

Searle on Analyticity, Necessity, and Proper Names

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Abstract: My aim is to show that once we appreciate how Searle (1958) fills in the details of his account of proper names – which I will dub the presuppositional view – and how we might supplement it further, we are in for a twofold discovery. First, Searle’s account is crucially unlike the so-called cluster-of-descriptions view, which many philosophers take Searle to have held. Second, the presuppositional view he did hold is interesting, plausible, and worthy of serious reconsideration. The idea that Searle’s account is a largely Fregean interlude between the Fregean description theory of proper names and Kripke’s proposals presented in “Naming and Necessity” is in major ways a myth, a mythical chapter in how the story of 20th-century philosophy of language is often told.

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1 Introduction

John Searle begins his seminal paper “Proper Names” with the question: “Do proper names have senses?” (Searle 1958, 166). He sums up part of his reply towards the end of the paper: if the question “asks whether or not proper names are logically connected with characteristics of the object to which they refer the answer is ‘yes, in a loose sort of way’” (Searle 1958, 173). He briefly mentions at this point that the logical connections involve “descriptive presuppositions” (cf. Searle 1958, 173): various descriptions that capture characteristics of the object, uniquely identifying it; for example, the descriptive presuppositions for the name ‘Aristotle’ might include ‘the teacher of Alexander the

Great', 'the most famous pupil of Plato', 'the author of *The Metaphysics*'. These descriptions are supposed to express certain characteristics of Aristotle: his having been the one and only teacher of Alexander the Great, for example.¹ That such descriptions are featured in, of all things, *presuppositions*, is a widely ignored feature of Searle's proposal, which I will argue is nonetheless crucial and innovative; indeed, it's so central that I will refer to Searle's proposal as the presuppositional view.

My aim is to show that once we appreciate how Searle fills in the details of his presuppositional view and how we might supplement it further, we are in for a twofold discovery: first, Searle's (1958) account is crucially unlike the so-called cluster-of-descriptions view, which many philosophers take Searle to have held; and second, the presuppositional account he did hold is interesting, plausible, and worthy of serious reconsideration. The idea that Searle's account is a largely Fregean interlude between the Fregean description theory of proper names and Kripke's proposals presented in "Naming and Necessity" is in major ways a myth, a mythical chapter in how the story of 20th-century philosophy of language is often told. Contrary to philosophical lore, a Searlean theory bears close kinship to direct reference theory, a view inspired by Kripke, with descriptive presuppositions adding an interesting twist.

In the course of this paper, I will revisit Searle's (1958) "Proper Names" to expose the presuppositional view that he proposed there. I'd like to show that this view can be developed further and can be defended against some central objections raised against the cluster-of-descriptions view of proper names. After providing some background (Section 2), I will argue that Searle's view was misunderstood in part because it wasn't recognized that by 'necessity', Searle meant 'analyticity' (Section 3), and in part because the role of presuppositions has been ignored (Section 4). These considerations already offer responses to some of the objections raised against the cluster-of-descriptions view. Meanwhile a Searlean framework also shows considerable promise in accounting for some of the remaining objections, concerning singular existential claims like 'Aristotle existed' (Section 5). Concluding remarks will follow in Section 6.

¹ Of course, some characteristics of Aristotle's are not unique to him, like being a philosopher, and accordingly, the description expressing it, 'a philosopher' is not a *definite* description.

2 Three commonly raised objections

Frege's (1892/1952) reply to our initial question had been: yes, proper names do indeed have senses, what we might call Fregean meanings. *Fregean meanings* are usually characterized as playing a number of theoretical roles including these: specifying what proper names contribute to the meanings of complex expressions containing them; determining to whom or (to what) the name refers; and being the objects of understanding (Fregean meanings are what competent users of the name grasp). The dominant view among philosophers is that Frege's theory of name meaning – the description theory of the meaning of proper names – provides an elegant solution to these (and other) tasks, but encounters fatal problems that a patched-up amendment, the cluster-of-descriptions theory fails to resolve. It is this latter theory, attributed primarily to Searle, that is therefore commonly featured in the literature as a lead-up to and foil for Saul Kripke's alternative proposals about how proper names work. In this section, I will outline the Fregean theory and its cluster-based successor, thought to be Searle's, and how they are taken to fare with respect to three objections.

The description theory of the meaning of proper names (the *description view* for short) – attributed to Frege (and also to Russell) – holds that for each proper name, its meaning is given by an associated definite description. For example, the meaning of 'Aristotle' is given by an associated description like 'the teacher of Alexander the Great'. Who does the associating – the linguistic community, or individual speakers? The Fregean theory claims the latter: each and every speaker who is a competent user of 'Aristotle' associates with the name the description 'the teacher of Alexander the Great'. And what does the associating consist in? There are various ways we might go on this, a convenient choice is to follow Kripke's (1970/1980, 64, 71) characterization: a speaker associates a definite description with a proper name just in case she believes that the description fits a single individual – the bearer of the name.² According to the description view, understanding the name 'Aristotle' requires associating 'the teacher of Alexander the Great' with it; it is the meaning of this description that the name contributes to sentences containing it; and the bearer of the name is whoever fits the

² This is featured in theses (1) and (2) of Kripke's general characterization of description-based accounts of which the description view discussed here is a special case.

definite description. The name, in short, is synonymous with the associated definite description.

The objections I am about to discuss are commonly raised against the description view. In what follows, I am closely tracking Michael Devitt and Kim Sterelny's (1999, 45-54) as well as Peter Ludlow's (2007, Section 8) line of argument; both of these texts are highly influential reference points and teaching materials within the philosophy of language.

