:

> Understood thus methodologically, the status of an object as theoretical or observable can change over time. When Pluto was first postulated, it was as a theoretical entity about which we could know only by making inferences from perturbations in the orbit of Neptune. With improvements in telescopy, looking at the calculated position of the hypothetical planetoid yielded the first observations of Pluto. It became, for the first time, observable. But *it* did not change ontological status; only its relation to us changed. Astronomers had been referring to the same planetoid, and knew things about it such as its orbit and mass, before it became observable—and would have done even if it had *never* become observable. A comparable story could be told about Mendelian genes. (Brandom 2015, 60.)

I see no *prima facie* reason why this thought could not be applied to meanings as causal-historical chains. Although the sense in which such chains are "observable" is a topic in and on itself, the fact that there is a persuasive reason to interpret

the theoretical-observational split non-ontologically is enough to shave some of the shockingness of the shocking idea, which claims that some meanings are "empirical" broadly speaking.

Now, onto Devitt's account about meanings as causal-historical chains in the case of proper names. To start off, the account as rendered here is mostly programmatic and thus scant in detail; in *Coming to Our Senses* (1996, 163) Devitt calls it "illustrative theory" (IT). But IT should suffice here to render the general idea clearly enough.

IT consists of three main parts which I will first roughly sketch, based mostly on Devitt (1996):

> *Grounding*. Following Kripke's lead, a proper name becomes first glued to its referent via an "initial baptism", which is the intentional act of using the name to refer to the (usually observationally present) object. Although baptism is a form of intentional action, the link that determines reference is causal and not descriptive in kind, although it is possible that some descriptive intentions are necessary for determinate baptism to occur at least in case of natural kind terms. One of Devitt's original ideas is the possibility of "multiple grounding": the first link in the chain of reference is not privileged in any way, but rather the grounding of a name should be understood as a continuous, prolonged process which may also ensue in reference-change.
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> *Borrowing*. Once the name has been (multiply) grounded, it can be borrowed from speakers who have been in causal contact with the referent to those who have not been in such contact and borrowed further from those speakers. While borrowing also is a form of intentional action, the key point is that it does not depend on the speaker or the hearer to have in mind a description (e.g., a belief) which singles out the referent necessarily and/or sufficiently.
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> *Mental processing of D-chains*. While the first part deals with the speakers' relation to the referents, and the second part with speakers' relations to each other, the third part deals with what goes on inside individual speakers' heads when they refer by proper names. In schematic terms, the "D-chains" (designation-chains) are stored in the mental system under different type-files that must meet at least four criteria. (i) the files must be able to distinguish between physically (e.g., phonetically) distinct to-

> kens of names; (ii) the files must be able to distinguish between physically identical yet referentially distinct tokens of names; (iii) the files must be able to distinguish between physically distinct yet referentially identical tokens of names; (iv) the files must be able to distinguish between physically identical and referentially identical tokens of names.[3]

It goes without saying that a lot more would have to be said to make IT a respectable philosophical (let alone empirical) theory about names and naming. However, my next task is to argue how IT is compatible with the rejection of absolute determinacy and endorsement of historicity of meaning discussed in the previous section. With that purpose in mind, I shall say a few more words about grounding specifically, but otherwise the development of IT will be left for future work.

4. Why the Causal-Historical Account Explains Historicity of Meaning

Bareboned, the thesis that meanings have history (the "historicity of meaning") means that present uses of a word type depend for their meaning on earlier uses. According to a (broadly) Fregean theory, one property of a word denoted by its "meaning" is its mode of presentation of the referent, and one theoretical job of meanings is to determine the referent of a word. Putting these together, earlier uses of a term partly determine the meaning (i.e., mode of presentation) of the term in the present by determining what referent the term has had in the past. For example, the reason why the past uses of the name "N.N." determine (in part) the meaning (and thereby the reference) of "N.N." in the present is that the present mode of presentation of N.N. by "N.N." depends on the past modes of presentation of N.N by "N.N.", which depend on past uses all the way down to the original use. And the

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[3] The fourth criterion may seem strange, and it certainly is a rarity, but it is still a possibility which IT should be able to account for. Devitt provides as an example a Batman-style scenario where the person was known in both of his lifeworlds by the physically same name, say "Bruce", without this double-life being generally known (1996, 167). Evidence that subjects would still file these names differently is that they would intuitively behave differently in relation to tokens of "Bruce-AKA-Batman" and "Bruce-AKA-the-billionaire", even when these persons were in fact the same, supposing it was generally not known that they were.

reason why they so depend on is that the present mode of presentation of N.N. just is in relevant parts the same as the past mode of presentation, namely the name "N.N." and the network of D-chains that underlie it.

