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**A Syncretistic Theory of Proper Names**

Alberto Voltolini

1. *Introduction*

In this paper, I want to show that, far from being incompatible, a Predicate Theory of proper names and the Direct Reference thesis can be combined in a syncretistic account. There are at least three plausible such accounts – one which compares proper names in their referential use to referentially used proper definite descriptions, another one that compares them in this use to demonstratives, and a third one which, although it is as indexicalist as the second one, conceives proper names in this use as a *sui generis* form of indexicals, *indexinames*. Finally, I will try to give both technical and substantive reasons as to why the third account is to be preferred to the other two.

1. *The Incompatibility between Predicate Theory and Millianism*

A Predicate Theory of proper names claims that such expressions have the same kind of meaning as general terms, so that they may formally count as predicates, namely as expressions that predicate a predicable (a property) of something else (Burge 1973: 428-9). If this is the case, the theory may well account for the so-called *predicative* use of proper names, the use that occurs when a proper name figures in non-argumental positions of a sentence, as in the following cases:

1. I’m happy to be an Alberto;
2. The Voltolini I’m curious about is not myself;
3. There is an Alberto Voltolini in Italy that I don’t know.

For the proper names involved in such positions seem to predicate a property of something else, as Burge (1973: 430) originally envisaged.

As such, this theory is clearly incompatible with Millianism, *if* Millianism is the position that radicalizes in a certain way the so-called Direct Reference thesis.[[1]](#footnote-1) As is well known, the latter is the thesis that the meaning of a proper name ends by collapsing onto its referent, i.e., what the name stands for. For Millians, proper names are counterparts in non-formal languages of individual constants. In so doing, from a semantical point of view they clearly privilege the *referential* use of a proper name in an argumental position, the use in this position where the proper name purports to designate something.[[2]](#footnote-2) They say that in that use, not only i) the *main* semantically relevant contribution of a proper name is its truth-conditional contribution, i.e., its referent (if any)[[3]](#footnote-3), as any direct referentialist maintains,[[4]](#footnote-4) but also ii) that contribution is the *only* semantically relevant contribution – that referent is given via *no* meaning mediators.[[5]](#footnote-5) For in the Millianist perspective, not only from a semantical point of view the predicative use of proper names is utterly split from their referential use, but there is no chance for a name in the latter use to be understood as counting as a predicate.

An evidence in favour of Millianism is that it is hard to see how a proper name in its referential use may be taken as counting as a predicate. The role the name has in referring to something cannot be a predicative role, not even if that something were the property a corresponding predicate predicates. In such a case, the name would name the property, it would not predicate it (cf. Napoli 2015: 217, 219).

The answer predicativists typically give to this problem is that in its referential use, a proper name involves a predicate of the kind “to be (an individual) called ‘N’”, where “N” is a schema for the name in question.[[6]](#footnote-6) For reasons that will be clear in Section 5, I prefer this formulation to the merely seemingly analogous formulation of the predicate in question as a predicate of the kind “to be a bearer of ‘N’”. Yet this answer can really account for the referential use of a proper name only once a Predicate Theory is nested into the Nominal Theory of proper names. According to this theory, in its referential use a proper name “N” is a schema for involves the above predicate insofar as it is synonymous with the nominal definite description of the kind “the individual called ‘N’”.

Clearly enough, the Nominal Theory may well accommodate the predicative use of a proper name. In saying something of the kind that someone is a N, what we really mean is that that very someone is an individual called “N”, so that in such a use the property of the kind *being called “N”* is what the name the schema “N” is for predicates of the relevant individual. Thus, the above sentences turn out to say respectively the same as

(1a) I’m happy to be an individual called “Alberto”;

(2a) The individual called “Voltolini” I’m curious about is not myself;

(3a) There is an individual called “Alberto Voltolini” in Italy that I don’t know.

Yet such a theory accounts for the referential use of a proper name in a way that is still incompatible with both Millianism and the Direct Reference thesis, *if* the nominal descriptions in question are taken to semantically work *à la* Russell.[[7]](#footnote-7) For then not only in that use the only semantical contribution of a proper name is not its referent, but also such a referent is not the name’s main semantical contribution. For the semantical contribution of the nominal description synonymous with the name is rather given in terms of its contextual definition yielded by the Russellian paraphrase of the sentence involving it, whose truth-conditions notoriously appeal to properties and (the meaning of) connectives, not to the designation of the name.

This theory raises the problems Kripke (1980) notoriously put forward: proper names seem to be synonymous with definite descriptions neither in general, nor when such descriptions are nominal descriptions of the above kind. Yet independently of Kripkean worries,[[8]](#footnote-8) one may put into question the idea that lurks behind endorsing such a theory, i.e., the idea that a proper name involves a predicate of the kind “to be (an individual) called ‘N’”. To put things in this way is clearly tantamount to giving up the original idea a Predicate Theory wanted to defend that a proper name formally counts as a predicate. For in the above predicate the name occurs as a quoted constituent. Cf. Napoli (2015: 222). So, what is the legitimacy of such a move? If the reason is just to provide a unified account both of the referential and of the predicative use of proper names, a Millian may well endorse Jeshion’s (2015a) perplexities: better to deny that there is a uniformity between the two uses and to provide an alternative explanation of the latter use, so as to ultimately reject that account.