People typically associate a plurality of definite descriptions with a name. There is, on the one hand, intrapersonal plurality: a philosopher might associate with 'Aristotle' the descriptions 'the most famous student of Plato', 'the author of *The Metaphysics*', 'the author of *The Nichomachean Ethics*'. And there is, on the other hand, interpersonal plurality: a historian might associate with 'Aristotle' 'the teacher of Alexander the Great', a description that is different from the philosopher's or from a high school student's.

(i) *The principled basis objection* concerns both intrapersonal and interpersonal plurality. The description theory posits a single definite description as giving the meaning or sense of 'Aristotle'. But for a single speaker and across several speakers, we find a plurality of descriptions associated with the name. According to the description view, "...one of these descriptions trumps all the others. If it fails to denote, the name is empty, even if all the other associated descriptions pick out the one object" (Devitt – Sterelny 1999, 48). It is up to the description view to provide a principled basis for selecting *the* definite description – the *meaning-giving description* – with which the name 'Aristotle' is to be synonymous; but it's unclear whence that principled basis would come.

(ii) *The unwanted ambiguity objection* concerns interpersonal plurality. Even if we were able to respond to the principled basis objection with respect to intrapersonal plurality, the meaning-giving descriptions will most likely vary across speakers within a linguistic community. The philosopher's, the historian's, the high school student's, etc. meaning-giving description associated with 'Aristotle' are unlikely to be the same. But then the description theory has it that 'Aristotle' is multiply ambiguous among language users, an unwelcome result.

(iii) *The unwanted necessity objection* makes the point that even if objections (i) and (ii) were handled, the description theory can't be squared with the fact that proper names and the candidates for meaning-giving descriptions we have thus far considered have distinct modal profiles.

- (1) Aristotle taught someone.
- (2) The teacher of Alexander the Great taught someone.

(1) is a contingent truth while (2) is necessary. It is a contingent fact about Aristotle that he taught someone; in some counterfactual circumstances, he didn't teach anyone at all. By contrast, in all counterfactual circumstances, whoever fits the description 'the teacher of Alexander' will be a person (creature) who taught someone, making (2) necessary.³ But positing 'the teacher of Alexander' as the meaning-giving description for 'Aristotle' would wrongly predict (1) to be a necessary truth. And any of the candidates for meaning-giving descriptions considered so far would give rise to similar unwanted necessary truths.

The following amendment of the description view seems at first to come to the rescue: the meaning of a proper name like 'Aristotle' is given not by a single definite description, but instead by a cluster of descriptions. Call this view, incorporating the following four features, the *cluster view*, which philosophers have widely attributed to Searle. First, the cluster for 'Aristotle', say, might include elements that don't pick out Aristotle uniquely: philosopher, was born in Stagira. Second, the cluster is gleaned from across speakers: from the philosopher, the historian, the high school student, and so on. Third, it is enough that individual speakers associate with the name 'Aristotle' some or other description or combination of descriptions from the cluster such that for each speaker, the majority (or weighted majority) of her descriptions uniquely identify Aristotle; all such speakers then count as using and understanding one and the same name 'Aristotle'.⁴ Fourth, for a

³ Of course, we are talking about the so-called *de dicto* reading of (2) in which the definite description takes narrower scope than the modal auxiliary 'might'. The issue is: proper names and definite descriptions have distinct modal profiles in that the latter produce a *de dicto* reading while the former do not. For thorough discussion of the ways in which a proponent of the description view can appeal to the two readings and what problems she encounters in the process, see Soames (2002, 24-50).

⁴ Devitt and Sterelny (1997, 50) also mention a weaker variant of this third feature: to use and understand the name 'Aristotle', it is sufficient that a speaker associate *some* definite description the (weighted) majority of which uniquely identifies the object; it need not be a description in the cluster, it could instead be something like 'whoever John was referring to just now with his use of "Aristotle"'. On this weaker variant, the description cluster gives the meaning of the name at the level of the linguistic community as

person to be the bearer of the name 'Aristotle', it is enough that most (or a weighted most) of the descriptions in the cluster fit him; the cluster view can accommodate some degree of error within the cluster (say, if we find out that Aristotle wasn't born in Stagira after all), as long as the (weighted) majority of the descriptions fit a certain individual, he counts as the bearer of the name.

Initially, the cluster view seems to have responses ready to objections (i)-(iii). In response to (i): The cluster includes several descriptions, so no principled basis is needed to choose just one among them. In response to (ii): no unwanted ambiguity arises for 'Aristotle', because the historian's, philosopher's and others' associated descriptions are all included in the cluster for the name. And in response to (iii): we avoid unwanted necessities like (1) because the cluster view does not require that *all* descriptions in the cluster fit the bearer of the name: in

a whole, but doesn't play a role in speaker understanding. Plausibly, Strawson (1959, 181-183) held such a variant of the cluster view. The objections and arguments considered in this paper apply equally to both formulations of this third feature.

It is, however, worth mentioning briefly how some of Kripke's objections to description-based views apply to something like Strawson's view with the weak formulation of the third feature. Crucially, Strawson posits the cluster of descriptions at the level of the community. Meanwhile, according to him, an individual's uniquely identifying description (which need not be included in the cluster) is, clearly, at the level of the individual. We can thus interpret Strawson as having given not one but two description-based proposals: *a community-level account about proper name meaning (in terms of description clusters), and an individual-level account of proper name use and understanding.* (By contrast, the Fregean description view is a unified individual-level account of meaning, use and understanding.) In Lecture II, Kripke (1970/1980) raises various problems that he thinks are applicable to all description-based theories of proper names: a competent user of a name need not associate any definite description with the name; and even if she does, her description might be in error and fit no-one or fit someone other than the bearer of the name. Now, these objections concern only individual-level description-based accounts; they leave untouched community-level alternatives. This way, one of Strawson's proposals – about community-level clusters – is unaffected by the just-mentioned Kripkean objections (as Evans 1973, 187-189 points out), yet (*pace* Evans) the Strawsonian is faced with these Kripkean objections when it comes to his other proposal about uniquely identifying descriptions at the level of the individual.