The important point, then, is this. Devitt's causal-historical account explains historicity of meaning (at least in the case of proper names) by the simple fact that later links in the D-chain of a word depend for their existence and nature on the earlier links. Since the network of D-chains forms the mode of presentation of the name's referent, and because the mode of presentation is one property which can be identified as a word's meaning, it follows that present tokenings of a name depend on earlier ones for their reference and meaning. Thus, the account is compatible with the historicity of meaning – in fact, vindicates it.

Is IT also compatible with the rejection of absolute determinacy? I see no fundamental problem in interpreting it this way. As we saw in section 2, the skeptical challenge is primarily a logical problem that has to do with exclusion of alternative semantic values for a given token expression. The type of expression as such is irrelevant; we could equally well pose the challenge to a given proper name, say "Kripke", and ask in virtue of what fact does "Kripke" mean (or refer to) *Kripke* and not *Kripnam*, where "Kripnam" means (refers to) the disjunctive set "Kripke or Putnam".[4] However, according to IT, what the referent of a name is is in principle an empirical question, not a logical problem. There is more to be said here, but the key point is that for IT, since meanings of proper names are at bottom empirical, the question whether e.g., "Kripke" means Kripke or Kripnam, while always logically available to be asked, is no more troublesome than the question whether "London" and "Londres" refer to the same city or not. The crucial point concerns the description of grounding uses and intentions. If IT can explain how grounding uses work without appealing to atemporal facts, like facts about truth conditions of the grounding intentions, then it will be able to avoid the problem of finitude, for then facts grounding meaning facts will not have the problematic logical form of rules.

This "solution" to the skeptical solution is fundamentally not "straight" in the sense that it would take the skeptical question at face value and then provide an answer to it. As I

[4] The example is from Colin McGinn (1984).

argued in my (2022) (mostly following Martin Kusch's lead, cf. Kusch 2006), there is no straight solution to the skeptical challenge because the skeptical challenge is at bottom a successful *reductio ad absurdum* argument against a certain philosophical picture of language and meaning, part of which includes commitment to absolute determinacy. Once we give up absolute determinacy, we thereby "solve" the skeptical challenge (or at least the problem of finitude) by granting one of its main points as correct; the point being, there is no real logical problem to begin with, only an empirical one.

Of course, assuming this solution is valid, nothing much has been solved yet as regards how names actually work. Overcoming the skeptical challenge is not the end of problems; it only makes it possible to see true problems clearly. For the rest of this note, my aim is to say a few words on the grounding part of IT and how it needs to be adjusted in view of historicity of meaning and rejection of absolute determinacy. What is first needed is a robust account of referential intentions, which play an important role in the grounding of names and other terms, not to mention in their borrowing. To this effect, in the next section I shall look at an interesting proposal by Mario Gómez Torrente.

5. Empirical and Logical Indeterminacy

A central lesson of the skeptical challenge that I have focused on is that the price for avoiding absolute *in*determinacy words (i.e., the conclusion that no word has no determinate meaning whatsoever) is to give up absolute determinacy of words. This is another way of saying that there is no straight solution to the skeptical challenge and the problem of finitude in particular.

The correct follow-up, then, is to embrace indeterminacy in how the meanings of our words are determined. This is, in essence, the strategy that Gómez-Torrente has advocated independently of the skeptical challenge:

> I seek to provide a strong anti-descriptivist consideration about reference fixing for names and demonstratives, based on cases of referential indeterminacy, that has not, to my knowledge, been exploited in the previous literature on the topic. I then develop an account of reference fixing for these expressions which is compatible with antidescriptivism and which embraces the idea, hinted at by Kripke and others, that the relevant reference fixing conventions need not provide necessary and sufficient

> conditions for reference, but only imprecise roughly sufficient conditions for reference and reference failure. (2019, vii.)

There are two interrelated kinds of "referential indeterminacy" that are important to Gómez-Torrente's overall argument: indeterminacy over the success or failure of a given referential act and indeterminacy over what is being referred to by a given referential act. (To specify, at least in my terminology a referential act "fails" in the sense that it refers to nothing, not that it would refer to something else than what the speaker intended; the latter could be called "misreference" for convenience.) Next, I shall briefly exemplify how this kind of indeterminacy fits well with the shocking idea and historicity of meaning.