In point of fact, Millians have tried to provide such an alternative explanation, for instance by appealing to pragmatics, as Napoli (2015: 222-3) does. There are many non-literal uses of proper names, both in the referential and in the predicative use, which neither Millians nor predicativists are able to account for. Consider

1. Aristotle is on the top shelf,
2. There are three Aristotles on the top shelf,
3. He is no Einstein,

taken to mean, respectively, that a certain book authored by Aristotle is on the top shelf, that three such books are on the top shelf, and that a certain person is not as clever as Einstein. Once one allows for such non-literal uses,[[9]](#footnote-9) why not simply saying that *all* predicative uses are non-literal?[[10]](#footnote-10)

Yet a predicativist may reply by noting, first, that in the referential use, non-literal uses are such insofar as they somehow depend on other uses, which thereby are the literal ones. As Fauconnier (1985) originally stressed, there is a pragmatic function from authors to their works, or in other and more general terms, a pragmatic local process, notably a metonymical one (as Recanati 1993, 2004a would say), that enables a referential transfer from the author of the *Metaphysics* to one of its books to occur as far as “Aristotle” is concerned in (4). Yet if this is the case, second, why can’t there be an analogous pragmatic process that allows a name in a predicative use to shift its meaningful contribution from the property it originally predicates to another property?[[11]](#footnote-11) As Recanati (2004a) has shown, this certainly happens when one utters

1. That statue is a lion

meaning that the statue over there is not a lion, but a lion-representation. In such an utterance, the meaning of a predicate “to be a lion” is modulated by a local pragmatic process (metaphorical in this case) that leads the literal meaning of that predicate to shift to its non-literal one.[[12]](#footnote-12) So, why cannot there be an analogous shift to predicating the property of *being an Aristotelian work* (in (5)) and the property of *having an Einstein-like character* (in (6)) in virtue of some local pragmatic process or other (a metonymical one in the case of (5), a metaphorical one in the case of (6))? But then a shift having the above properties as their respective targets may well take the property of *being called “Aristotle”* and *being called “Einstein”* as (*inter alia*)[[13]](#footnote-13) their respective sources, as a Predicate Theory ultimately claims. If this is the case, then not only (5)-(6) display non-literal predicative uses of proper names, but such uses are such for they *depend* on another use, precisely the predicative use of such names (1)-(3) display. The latter use is therefore the literal, hence the privileged, predicative use[[14]](#footnote-14) that a Predicate Theory can account for.[[15]](#footnote-15)

At this point, in order to attack a Predicate Theory by still appealing to a pragmatic, or at least to a pragmatically-based, account of the predicative use of proper names one may appeal to the following move, as Leckie (2013) does. The very privileged predicative use of a proper name that (1)-(3) exhibit, one may say, is precisely a target having the name’s referential use as its source, either in virtue of some pragmatic process or better because of the lexicalization of that process: the process is turned into a lexical rule that connects the predicative use of a proper name with its referential use. Yet this move doesn’t seem to work. First, there seems to be no evidence of such a pragmatic process; as I have just said, the privileged predicative use of a proper name is the *literal* one. To be sure, this literality is compatible with the idea that the pragmatic process is lexicalized, as Leckie ultimately holds. Yet second, as we have seen before the pragmatic processes such as the ones Leckie herself appeals to in order to make her proposal plausible are *local* processes; namely, they are processes that affect just *one* subsentential element – whether it is a singular term or a predicate – in order to provide another interpretation different from its standard one. Yet the process that should obtain here is a process from a *certain* subsentential element (the name in argumental position) to *another* subsentential element (the name in predicative position). Thus, why should one postulate the existence of such a *sui generis* pragmatic process when a simpler interpretation of the data in question is available, as the one that a Predicate Theory provides?

If the above is the case, then the fact that a Predicate Theory manages to explain how the predicative and the referential uses stem out of a common semantical root may lead one to think that dispensing with such a theory is like throwing the baby with the bathwater. We have hitherto seen that, once it is strengthened in the Nominal Theory, a Predicate Theory is incompatible not only with Millianism, but also with the weaker Direct Reference thesis. Now, it is worth exploring whether there is no weaker version of a Predicate Theory that makes it compatible, if not with Millianism, at least with the weaker Direct Reference thesis. In other terms, I will look for a *syncretistic* account that combines the best of a Predicate Theory and the best of Direct Reference while dropping their radicalizations making them theoretical antagonists.

1. *The Compatibility between Predicate Theory and Direct Reference*

As I said before, Millianism radicalizes the Direct Reference thesis, the thesis that the meaning of a proper name ends by collapsing onto its referent, in a particular way; namely, by saying not only that i) the *main* semantically relevant contribution of a proper name is its truth-conditional contribution, i.e., its referent (if any), but also that ii) such a contribution is the *only* semantically relevant contribution.

Yet this way of articulating the above thesis is not mandatory at all for being a direct referentialist. For there are other expressions, or at least certain uses of them, which are taken to be directly referential and yet fail to satisfy thesis ii) of Millianism. Indeed, they possess a further dimension of meaning that enables them to have certain referents as their truth-conditional contributions. As a result, for such expressions their meaning ends by collapsing on their referents, yet it is not absorbed by them.