As we'll see shortly, the principled basis objection is distinctive in that it applies even to community-level versions of description-based views.

a counterfactual circumstance, 'the teacher of Alexander the Great' is one of the minority descriptions that fails to fit the bearer of the name, making (1), "Aristotle taught someone", a contingent truth, just like we wanted.

But on closer inspection, objections (i)-(iii) return to haunt the cluster view as well.

The principled basis objection remains: we don't want every single associated description about Aristotle to go into the cluster: line-by-line details about his writings that an Aristotle-scholar might cite plausibly aren't part of the cluster that *defines*, gives the meaning of the name. Nor do we want to include in the cluster someone's idiosyncratic description like 'the philosopher I kept calling "Aristid" in my philosophy final exam'. Peter F. Strawson, one of the philosophers to whom the cluster view is attributed, suggests that we cull the cluster of descriptions by asking individual speakers for what they consider to be "salient" descriptions about Aristotle, incorporating in the cluster "the most frequently mentioned" ones (Strawson 1959, 191). The cluster view therefore still has to provide a principled basis for separating what's salient and frequently mentioned from what isn't.⁵

The unwanted ambiguity objection returns: it is unlikely that the clusters of descriptions and the relative weight assignments should be the same across individuals, the historian, the high school student, etc. But that still yields the unwelcome result that 'Aristotle' is ambiguous among these speakers, has different meanings across language users. If the proponent of the cluster view tried to make amends by suggesting that the linguistic community fixes the cluster across speakers, then one of the prime advantages of the description view and the cluster view would vanish: their ability to explain the contrast between informative identity statements like 'Cicero is Tully' and trivial ones like 'Tully is Tully' (the associated descriptions for 'Cicero' and 'Tully' are distinct, resulting in a difference in meaning—the explanation goes). For it is likely that the cluster of descriptions and relative weights culled from the linguistic community as a whole would be identical for the two

⁵ Notice that here, the principled basis objection targets Strawson's community-level proposal of description clusters: on what basis do we cull the cluster from across speakers? See the previous footnote on community- versus individual-level accounts.

proper names ‘Cicero’ and ‘Tully’, making the first identity statement trivial like the second one.

The cluster view still has to contend with unwanted necessities:

(3) Aristotle did at least one of the deeds featured in the cluster.

(3) is plausibly contingent: Aristotle’s life might have gone entirely differently, he might have chosen a different profession, so none of the deeds mentioned in the cluster are true of him. Yet the cluster view wrongly predicts (3) to be a necessary truth.

Arguing along these lines, many authors – including Devitt and Sterelny as well as Ludlow – use the cluster view as an interlude to lead up to Kripke’s 1970 “Naming and Necessity” lectures (see Kripke 1970/1980) which introduced alternatives to the description and the cluster views. But is the cluster view the one Searle (1958) put forth? And is Searle’s own proposal subject to objections (i)-(iii), as philosophers have tended to assume? In what follows, I will motivate a negative answer to both these questions.

3 Necessity and analyticity

In this section, I argue that Searle’s (1958) theory in “Proper Names” does avoid (iii), the unwanted necessity objection. Philosophers have thought otherwise because they understood necessity differently than Searle did.

As a starting point, it is well to clarify what Searle means by ‘analytic’, a notion with which he begins and ends his paper. According to him, “[a] statement is analytic just in case it is true in virtue of linguistic rules alone, without any recourse to empirical investigation” (Searle 1958, 166). Now, given this, do we have reason to think that (4) is synthetic?

(4) Tully is Cicero.

Searle thinks not, on the grounds that (4) *can be used* in such a way that it “follow[s] from linguistic rules”; later on he adds: “[a] statement made using this sentence would ... be analytic for most people” (Searle 1958, 167, 173). When used analytically, (4) provides information about how linguistic rules governing the use of various symbols of English like ‘Cicero’ and ‘Tully’ are: these rules make it so the two names pick out the same individual. Meanwhile, (4) can be used to make a synthet-

ic statement also; “it might even advance a historical discovery of the first importance” (Searle 1958, 173). Here, Searle likens (4) to debates over the truth of ‘Shakespeare is Bacon’, which he takes to be a synthetic statement: participants in this debate “are not advancing a thesis about language” (Searle 1958, 167), and hence aren’t making an analytic statement when saying or denying ‘Shakespeare is Bacon’. In “Proper Names”, Searle sets out “to examine the connection between proper names and their referents in such a manner as to show how both kinds of identity statement [analytic and synthetic] are possible” (Searle 1958, 167). In effect, Searle is outlining a notion of analytic-for-an-individual or analytic-for-a-subgroup rather than analytic-for-an-entire-linguistic-community. Notice that in the preceding quotes, he had talked about ‘Shakespeare is Bacon’ being used by *debate participants* to make a synthetic statement, and (4) being “analytic for most people”, but synthetic for some.⁶ It is unclear what purpose this individual-relativized (or subgroup-relativized) notion would serve; I will return to this issue briefly in Section 5. In the rest of this section, I’ll explore how Searle’s notion of necessity relates to his notion of analyticity.