First an example of indeterminate referential success or failure in case of a proper name, inherited from *Naming and Necessity*:

> If [. . .] the teacher uses the name 'George Smith '—a man by that name is actually his next door neighbor—and says that George Smith first squared the circle, does it follow from this that the students have a false belief about the teacher's neighbor? The teacher doesn't tell them that Smith is his neighbor, nor does he believe Smith first squared the circle. He isn't particularly trying to get any belief about the neighbor into the students' heads. He tries to inculcate the belief that there was a man who squared the circle, but not a belief about any particular man—he just pulls out the first name that occurs to him—as it happens, he uses his neighbor's name. It doesn't seem clear in that case that the students have a false belief about the neighbor, even though there is a causal chain going back to the neighbor. (Kripke 1980, 95–96.)

Citing this example, Gómez-Torrente agrees with Kripke('s assumed view) that whether or not the pupils' use "George Smith" fails or succeeds to refer to George Smith is indeterminate in view of a competent speaker's linguistic intuitions (Gómez-Torrente 2019, 73).

Second, an example of indeterminacy of what is being referred to in case of a proper name:

> For another example, turn to the above (historically inaccurate) story often attributed to Evans. In the story, when Marco Polo inherits the name "Madagascar" he has both the intention of referring to whatever the Arab or Malay sailors referred to and the

> intention of referring to the island now known as "Madagascar "; these conflict, for they lead to different objects. At this point, it seems as if neither of those two referential intentions overrides the other, and it is intuitively uncertain whether "Madagascar," as a matter of what the reference fixing conventions determine, refers to either thing in the mouth of Marco Polo. (Of course, there must be a later time in the history of the transmission of the name (according to the story) in which "Madagascar" begins to refer to the island in the mouth of normal speakers.) (Gómez-Torrente 2019, 74.)

The comfort brought by the rejection of absolute determinacy is that we need not be philosophically uneased by these results. The empirical world is rife with indeterminacy, and naming is simply a part of the empirical world. *There is no logical reason why these matters would necessarily have to be decided one way or another.* That is one of the lessons of the skeptical challenge.

There is a ready objection to be made here. It is more plausible to grant that singular acts of reference by a proper name may be indeterminate at the intuitive level, but how could the very *grounding*, or the matter of bifurcation, of a name be indeterminate? Well, in the majority of cases where the referent is an individual there is no relevant indeterminacy present at the intuitive level; every competent speaker agrees who is the referent of "Saul Kripke".[5] The key point is that the kind of indeterminacy showcased in the examples presented here is "empirical" in a broad sense, not "logical" in the sense of the skeptical challenge. It is in the implicit parameters of the examples that *most* logically possible alternatives are excluded at the intuitive level. To think that behind the intuitions and the causal chains there must be a logically unique solution, formulable in the manner of Miller's scheme, is to succumb to the idea of absolute determinacy. Although in most cases the referent of a proper name referring to an individual will not be indeterminate or experience bifurcations, the empirical possibility is always there due to the simple complexity of the causal world. But there is no *further* worry about indeterminacy in the sense of the skeptical challenge because meaning (at least in the case of proper names) is at bottom empirical, not logical, in nature.

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[5] But cf. the examples in Gómez-Torrente (2019, 75–76).

6. Conclusions

It is hard to say which is a more complicated phenomenon: the human linguistic classificatory system or the world which it tries to classify. Arguably what is most complicated of all is the combination of the two in reality. From this perspective it is somewhat surprising to find that a common descriptivist objection to the causal-historical account of reference is that it leaves the reference of many terms (most importantly natural kind terms) too indeterminate. In contrast, Gómez-Torrente (2019, 45). argues that a big problem for descriptivist theories of reference determination is precisely their aim to give necessary and sufficient conditions for determination, against the evidence of intuitions.

So, if we understand referential indeterminacy as a feature of the phenomenon under study as opposed to a bug of the causal-historical theory, then it will turn out that Devitt's shocking idea is a much more palatable proposal for understanding the nature of meaning even in case of natural kind terms and many others. In fact, the shocking idea works as a partial explanation for why kind-term reference is ridden with indeterminacy: because the causal D-chains themselves are so complicated.

This note sought to expand on some of the themes of its parent paper, most importantly what to make of the esoteric-sounding phrase "historicity of meaning". A demystifying virtue of the causal-historical account is that it is able, I believe, to explain the historicity of meanings by the historicity of the referents, for meaning is an aspect of causal-historical reference.

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