These expressions are indexicals and (possibly) proper definite descriptions when referentially used. Indexical expressions – pure indexicals like “I”, “here”, and “now”, demonstratives like “this” and “that”, etc. – are directly referential expressions insofar as their truth-conditional contributions is provided by their contextual referents. Yet they do not function as Millian devices of reference, for they also possess another dimension of meaning, their so-called *nonconstant* *character*, which is the function that enables one such expression to get a referent given a certain context of truth-conditional interpretation – typically, a different referent for any such different context of interpretation.[[16]](#footnote-16) The referential use of a proper definite description may be seen as the use in which that description is again a device of direct reference for its referent provides its truth-conditional contribution. Yet in such a use the description again is no Millian device of reference, for it gets such a referent insofar as it uniquely satisfies the *constant* *character* that description may be seen to possess, namely the constant function that, given *any* context of interpretation, yields to such a description the very same referent. According to this way of putting things, the definite description figuring in the famous Donnellan (1966) example “the man drinking a Martini” has a referential use that yields no individual as its truth-conditional contribution, for neither the individual the speaker has in mind when so using the description, nor anybody else in the relevant situation for that matter,[[17]](#footnote-17) drinks a Martini. Hence, the description is not proper, for nobody satisfies its constant character. Yet the description “the Italian Prime Minister in 2015” has a referential use whose truth-conditional contribution is Matteo Renzi, for in its being used to refer to Matteo, he uniquely satisfies its constant character, so that the description is proper.[[18]](#footnote-18)

Once things are put this way, there is a way to make a Predicate Theory compatible with the Direct Reference thesis. For one may go on saying that, as far as proper names are concerned, in their referential use such expressions have their referents, if any, as their truth-conditional contributions. Yet while so used, proper names also express a character which (contextually) determines such contributions. Moreover, such a character amounts to a property that either coincides with or entails[[19]](#footnote-19) the property that is predicated of them when they are predicatively used.

If this is the case, one manages not only to give a semantically uniform account of the referential and the predicative use of a proper name, but also to explain why the property that is expressed in the referential use as the name’s character coincides with or entails a property of the kind *being called “N”*. For the latter is the property that is predicated in the predicative use of a proper name.

To see why this is the case, consider to begin with indexical expressions. Also indexical expressions have predicative uses.[[20]](#footnote-20) Consider sentences like

1. That cat is a he;
2. The today I’ll someday want back;
3. Once one has journeyed half of her life’s way, there are for her more yesterdays than tomorrows.

It would be odd to say that the predicative use of the indexical “he” in (8), that of “today” in (9), and those of the indexicals “yesterday” and “tomorrow” in (10), have nothing to do with the referential use of such indexicals. For what is predicated in the former use are respectively the properties of (roughly) *being a male individual in the surroundings of the contextual speaker and interlocutors*, *being the day of the context, being the day that precedes the day of the context*, *being the day that follows the day of the context*. Now, such properties are precisely the properties that constitute the respective characters of such indexicals, as signalled by their respective referential use. Indeed, given a context of interpretation, the referent of “he” will be a male in the surroundings of the speaker and her interlocutors in that context; *mutatis mutandis*, one can say the same as to “today”, “yesterday”, and “tomorrow”.

When we come to proper names, the situation is pretty similar. The property of *being called “Alberto”*, which is predicated by “an Alberto” in (1) once it is shorthand in such a predicative use for “an individual called ‘Alberto’”, either coincides with or entails the property that constitutes the character of “Alberto” as expressed in its referential use. Indeed, given a context of interpretation, what the name refers to is the individual that is called “Alberto” in that context; myself, in such a case. Likewise for “Voltolini” and “Alberto Voltolini” in (2) and (3) respectively.

Thus, once a Predicate Theory is suitably weakened so as to disentangle it from the Nominal Theory, it is quite compatible with the Direct Reference thesis once this latter thesis is also suitably modulated, namely, it is taken to coincide just with thesis i) and not also with thesis ii), as Millians instead pretend. Insofar as this compatibility not only allows for a basically uniform account of the predicative and of the referential use of proper names but also explains why a property of the kind *being called “N”* is the property both uses mobilize (as respectively predicated and expressed), defending such a compatibility clearly constitutes a theoretical advantage. Thus, a syncretism about proper names that articulates such compatibility naturally suggests itself. Yet *which* form of syncretism exactly?

1. *The Best Syncretistic Account of Proper Names*

As far as I can see, there are at least three, if not four, syncretistic ways of combining a Predicate Theory and the Direct Reference thesis. According to the *first* way, a proper name is actually like a referentially used proper definite description. For the truth-conditional contribution of a proper name in its referential use is just its referent, yet such a referent is determined by its *constant* character. Given any context of interpretation, the referent of the proper name always remains one and the same individual, the one that uniquely satisfies the nominal property constituting such a character.[[21]](#footnote-21) According to the *second* way, demonstratives are the paradigm of proper names. For again, the truth-conditional contribution [of a contribution] of a proper name in its referential use is just its referent, yet such a referent co-varies with the context of interpretation, since the *nonconstant* character of a proper name determines a different referent for any different context of interpretation. Depending on whether the referential use of a proper name is taken or not to be strictly tantamount to that of a complex demonstrative of the kind “that N”, which is in its turn shorthand for “that individual called ‘N’”, we have two options of how to articulate this second syncretistic way.[[22]](#footnote-22)

These two ways basically differ insofar as they differently account for the phenomenon of *homonymous* proper names, i.e., the fact that the same morpho-syntactic string of letters that constitutes a proper name may be used to refer to different individuals. For instance, the surname “Voltolini” may be used to refer to me but also to Dario, my writer friend, who is the Voltolini I’m curious of.