The oft-quoted passage⁷ from “Proper Names” in connection with the unwanted necessity objection goes as follows:

... suppose we ask, ‘why do we have proper names at all?’ Obviously, to refer to individuals. ‘Yes, but descriptions could do that for us.’ But only at the cost of specifying identity conditions every time reference is made: suppose we agree to drop ‘Aristotle’ and use, say ‘the teacher of Alexander’, then it is a **necessary truth** that the man referred to is Alexander’s teacher — but it is a **contingent fact** that Aristotle ever went into pedagogy (though I am suggesting it is a **necessary fact** that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive disjunction, of properties commonly attributed to him: any individual

⁶ Searle doesn’t mention the possibility of a single individual using (4) at one time to make an analytic statement, and at another, to make a synthetic one. Based on his remarks about analyticity, it seems clear that he would definitely allow such a possibility if the linguistic rules for ‘Cicero’ and ‘Tully’ were to change over time. What about other scenarios in which the linguistic rules remain constant? This turns out to be an interesting issue that I will address in Section 5.

⁷ Kripke quotes the bulk of this passage twice (1970/1980, 61, 74) while Devitt – Sterelny quote the parenthetical remark (1999, 51).

not having at least some of these properties could not be Aristotle).
(Searle 1958, 172; underlining, boldfacing added)

By 'contingent'/'necessary', occurring here, Searle plausibly means a linguistic notion: '*contingent/necessary given linguistic rules*'; there is no reason to interpret him in any other way. In the parenthetical remark, he suggests that *Aristotle in the actual world* is bound to have at least one of the properties commonly attributed to him. Searle isn't talking about *Aristotle in a counterfactual circumstance* in which he becomes a carpenter, say. The unwanted necessity objection hinges on the latter interpretation of 'necessary fact', and hence doesn't arise against Searle. In sum, by 'necessity', Searle – like most of his contemporaries⁸ – plausibly meant 'analyticity'. As telling evidence for this interpretation, consider the fact that this passage is repeated almost verbatim in Searle's book *Speech Acts* a decade later, with 'necessary truth' replaced by 'analytic truth' (cf. Searle 1969, 172-173).

The unwanted necessity objection involves a different notion of necessity, that of metaphysical necessity, clarified by Kripke in his "Naming and Necessity" lectures in which he returns to the above passage from Searle twice, suggesting that *if* in the passage 'necessary' means metaphysical necessity, *then* Searle's parenthetical remark is false, for it isn't "a necessary truth that Aristotle had the properties commonly attributed to him". This is a conditional form of the unwanted necessity objection then. Kripke and subsequent commentators like Devitt – Sterelny (1999) as well as Ludlow (2007) took the conditional antecedent to be true, reading Kripke's notion of metaphysical necessity into Searle's writing, a move I hope to have shown is unfounded.

Elsewhere in "Proper Names", Searle does seem to use 'contingent' (three times) in a different sense. But I aim to show that this only serves to reinforce and not weaken the point I've been making: that by 'contingent/necessary', Searle means '*contingent/necessary given linguistic rules*'. Towards the very beginning of the paper, Searle makes the point that (4) can be used to make an analytic statement that nonetheless carries information, to wit, information about the linguistic rules for the symbols (for example, the proper names) of our language. Sear-

⁸ See for example the debate between Marcus (1961) and Quine (1963) as well as some of Quine's earlier work (e.g. 1943, 1953). For an excellent overview of debates over and changes in the notion of the necessity up until the 1970s, see Burgess (1997) and Neale (2000).

le emphasizes that when (4) is so used, it is nonetheless contingent, “illustrat[ing] contingent facts about our use of symbols”, (4)’s truth is a matter of “contingent usage” (Searle 1958, 166, 167). There are three things worth noting about this notion of contingency-given-how-usage-is (*usage-contingency* for short). First, usage-contingency is closely related to Kripke’s metaphysical notion of contingency – about counterfactual circumstances in which linguistic rules develop differently, say, ‘is’ means what ‘loves’ actually means.⁹ Second, in the usage-contingency sense, every use of every sentence is contingent, for the linguistic rules for all expressions are a matter of how language use happens to have developed; it’s overwhelmingly plausible to expect that no statements or facts are ever usage-necessary. And given this, third, it is clear that in the widely quoted passage from Searle, above, ‘contingent fact’ and ‘necessary fact’ are used in a sense different from the usage-contingency sense: after all, Searle writes that “it is a necessary fact that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive disjunction, of properties commonly attributed to him”, yet as we have just noted, there are no *usage-necessary* facts; it is a *usage-contingent* fact that certain properties (and not others) are attributed to the bearer of ‘Aristotle’. In sum, although Searle employs a different notion of contingency elsewhere in his paper – what I have dubbed usage-contingency – upon closer inspection, it is obvi-

⁹ Two remarks are in order, one about Searle and another about Kripke. Searle considers a different sort of usage-contingency; instead of the point that the lexical meanings of expressions are usage-contingent, he suggests that the coreference of the two occurrences of ‘Tully’ in ‘Tully is Tully’ is usage-contingent, contingent on how we happen to use language (Searle 1958, 167). The difference between these two kinds of usage-contingency doesn’t matter for my purposes.

In talking about statements of English being metaphysically necessary, Kripke stresses that he is holding fixed that “we use *English* with *our* meanings and our references”: “[o]ne doesn’t say that ‘two plus two equals four’ is contingent because people might have spoken a language in which ‘two plus two equals four’ meant that seven is even” (Kripke (1970/1980, 77, emphasis in the original). So Kripke excludes both kinds of usage-contingency when discussing statements being necessary or contingent. That doesn’t change the fact that it is a *metaphysical* possibility that linguistic rules are different (and this is what usage-contingency is about); it’s just that this possibility is irrelevant when considering whether various statements of English, including ‘Cicero is Tully’ and ‘Two plus two equals four’ express necessary truths (according to Kripke, both of them do).

ous that the occurrences of 'necessary' and 'contingent' in the passage Kripke and others have focused on don't involve that notion.

The upshot of this section has been this: Searle's notion of necessity in his key passage was analyticity rather than metaphysical necessity; yet the unwanted necessity objection attributes to him the latter, thus missing its target. One might, however, worry: isn't there a related objection to be raised for Searle's own notion of necessity also? We might call it the *unwanted analyticity objection*: in the quoted passage, Searle is committed to (3) – "Aristotle did at least one of the deeds featured in the cluster" – being analytic, that is, true in virtue of linguistic rules, and hence knowable by a competent user of 'Aristotle' a priori, without recourse to experience. Kripke (1970/1980, 67-68) suggests that this is problematic, for it constitutes an empirical discovery (and not knowable a priori) about the bearer of 'Aristotle' that he did any of the deeds featured in the cluster associated with the name; indeed, occasionally, empirical discovery confirms the opposite, as in the case of Jonah, whom some historians consider a historical figure who did none of the deeds that the Bible attributes to him. These historians' position strikes us as perfectly coherent, yet Searle's passage commits him to the analyticity and thus the apriority of "Jonah did at least one of the deeds featured in the cluster" and hence to the historians' holding a contradictory stance.

In the next two sections, I will show that not only does Searle's own view – the presuppositional view – have the capacity to respond to objections (i) and (ii), but also to the unwanted analyticity objection.¹⁰ Before returning to the objections, however, let's first lay out the presuppositional view.

4 The presuppositional view

What was Searle's own account, and just how different was it from the cluster view philosophers tend to attribute to him? Searle's description clusters turn out to play a markedly different role than that pos-

¹⁰ In this paper, I don't assess the strength of the unwanted analyticity objection: instead, I grant it for the sake of argument and show that the presuppositional view can offer a response to it.

ited by the cluster view, which ignores the role of presuppositions in Searle's account.

What are the descriptions to be included in the cluster that gives the meaning of 'Aristotle'? Searle suggests that "we ask the users of the name 'Aristotle' to state what they regard as certain *essential and established facts* about him" (Searle 1958, 171, emphasis added). This does seem to invite the principled basis as well as the unwanted ambiguity objections. On what grounds do we separate what's essential and established from what isn't? And how do we avoid a situation in which what is essential and established varies from one individual to the next, thus varying the clusters and hence the meaning across speakers? Yet these lines of criticism ignore an essential detail about Searle's account.

To get a sense of Searle's view, we first need to recognize that he draws a crucial distinction between *extraordinary uses* of proper names and ordinary uses — *referring uses* as he calls them:

... though proper names do not normally assert or specify any characteristics, their *referring uses* nonetheless *presuppose* that the object to which they purport to refer has certain characteristics. ... Now what I am arguing is that the descriptive force of 'This is Aristotle' is to *assert* that a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true of this object. Therefore, *referring uses* of 'Aristotle' *presuppose* the existence of an object of whom a sufficient but so far unspecified number of these statements are true. *To use a proper name referringly is to presuppose the truth of certain uniquely referring descriptive statements, but it is not ordinarily to assert these statements or even to indicate which exactly are presupposed.* (Searle 1958, 170-171, emphases added)

Searle is quite explicit here: the referring uses of 'Aristotle' are such that they presuppose without asserting that the bearer of the name fits a sufficient number of the descriptions in the cluster for 'Aristotle'. (Crucially, the sufficient number of descriptions together have to identify Aristotle uniquely.) It is in the extraordinary cases (Searle mentions above 'This is Aristotle') that in making a statement, the speaker asserts (and doesn't merely presuppose) that the bearer of 'Aristotle' fits a sufficient number of the descriptions in the cluster. The extraordinary cases that Searle discusses include, on the one hand, *identity claims* ('This is Aristotle' as well as 'Tully is Cicero', 'Chomolungma is Mount Everest'), and on the other hand, *singular existential claims* like 'Aristotle never

existed', which, according to Searle, "asserts that a sufficient number of the conventional presuppositions, descriptive statements, or referring uses of 'Aristotle' are false" (Searle 1958, 173).¹¹

It remains to be seen whether a suitable notion of presupposition would allow a Searlean view to avoid the principled basis, the unwanted ambiguity, and the unwanted analyticity objections for referring uses. The rest of this section will explore this issue. Another question, how the objections can be addressed in connection with the extraordinary cases, will be taken up in the next section.

What is the notion of presupposition plausibly at work in referring uses? There are two options to consider: in the case of a proper-name-containing sentence, the truth conditions of the utterance either feature (at least some of) the descriptions in the cluster, or they don't, featuring only the object to which the name refers, that is, the object uniquely picked out by the weighted most of the descriptions in the cluster. Let's say that in the former case, the utterance has *description-featuring truth conditions*; in the latter, *object-featuring truth conditions*. My aim is to show, first, that (a) Searle didn't take a clear stand on the choice between object- and description-featuring truth conditions, but (b) it is object-featuring truth conditions that are closer to his purposes, and (c) going object-featuring is a promising move for it affords an elegant response to extant objections for referring uses.

Let's begin with (a); Searle, I will argue, did not make clear whether he wants to construe the truth conditions of utterances involving proper names as description- or object-featuring. Let's first review considerations that speak *against* object-featuring truth conditions. Searle is explicitly citing Strawson's (1950) paper "On Referring" as his reference point for presuppositions: "Following Strawson we may say that referring uses of both proper names and definite descriptions presuppose

¹¹ One might include among the special cases indirect discourse also, as in 'John believes that Tully was an orator'; Searle (1958, 1969) doesn't mention such cases.