According to the first way, homonymous names are just semantically different expressions insofar as they possess *different constant* characters. In this perspective, a constant character expresses a *relativized* nominal property, namely a property of the kind *being called “N” according to a certain naming convention*, where this naming convention is basically individuated in terms of a certain dubbing context. Since in the case of homonymy we have different dubbing contexts, hence different naming conventions, we have different constant characters, each for any homonymous proper name. Such characters respectively determine, in any context of interpretation, different referents for any such name. So in the “Voltolini” case, we have (at least) two different “Voltolini” names, one whose character includes a *certain* naming convention (basically, a procedure tracing back to the dubbing my parents did that determines myself as its referent in any context of interpretation, and another whose character includes *another* naming convention (basically, a procedure tracing back to the dubbing Dario’s parents’ did that determines Dario as its referent in any context of interpretation. Cf. Predelli (2015: 371-5).

According to the second way instead, properly speaking there are no homonymous proper names, there is simply just one name that, in virtue of its nonconstant character, in different contexts of interpretation has different referents. Difference in reference for a proper name is basically a matter of indexicality. Just as it may be the case that in different contexts of interpretation the demonstrative “that” has different referents in virtue of its nonconstant character, roughly *being in the surroundings of the contextual speaker and interlocutors*, so it may be the case that the surname “Voltolini” refers to myself in a context of interpretation, to Dario in another such context, in virtue of its nonconstant character, roughly *being called “Voltolini”*.

The *third* syncretistic way agrees with the second one in its being an indexical account, basically accounting for homonymy in the same way as the second does.

In this respect, both the second and the third way have a slight theoretical advantage on the first way. For while they can account for both the referential use and the predicative use of a proper name by saying that *the very same property*, i.e., a property of the kind *being called “N”* or even *being contextually called “N”*, is mobilized as predicated of something in the latter use and as expressed as a nonconstant character in the former use, the first way is forced to say that while this very property is mobilized in the latter use, the former use expresses different more fine-grained properties, namely different convention-relative properties as the respective constant characters of the proper names involved. As the following sentence clearly shows:

1. There are a few Voltolinis in the Turin’s telephone directory.

(11) clearly states that the number of the individuals called “Voltolini” mentioned in the Turin telephone directory is small. Yet the constant character that is associated to any “Voltolini” name is always a different one, each time more fine-grained than the property of *being called “Voltolini”*. It is the convention-relative property of *being called “Voltolini” according to a* ***certain*** *convention* in the case of *my* surname, the different convention-relative property of *being called “Voltolini” according to* ***another*** *convention* in the case of Dario’s surname, and so on. Cf. Predelli (2015: 374-5).

Yet the third way disagrees with the second one in that for it, proper names are a *sui generis* form of indexicals, *indexinames* to give them a label. Indexinames are like pure indexicals on the one hand, since their reference is *automatically* determined by a context of interpretation given their nonconstant character. Yet they are also like demonstratives on the other hand, since in certain contexts of interpretation they are *referentless*. Let me clarify.[[23]](#footnote-23)

As to the first point, the context of interpretation of an indexiname is a *narrow* context, i.e., a set-theoretical construction made of certain parameters, hence it is not a context in a *wide* sense, the concrete overall situation of discourse.[[24]](#footnote-24) Moreover, it is an *enlarged* narrow context, for instead of limiting itself to containing the parameters that traditionally constitute such a context, i.e., agent, space, time and world of interpretation, it contains a *further* parameter, the parameter of naming conventions or better of dubbings. In a nutshell, what according to the first syncretistic way is put *outside* the context of interpretation, as constituting a prior and independent context – a dubbing context – according to the third way is put *within* the context of interpretation, as constituting another of its parameters. Furthermore, since the nonconstant character of an indexiname is again constituted by a property of the kind *being contextually called “N”*, the referent of an indexiname is automatically, i.e., non-intentionally, fixed given a certain context of interpretation. For such a character directly points to the dubbing parameter of that context so as to provide the referent of the indexiname in that context, one’s intentions on this concern notwithstanding. As it happens with pure indexicals: e.g. the character of “I”, roughly *being the agent in context*, directly points to the agent parameter in narrow context so as to automatically provide the referent of “I” in that context.[[25]](#footnote-25)

As to the second point, the nonconstant character of an indexiname is also a *partial* function, in that given a certain context of interpretation, there may be no referent in that context, that is, when the dubbing fails in want of an individual to be dubbed. As it happens with demonstratives, which fail to refer to anything when there is no relevant individual in the context of interpretation (cf. Kaplan 1989a,b).

The third syncretistic way is definitely better than the second way. To begin with, equating the character of a proper name to the character of a demonstrative, as the second way does, leaves the contextual reference of the name indeterminate even once a certain narrow context is fixed until further factors coming from the wide context are appealed to. The context of interpretation, the one providing the relevant contextual truth-conditions for the sentence involved, must be in that case the wide, not the narrow context, as so-called *contextualists* as to the semantics/pragmatics divide maintain (cf e.g. Recanati 2004a). If one utters

1. That comes from North-Western Italy

the reference of “that” in the above token of (12) is indeterminate even if one fixes the agent, the space, the time, and the world of interpretation, in a nutshell even if one fixes a certain narrow context, until the utterer specifies e.g. that among all individuals that contextually satisfy the character of “that”, roughly *being in the surroundings of the contextual speaker and interlocutors*, she had *one* of those individuals in mind (as Kaplan (1989a,b) originally envisaged), where the utterer’s intentions are a wide-contextual factor. In the second syncretistic way, the situation does not basically change if one utters

1. As to his family’s origins, Voltolini comes from North-Eastern Italy.

For according to such a way, the character of “Voltolini” notwithstanding (roughly, *being called “Voltolini”*), given a certain narrow context it is still indeterminate whether “Voltolini” in the above token of (13) refers to me, to my friend Dario, or to any other individual contextually satisfying that character, until some further wide-contextual factors are appealed to (for instance, the fact that the utterer of (13) has Dario rather than myself or any other Voltolini in mind).