On a side note, it is worth stressing that the range of referring uses of expressions is vastly broader than Donnellan's (1966) category of the so-called referential uses of definite descriptions; so the two labels should be carefully distinguished. For one thing, expressions other than definite descriptions have referring uses (proper names, for example); for another, the examples that Donnellan labels referential and attributive uses of definite descriptions, for example, the two uses of 'Smith's murderer is insane' (or: 'The guy who murdered Smith is insane'), *all* count as referring uses in Searle's sense.

the existence of one and only one object referred to" (Searle 1958, 170). And for the overall purposes of Strawson's paper, the choice of object-featuring truth conditions would be disastrous; here is why. Strawson's paper doesn't mention proper names at all; he discusses primarily definite descriptions in the context of utterances like the contemporary utterance of 'The king of France is wise'. Now, surely, it would be bizarre to suggest that this sentence, when uttered presently, has incomplete truth conditions due to there being no French monarch at present, and hence no object to be featured in the truth conditions of the utterance. It would be likewise bizarre to suggest that the truth conditions of the utterance do not feature descriptive material like being French or being a king. That would mean the following four sentences, uttered now, would have the very same object-featuring truth conditions:

- (5) The Queen of England is wise.
- (6) The successor of King George VI is wise.
- (7) The only monarch ever to participate in a James Bond video clip is wise.
- (8) The only monarch ever to participate in a Summer Olympics video clip is wise.

The object-featuring truth conditions for all of these utterances would involve a certain woman, Elisabeth II, presenting her as wise. By contrast, positing description-featuring truth conditions for (5)-(8) would give far more plausible candidates—they would allow for distinguishing among the truth conditions of the four utterances due to differences in the descriptive material featured in each.¹²

Elsewhere in "Proper Names", Searle himself doesn't take a stand on the choice between description-featuring and object-featuring truth conditions as his model for presuppositions. Beyond citing Strawson, he writes:

But the uniqueness and immense pragmatic convenience of proper names in our language lie precisely in the fact that they enable us to refer publicly to objects without being forced to raise issues and come to agreement on what descriptive characteristics exactly con-

¹² Indeed, Soames (1989, 609, fn. 16) assumes that for (5)-(8), Strawson is opting for description-featuring truth conditions. Soames does not consider Strawson's subsequent (1959) commitments about presuppositions, to be discussed shortly.

stitute the identity of the object. They function not as descriptions but as pegs on which to hang descriptions. Thus the looseness of the criteria for proper names is a necessary condition for isolating the referring function from the describing function of proper names. (Searle 1958, 172)

The first sentence in the quote suggests that to refer with ‘Aristotle’, speakers need not come to an agreement about what descriptions identify him uniquely; But this can be accommodated with a description cluster (rather than a single meaning-giving description) for ‘Aristotle’, the weighted majority of which fit the bearer of the name and him only. How presupposed description clusters work, whether they issue in description- or object-featuring truth conditions, is an issue left wide open for all Searle has stated so far. The second, enigmatic sentence about names being “pegs on which to hang descriptions”, might be taken to inspire a model of object/peg-featuring truth conditions that individual speakers reach via some or other uniquely fitting description; but there is practically no guidance or ground given by Searle here or elsewhere to steer us in this direction.¹³ The third sentence can be understood in two ways: is Searle talking about a necessary condition for the referring function of *expressions quite generally*, or of *proper names only*? The first option seems at odds with Strawson’s (1950) idea that typical examples of the referring function of language involve definite descriptions as they occur, for instance, in (5)–(8). Overwhelmingly often, in the case of referring uses of definite descriptions like ‘the reigning Queen of England’, there is no looseness of criteria, no looseness in the description at issue: the speaker talks about someone who meets the criterion of being the reigning Queen of England; yet Strawson does want to isolate the referring function of such definite descriptions from their describing function (Strawson 1950, 334–344). The second option yields no such conflict with Strawson’s claims: if in positing looseness as a necessary condition for isolating the referring function from the describing one, Searle is talking about proper names only, then he could maintain (along with Strawson) that no such necessary condition ap-

¹³ Names as pegs on which to hang descriptions is the perfect metaphor for D’Cruz’s account (some aspects of which will be discussed later) according to which “an ordinary proper name is a mere placeholder for an arbitrary ordinary definite description true of the given individual” (D’Cruz 2000, 721).

plies to definite descriptions. But this would take further explanation and discussion of how Searle's take on referring uses relates to Strawson's; yet the above passage is the only place Searle mentions the referring function of language or of names. As it stands, the foregoing passage from Searle has puzzling aspects and doesn't in the end support the choice between description- and object-featuring truth conditions with respect to the descriptions that are presupposed.

Moving on to (b), why insist that object-featuring truth conditions fit Searle's purposes? First, the odd consequences described for examples (5)-(8) do arise for definite descriptions, but not for proper names, which are the exclusive focus of Searle's paper. Indeed, a popular position since John Stuart Mill has it that in uttering 'Cicero was an orator' and 'Tully was an orator', speakers express the very same object-featuring truth conditions. Second, Strawson's (1950) work discusses, besides referring uses of definite descriptions (for which, as we have seen, description-featuring truth conditions seem by far the more plausible of the two approaches), also context-sensitive expressions like 'I' and 'this'; and for sentences like 'I am a philosopher', 'This is red', positing object-featuring truth conditions is the vastly more plausible of the two approaches as David Kaplan argued since the 1970s, primarily in his (1977/1989) monograph "Demonstratives". It thus seems unfounded to regard Strawson (1950) as having given *univocal* support to one or the other type of truth condition.¹⁴ Third, in his subsequent book *Individuals* (1959, 180-194), Strawson is rather explicitly opting for the object-featuring model of presuppositions: he suggests that a condition for "introducing a particular into a proposition" (see Strawson 1959, 180), making it part of what the speaker says (Strawson 1959, 182), is that the speaker be able to provide unique identification of the particular object, the uniquely identifying descriptions for proper names forming their "presupposition set" (Strawson 1959, 192). Crucially, for successful name use, the speaker and hearer both need to be able to provide unique identification of the particular object, but their ways of identifying can be different (Strawson 1959, 183).

And finally reaching (c): opting for object-featuring truth conditions in the context of the presuppositional view gives the crucial advantage

¹⁴ See Soames' (1989, 562-566) illuminating discussion on how Strawson's (1950) view might be construed and related to Frege's (1892/1952) notion of presupposition.

of countering, in the ordinary cases, the remaining objections: about the lack of a principled basis, as well as about unwanted ambiguity and unwanted analyticity. By going object-featuring, the principled basis objection, (i), does not arise with respect to the truth conditions of utterances involving proper names: for the truth conditions feature the object only, so at that point, no principled basis is required for selecting among descriptions that are in the presupposition cluster, and ones that aren't. The unwanted ambiguity objection, (ii), does not arise either: again, the truth conditions for an utterance involving a proper name feature the object only for both speaker and hearer, despite their presupposition clusters being potentially different; at the level of truth conditions, 'Aristotle' makes the same contribution – the person – across language users. Further, the unwanted analyticity objection (which replaced the unwanted necessity objection once we clarified the right notion of necessity to attribute to Searle) doesn't pose a problem: in the case of referring uses of proper names as in (3) – "Aristotle did at least one of the deeds featured in the cluster" – the descriptions in the presupposition cluster are not featured in the truth conditions of the utterance, only the object is; this way, (3) isn't an analytic truth.

In sum, opting for object-featuring truth conditions for utterances involving proper names – that is, excluding the presupposed descriptions from the truth conditions of the utterance – is independently motivated and successfully responds to objections (i) and (ii) raised against the cluster view as well as to the unwanted analyticity objection. So far, we have covered only the ordinary cases, and it remains to be shown if the presuppositional view has the resources to handle extant objections with respect to the extraordinary cases; to this we now turn.

5 Deflecting what remains of the objections

Searle highlighted two kinds of extraordinary cases: identity claims and singular existential claims, suggesting that in such cases, there being a unique individual who fits the weighted most of the descriptions in the cluster is asserted and not merely presupposed. How might this part of the Searlean view be squared with objections (i) and (ii) – about a principled basis and unwanted ambiguities?¹⁵ In this paper, I content

¹⁵ The remaining objection about unwanted analyticity doesn't arise in the extraordinary uses, so I will discuss it in footnotes only.

myself with developing a solution for singular existential claims, leaving identity claims to another occasion.

Quite independently of Searle's treatment of singular existential claims like 'Aristotle existed' or 'Aristotle never existed', or 'Aristotle didn't (really) exist', several philosophers have observed that such claims are distinctive in that they lack a *stable semantic role*.¹⁶ Ludwig Wittgenstein writes:

If one says 'Moses does not exist', this may mean various things. It may mean: the Israelites did not have a *single* leader when they withdrew from Egypt – or: their leader was not called Moses – or: etc. etc. – We may say, following Russell: the name 'Moses' can be defined by means of various descriptions ... And according as we assume one definition or another the proposition 'Moses does not exist' acquires a different sense and so does every other proposition about Moses. (Wittgenstein 1953, sc. 79)

Wittgenstein is suggesting here that 'Moses doesn't exist' may variously mean 'the Israelites didn't have a single leader', 'The leader of the Israelites wasn't called Moses', and so on. When someone utters 'Moses doesn't exist', it is simply unclear what the truth conditions she expressed are; there are various nonequivalent candidates and no basis for choosing one over the others as the truth conditions of her utterance. It is only natural then that the utterance is ambiguous among speakers and that there isn't a principled basis for selecting which of the various things a speaker might mean by an utterance. Utterances of this sort are without a stable semantic role, it is to be expected then that objections (i) and (ii) should arise; we should be worried if they didn't.¹⁷ This is a compelling line to take on singular existential claims. Wittgenstein does, however, in the last sentence of the passage above, generalize the point to *every* utterance involving the name 'Moses', including 'Moses had a beard'. On the one hand, the more general point lacks sufficient motivation: there is no expectation that 'Moses had a beard' lacks specific, stable truth conditions. On the other hand, this last point of Wittgenstein's provides evidence that he (unlike Searle)

¹⁶ See D'Cruz's (2000, 740-743) thorough discussion.

¹⁷ The unwanted analyticity objection does not arise for singular existential claims – clearly, statements of that form are never analytic on Searle's presuppositional account (nor are they analytic on the description view or the cluster view).

held the cluster view, against which objections (i) and (ii) were justifiably raised.¹⁸

But other authors like Gareth Evans (see Evans 1982, 396-398) and Mark D’Cruz (see D’Cruz 2000, 740-743) insisted, rightly, I think, that in the case of singular existential claims – more precisely, they highlight *negative* existential claims only – the phenomenon of there being no stable semantic role is quite robust, and deserves an explanation. Searle’s proposed treatment for the extraordinary cases provides just this sort of explanation: given the cluster of descriptions being featured in what is asserted, the result is that we are faced with various descriptions and no principled basis to choose among them; we likewise expect ambiguity across speakers. When it comes to negative existential claims, objections (i) and (ii) arising against the presuppositional view is therefore something the proponent of the presuppositional view should consider an asset rather than a liability; it is those accounts that steer clear of (i) and (ii) that thereby face a disadvantage and need to explain their case.