Granted, on behalf of the second form of syncretism one might try to pair a demonstrative, hence a proper name as well, with a pure indexical, namely by supplementing the expression’s character in such a way that it may point to a *further* element in *narrow* context, so that its contextual reference is automatically fixed. As to demonstratives, so-called *traditionalists* as to the semantics/pragmatics divide, namely people who believe at most narrow context is the relevant context of truth-conditional interpretation, often appeal to such a move. For instance as to “that”, the idea is that its character roughly amounts to *being the* ***demonstrated*** *individual in the surroundings of the contextual speaker and interlocutors*. As a result, by pointing to a further parameter in narrow context, a parameter of *demonstrations* (perceptual ostensions) or of *demonstrata* (ostended individuals), the character of “that” automatically provides a referent for that demonstrative in such an enlarged narrow context. For such strategies, cf. e.g. Caplan (2003).

Yet independently of whether this move works for demonstratives, as I strongly doubt (cf. Voltolini 2009), it is unlikely that it works for proper names. Suppose that one so supplements the character of a proper name, by making it roughly identical with a property of the kind *being the demonstrated individual contextually called “N”*. Thus, the name sounds equivalent to a complex demonstrative of the kind “that N”, i.e., “that individual called ‘N’”. One then adds a parameter of demonstrations or of *demonstrata* in the enlarged narrow context of a proper name. Yet this move does not suffice to settle contextual reference for a proper name. For even if one fixes that further parameter, that reference is not settled yet. Suppose that two stars both named “Starry” send to the earth light rays that ultimately collapse into just one ray, thereby appearing as just one dot in the sky’s vault. By pointing to that dot, one utters

1. Starry is shining.

Yet by fixing her perceptual ostensions or such an ostended dot, it is not settled yet to which star the utterer of (14) is referring by “Starry”.

Clearly enough, no such problem arises as to the third way. For if a proper name is an indexiname, then its character points to the parameter of dubbings in a narrow context enlarged by adding *that* parameter, so as to automatically get a referent in such a context. If “Starry” in (14)’s token mobilizes a *certain* dubbing, it refers to *one* of the two stars; if it mobilizes *another* dubbing, it refers to the *other* one.

To be sure, on behalf of the second syncretistic way a contextualist might reply that if the above problem merely shows that the context of truth-conditional interpretation for proper names treated as demonstratives must be the wide context, the worse for a traditionalist. This would not be an exciting reply, since contextualism as to meaning phenomena forcefully suggests itself only when no traditionalist account of the phenomenon at issue sounds plausible.[[26]](#footnote-26) Yet the above counterexample shows that the problem is even deeper than that. A proper name cannot work exactly like a demonstrative, for its range of application widely exceeds what can be perceptually given. Unlike demonstratives, we use proper names to refer not only to what is out there, but also to what is not out there, for it is very far away or it is not there at all (it is a nonpresent entity, an abstract entity, a fictional entity, a merely possible entity …).

Moreover, the third syncretistic way is also better than the first way. As we have seen, in the third way the contextual referent (if any) of the function that constitutes the proper name’s character is automatically given, for the character points to a parameter in the argument of that function, a certain enlarged narrow context, that nonintentionally provides the value of the function, the name’s contextual referent (if any). Yet in the first way there is no element in the relevant function that is mobilized there, a function from dubbings to constant characters, which points to the function’s argument, a given dubbing, so as to automatically provide the function’s value, a certain constant character. For in such a case, what is at our disposal is only the *shape* of a certain expression. From that shape, one cannot get to a dubbing so as to automatically retrieve a constant character. Consider an example provided by Napoli (2015: 215):

1. Leave me alone is in a bad mood.

In the relevant token of (15), the expression “Leave me alone” is used as a nickname of a not very sociable fellow. Yet by merely considering the shape of that expression, we cannot get its syntactic form, which may be that of a sentence, as in its usual reading that would provide another yet ungrammatical token of (15), as well as that of a proper name, as in its unusual reading that interests us. If on the basis of that expression’s shape we could have that syntactic form at our disposal, we might single out a syntactic element in that expression’s shape that points to a dubbing, so as to automatically get the constant character of “Leave me alone” we are looking for. But since we do not so have such a form at our disposal, we cannot single out such an element. This may have a dramatic consequence, as in the famous Polyphemus story. If his fellow Cyclops could have singled out the relevant syntactic form on the basis of the uttered shape, they might have immediately helped Polyphemus when he uttered

1. Nobody has blinded me.

However, since they did not so have such a form at their disposal but they merely had to rely on an intentional factor that they (luckily) ignored, i.e., Polyphemus’ intention to refer by “Nobody” to Ulysses, they limited themselves to mocking at their unfortunate fellow, by privileging the ordinary, quantified interpretation of (16).

On behalf of the first syncretistic way, one might reply with Predelli (2015: 374) that this is as should be. Semantic interpretation starts only when a constant character, hence a certain proper name, is at our disposal, so as to allow one to provide a certain truth-conditional interpretation for that name. Whatever happens before, dubbing procedures included, just belongs to the domain of pragmatics, as involving a *pre*-semantic role of context.

Yet it is not clear to me why this (let me call it) *second-order* contextualism, a contextualism as to (constant) character rather than as to (truth-conditional) content, should be the right game in town, if an overall traditionalist account of proper names such as the one the third syncretistic way provides is available. As a matter of fact, there are cases in which we may avoid such a second-order contextualism. For instance, we may relativize shapes to languages, so as to automatically get different lexical representations, including constant characters of the terms involved, in virtue of the different syntactic structures such languages respectively mobilize. E.g., once we relativize a certain string of sounds to English, English makes us point to a certain syntactic structure that automatically gives us a certain lexical representation, including *certain* constant characters of the terms involved

1. Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.

Yet once we relativize the same string of sounds to French, French makes us point to another syntactic structure that automatically gives us another lexical representation, including *other* constant characters of the terms involved

1. Un petit d’un petit s’étonné aux Halles.[[27]](#footnote-27)

In such a case, we may give up a second-order contextualist account of lexical representations, for we have a second-order traditionalist account of such representations. Yet in point of fact, we can hardly so relativize shapes to syntax, as the following example Napoli (2015: 216) provides clearly shows. Only wide context can tell us which is the relevant reading (vocative hence nominal, imperative hence non-nominal) of “Leave me alone” in

1. Leave me alone, do not try to fool me.

If we cannot analogously relativize shapes to syntax as far as (15), (16) and (19) are concerned and so ascend to a second-order traditionalist account of proper names, then it is better to stick to the third rather than to the first syncretistic way. For second-order contextualism may be in order when what has to be both wide-contextually and pre-semantically settled is just the expression to which a semantical interpretation must be subsequently applied, as traditionalists ordinarily maintain.[[28]](#footnote-28) Yet it is less in order when what has to be both wide-contextually and pre-semantically settled is rather a *meaning* dimension, namely the alleged constant character of proper names, as supporters of the first syncretistic way hold. For as we have seen before, contextualism as to meaning phenomena forcefully suggests itself only when no traditionalist account of the phenomenon at issue sounds plausible. Yet the third syncretistic way precisely provides such an account.

1. *A Speculative Story*

Up to now, first, I’ve limited myself to saying that a syncretistic theory of proper names that combines the virtues of the Predicate Theory and those of the Direct Reference Thesis is preferable to both the Nominal Theory and to Millianism, which for some reason or other unsatisfyingly radicalize the above doctrines. For it accounts for the very idea from which a Predicate Theory started and the Direct Reference thesis by itself does not deny, namely the idea that the predicative and the referential use of a proper name share a common semantical root. Second, I’ve tried to show that among the three (if not four) syncretistic approaches I have considered, the third one is the best. For it accounts in an utterly traditionalist way for the homonymity of proper names, by taking them as a *sui generis* form of indexicals, namely indexinames, whose character is a partial function from an enlarged yet narrow context to referents.[[29]](#footnote-29) Yet is there a non-technical, but a philosophically substantive, reason, as to why we should stick to the syncretistic approach based on indexinames?

I guess that there is one. As I hinted at before, I take that the property a proper name’s character mobilizes is a property of the kind *being contextually called “N”*, where “called ‘N’” has to be meant as *called to the interlocutors’ attention by means of ‘N’*. To begin with, this move has the further technical advantage that it purportedly saves the analyticity, i.e., truth in all contexts of interpretation, of a sentence of the form:

1. If it exists, N is called “N”.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Being analytic in the sense of being true in any context of interpretation is what is expected by a sentence that predicates of an individual the property that allegedly qualifies the relevant indexical’s character (as for instance happens with “I am the context’s agent”, which is true in any context of interpretation for “I”). Now if (20) meant that *if it exists, N bears “N”*, then there might surely be a context in which it is false, namely a context in which the name “N” is a scheme for is not the *official* name of a certain individual: recall the “Leave me alone” case given before (cf. Napoli 2015: 218). No such problem arises if “called ‘N’” means *called to the interlocutors’ attention by means of ‘N’*. For instance, in the “Leave it alone” case, although the relevant individual is not the official bearer of that nickname, she is still the individual the speaker is calling her interlocutors’ attention for by uttering “Leave me alone”.[[31]](#footnote-31)

Yet more importantly for my present purposes, the above move may suggest a theoretical justification as to why names are indexinames. Consider whistles, claps, or any other way to attract someone’s attention. One may well take them as context-sensitive forms of expression, just as indexicals are. In one context, a certain whistle attracts my attention; in another context, a qualitatively identical whistle attracts the attention of someone else. Yet a whistle, or any functionally similar sound, is not a proper name yet. In order for such a sound to become a proper name, it has to be so to speak *stabilized*.[[32]](#footnote-32) Unlike the previous case, when a sound is stabilized as a proper name, the *subject* of attention – the speaker’s interlocutor – may well not coincide with the *object* of attention (if any)[[33]](#footnote-33) – the speaker’s addressee.[[34]](#footnote-34) For not only the addressee may even be an inanimate thing or anyway an entity unable to display attention, but also the interlocutor manages to allow for an attentional focus to the addressee (if any) to persist not only when the addressee is no longer there, but also when the interlocutor herself is no longer there and has been replaced by another person, i.e., a later interlocutor. There are indeed two ways of attracting the earlier vs. the later interlocutor’s attention to something: an *in praesentia* and an *in absentia* one. They enable the original sound to be used with respect to the addressee (if any) out of the original dubbing circumstance as a name of the addressee itself. For by means of such ways, not only the circumstance in which that sound is originally uttered may be reinforced in its characteristic of being a dubbing (of the addressee), but also that very dubbing may be appealed to as the relevant contextual parameter in order for the later interlocutor to assess *what* (if any) her attention has to be directed upon. Since the later interlocutor has not attended the original dubbing circumstance, she has indeed to settle to *what* her attention has to be directed upon when she hears a proper name. She can do that only by selecting a certain dubbing circumstance rather than other ones. (Such a selection may, but not must, be performed by appealing to certain referential intentions, as the traditional causal-intentional theory of naming stemmed out of Kripke 1980 claims.) Hence, the referential value of the name changes, depending on which dubbing is pointed out. As the indexiname approach predicts.[[35]](#footnote-35),[[36]](#footnote-36)

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1. I stick to the traditional formulation of Millianism (see below). In presenting an alternative formulation of Millianism as the view according to which a proper name “is endowed with a constant character—the function that determines a particular individual as its content at any [context] *c*”, Predelli (2015: 369) may disagree on this assessment of Millianism as a radicalization of the Direct Reference thesis. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. In this paper, I refrain from considering another way in which a proper name may be used in argumental position, an *attributive* use (as when one utters “Alberto, make a step forward!” to mean that whoever is so named has to make such a step). If there were such a use, this would be further evidence for a Predicate Theory, especially if combined with the Direct Reference thesis as I do below. For in such a case, the truth-conditions of the sentential token involving such a use would be (*inter alia*) constituted by (roughly) the property that is predicated in the name’s predicative use. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. This way of putting things notoriously raises the problem of how to account in direct referentialist terms for the truth-conditional contribution of empty names, those names who lack a referent. I won’t deal with this problem here. For a proposal, see my Voltolini (2014). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. By putting things this way, it follows that a proper name is rigid, i.e., it designates the same individual across all possible worlds. For the name has the same referent, *qua* its truth-condtional contribution, across all worlds. By following Marti (1995), I put thesis i) in terms of a name’s having its referent as its truth-conditional contribution rather than in the both ontologically and metaphysically more demanding terms of the name’s referent as (*inter alia*) constituting a singular proposition, the structured entity made of individuals and properties to be evaluated throughout possible worlds. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See also Napoli (1995). For a similar way of formulating the Millian claim see Marti (1995), who distinguishes between a truth-conditional and a cognitive sense of “direct reference” and holds that Millianism defends both. I have not appealed to that formulation, for one may say that, once that cognitive sense is turned into a normative sense, Millianism has to stick only to the first, truth-conditional, sense of “direct reference” just as any direct referentialist. On this see Voltolini (2004). The formulation of Millianism Predelli gives in (2015) (fn. 1) may be interpreted as going along this direction. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. This idea is sketched in Burge (1973); it returns (in different forms) e.g. in Bach (1981), Fara (2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. In what follows, I equate the Nominal Theory with a nominal descriptivist theory of proper names. Along the lines originally proposed by Kneale (1962). By itself, this is not exactly the case – the Nominal Theory limits itself to saying that a determiner equivalent to the definite article is a phonologically covert element of a sentence containing a referentially used proper name (cf. Leckie 2013: 1141-2). Yet unless opts for a nonstandard, e.g. a Montagovian, reading of a definite description, Russellian descriptivism naturally suggests itself as the correct way of cashing out the Nominal Theory. Unless one wants to read the Nominal Theory *à la* Predelli (2015); yet in such a case the determiner figures as a covert element that qualifies the constant character of a proper name, not its truth-conditional contribution. See below. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. I tried to answer such worries in my Voltolini (1995). [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Burge (1973) claims that, unlike (1)-(3), (5)-(6) involve non-literal predicative uses of proper names. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. For similar examples and worries, cf. Jeshion (2015a: 238ff.). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. By so considering (4)-(6), for the purposes of this paper I remain neutral as to whether such cases involve a truth-conditionally relevant pragmatics, as Recanati (2004a) among others (including myself) believes, or a proper post-semantical pragmatics, as followers of Grice (1975) believe. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. For many other such examples, cf. Fara (2015). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. I say “inter alia”, for the pragmatic function must here take as argument both the relevant nominal property and the fact that a certain individual is the ordinary (or at least the most relevant) referent of the proper name in question in order for it to take as value the relevant non-literal property. Jeshion (2015a: 245-6) seems to consider a variant of this predicativist reply, yet she does not seem to see the problems that it raises for her own criticism of predicativism. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. *Pace* Jeshion (2015a: 241-5). In (2015b: 288), Jeshion adds that when a sentence having a proper name in non-argumental position is used to say of something that it is called by that name, as in (1)-(3), this use is as derived as the use that occurs in (5-)(6). Yet this is not the case. For the relevant local pragmatic process operates in (5)-(6) by taking a property of the kind *being called “N”* as its source, whereas as to (1)-(3) there is no further property with respect to which that very property would be its target. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. In (2015), Fara defends a similar account. Yet she does not seem to see, first, that *all* the examples of non-literal predicative uses she provides – i.e., both examples of type (5) and examples of type (6) – may be ranked as property shitfs induced by local pragmatic processes, and second, that by appeal to such processes one can rank as non-literal predicative uses of proper names even those uses that she instead ranks as literal predicative uses involving different predicates having to do with family membership (e.g., “Waldo Cox is a Romanov” when used to mean that Cox the gardener belongs to the well-known imperial family) (for a similar criticism, see Jeshion (2015b)). Fara thinks so for she believes (along with Jeshion (2015b)), that family names are proper *nouns* (2015: 268). But alleged proper nouns are just proper names of *types*, as any name of a genus or a species. Cox is a Romanov just as he is a Homo Sapiens, the species referred to when e.g. one says “Homo sapiens is the only surviving species of hominids“. (Incidentally, the latter sentence shows that a type can be referred to by a proper name even without prefixing a definite article to the name. Thus, it also shows that the supposed syntactic evidence that should show when referring to a type, a purported proper name is just a proper noun (cf. e.g. Jeshion 2015b: 290), is rather controversial. As Northern Italians well know, even the opposite syntactic evidence to the effect that proper names in a referential use are not prefixed by the definite article is rather controversial.) Thus, a local pragmatic process may well involve a shift from the property of *being called “N”* (plus the fact that a certain type is the ordinary, or at least the most relevant, type referred to by that name) to the property of *being a member of the type called “N”*. Indeed, if you address me by saying that I am a Mussolini, you may mean not only that I am so-called, but also either a) that I have a Mussolinian physiognomy viz. that I am an instance of a certain *physiognomical type*, or b) that I have a Mussolinian character viz. that I am an instance of a certain *psychological type*, or c) that I belong to the Mussolini family, a certain *anthropological type*. If a)-b) depend on the relevant local pragmatic process, it is hard to see why c) does not so depend. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. I follow Predelli (2005) in distinguishing context of interpretation from context of utterance. For, as he has convincingly shown, there are contexts of utterance that are irrelevant for yielding a sentence its contextual truth-conditions. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. I put the Donnellan’s example in this way in order to rule out the possibility that the definite description in question is still proper, for in the situation at issue there is someone else who uniquely drinks a Martini, so that this someone may work as the referent of the referentially used description. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. For this way of drawing a semantically relevant distinction between the referential and the attributive use of a definite description, cf. e.g. Recanati (1993). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. By considering later the problem of homonymity, we will see why this specification is important. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. In my Voltolini (1995),I already drew this comparison between indexicals and proper names in favour of the indexicalist theory of proper names I will appeal to later. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. We owe this way to Predelli (2015). According to him, this way makes not only a Predicate Theory, but also the Nominal Theory, compatible even with Millianism. Yet this depends on the fact that he both means the Nominal Theory not as a form of Russellian descriptivism and provides a non-standard characterization of Millianism (see fn. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. One can trace back those two options to Castañeda (1990) and Burge (1973) respectively. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. I have appealed to this form of syncretism in my Voltolini (1995, 2014). It may be also found in Recanati (1993), Pelczar and Rainsbury (1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. For the distinction between these notions of context cf. e.g. Perry (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. For such an interpretation of the automaticity of narrow context cf. Recanati (2004b). To be sure, language users may well ignore which property a character of an indexiname amounts to, in particular they may well ignore that such a property appeals to certain psychological facts of attention (see later). Yet *pace* Leckie (2013: 1156) this is not a problem. For not even users of a pure indexical such as “I” must know which property the contextual referents of “I” share in order for them to be such referents; nevertheless, those referents are authomatically fixed as well, given such a character. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. As Recanati (2004a:116) convincingly says. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. By pointing to this second-order traditionalist account of the case at issue, I do not want to say that it is its best account. I prefer a contextualist account that interprets the sound that utterances of (17)-(18) roughly share as an intentionally ambiguous punny utterance of one and the same sentence, on a par e.g. with “Condoms should be used in any conceivable occasion”. For this account cf. Voltolini (2012). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. This is how Perry (1997) and Predelli himself (2005) deal with the phenomenon of lexical ambiguity; when a lexically ambiguous expression is a stake, actually wide context in a pre-semantic role makes one select *which* homonym among those that disambiguate the expression is at stake in order for semantic interpretation to start. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. In my Voltolini (2014) I presented another argument in favour of the indexinames theory. Such an argument revolves on how to account for empty uses of proper names, especially the fiction-involving ones. Yet probably such an argument has counterparts in each of the other syncretist approaches. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. As originally envisaged by Burge (1977: 344fn.7). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. For more about this, cf. Voltolini (2014: 303). Fara (2011) distinguishes between *being called N* and *being called “N”* roughly in the same way as I did between *being a bearer of “N”* and *being called to*  *one’s attention by means of “N”*. Yet she also says that her two notions are independent of each other. Although I agree that *being called to* *someone’s attention by means of “N”* does not entail *being a bearer of “N”*, I think that the converse entailment holds. For, as I will try to show below, it is only in virtue of being called to someone’s attention by means of a name that one also becomes a bearer of that name. Fara’s (2011: 496-7) alleged counterexample – she is called Delia Ruby Graff Fara but she never heard anyone so calling her to someone’s attention – is not a real counterxample, for it presupposes that the only way to attract someone’s attention is the *auditory* one. Yet this of course is not the case. As she admits, at a certain point she added “Fara” to “Delia Ruby Graff”. But this addition could take place only if she *manifested* it somehow – for instance, by writing it. For this is enough as a means to attract someone’s attention to her. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. I here focus on sounds, on the reasonable genetic hypothesis that oral language precedes other forms of language. Yet, as I have shown in the previous footnote, nothing would basically change if I focused say on written language, which mobilizes visual rather than auditory perception. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Remember that (uses of) names may well be referentially empty if the relevant dubbing fails when there is no individual one’s attention is attracted to. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. The distinction between interlocutors, addresses, and speakers is functional. Sometimes, either the first two roles or the second two roles are instantiated by the same individual. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. In so giving an account of the mechanism of name reference, the third kind of syncretism copes with the methological worries Jeshion (2015a: 236-7 and fn. 15) raises against a Predicate Theory of names. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. I warmly thank Stefano Predelli for some comments to a previous version of this paper. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)