Moreover, D’Cruz stresses the *contrast* between negative existential claims and other, more ordinary claims like ‘Moses had a beard’, which do have a stable semantic role:

‘Aristotle is fat’ has a stable semantic role in the language, in the sense that competent listeners would know exactly what to make of it without further ado. Thus, its utterance would not normally invite such remarks as ‘What do you mean?’ or ‘I do not understand’, which would belie its alleged stable role. Naturally, this stable role is derived from the stable role of its constituents – ‘Aristotle’, ‘is’ and ‘fat’ – and the way they are strung together in the utterance. An utterance of ‘Q is fat’, however has a stable role in exactly the same way, derived from the stable role of *its* constituents, and the way *they* are put together. Its utterance, therefore need not semantically puzzle one who already grasps ‘Q’ and who otherwise speaks English: he or she would know what to make of it. ... Evans pointed out an interesting fact about a negative existential such as ‘Ronald Reagan does not exist’, involving a *mature* name-using practice, namely, that it has *no stable semantic role* in the sense just described ... (D’Cruz 2000, 740, emphasis in the original)

¹⁸ Indeed, besides Searle and Strawson, the cluster view is widely attributed to Wittgenstein also, based on this particular section, Section 79 of “Philosophical Investigations”.

At this point, to give more detail about the absence of a stable semantic role in the case of negative existential claims, D’Cruz (2000, 740-741) goes on to quote Evans (1982, 397):

When there is no specific body of information which is generally associated with a name (as in the case of a mature name-using practice), the negative existential statement does not have a clear sense ... If someone said to me, ‘Ronald Reagan does not exist’, I should not know what to make of it. If the remark is intended to have a content such that it is true if and only if ‘Ronald Reagan’, as used in a certain name-using practice, does not refer, then I cannot conclude from its truth anything about the information I associate with the name, since for all that the remark, so understood, tells me, that information could still constitute knowledge about some individual.

D’Cruz is calling attention to this phenomenon: upon hearing ‘Ronald Reagan doesn’t exist’, I cannot conclude from it anything about the definite descriptions ‘the 40th President of the United States’, ‘the man who prior to becoming the 40th President of the United States had been an actor in movies like *Bedtime for Bonzo*, and had served as the 33rd Governor of California’, and so on; for all I know, these descriptions might still fit some person or other.

A Searlean presuppositional view with object-featuring truth conditions receives substantial support from the contrast that D’Cruz is describing. There is something very intuitive about negative existential claims lacking a stable semantic role: we encounter semantic instability there, though not with the ordinary, referring uses of proper names as in ‘Moses had a beard’. This contrast is entirely unsurprising by the presuppositional view’s lights. Given what it takes for an individual to associate one or more descriptions with a name (she is to believe that the descriptions apply to the bearer of the name), the presuppositional view is – quite independently of D’Cruz’s, Evans’s and Wittgenstein’s considerations – set up so in the ordinary cases, when the associated descriptions are merely presupposed, the variation among speaker associations does not interfere with the stable semantic function of the utterance, whereas in the extraordinary cases, when the associations become part of what is asserted, the result is messy and unstable.

Further, Evans’s and D’Cruz’s point that certain utterances (unlike others) are without a stable semantic role can and should, I take it, be generalized to *affirmative* existential claims like ‘Moses existed’, ‘Homer existed’, and ‘Ronald Reagan existed’ as well: these, too, are without

a stable semantic role.¹⁹ Just as with negative existential claims, in affirmative ones (true and false claims alike), there are various things speakers might mean by them – a variety of nonequivalent truth conditions each of which are candidates for what the speaker meant – and no way for an audience to choose among them. D’Cruz’s characterization of the contrast between the existence versus the absence of a stable semantic role (quoted above) applies equally to referring uses of proper names versus affirmative existential claims. Interpreting ‘Moses existed’ generates comparable puzzlement as ‘Moses didn’t exist’ does.

To home in on just how robust the lack of a stable semantic role is in the case of negative existential claims, Evans draws a contrast between ordinary proper names and what he calls *thin uses* of proper names, which are strongly associated with a specific description: “I may book a flight in a false name, and then the next day telephone the airline and say ‘Look, Agatha Hermer doesn’t exist’ ... All that the receptionist need conclude is that when I uttered the name previously, I referred to nothing” (cf. Evans 1982, 398). The utterance ‘Agatha Hermer doesn’t exist’ does have a stable semantic role. This is crucially unlike ‘Moses didn’t exist’, ‘Aristotle never existed’ both featuring ordinary proper names and exhibiting semantic instability in need of explanation. Moreover, ‘Moses existed’, ‘Aristotle existed’, and ‘Homer existed’ likewise show semantic instability in need of explanation.

The lack of a stable semantic role in the case of existential claims is not explored by Searle, although he alludes to it in the last sentence of this passage:

‘Aristotle never existed’ ... asserts that a sufficient number of the conventional presuppositions, descriptive statements, of referring uses of ‘Aristotle’ are false. Precisely which statements are asserted to be false is not yet clear, for what precise conditions constitute the criteria for applying ‘Aristotle’ is not yet laid down by the language. (Searle 1958, 73)

Here, Searle’s point is that given the fact that the cluster of descriptions for ‘Aristotle’ does not provide a set of descriptions all of which are known to the speaker and are true of Aristotle, there is no single claim

¹⁹ Of course, these considerations about singular existential claims are intended to be quite general, covering (a) sentences in the present tense and (b) sentences involving proper names of things other than people, for example, ‘Troy exists’, ‘Troy doesn’t exist’, ‘Atlantis exists’, ‘Atlantis doesn’t exist’.

of the form 'Nothing fits description D' that a speaker might be taken to mean by 'Aristotle never existed'. But Searle appears to raise this point more as a consequence of his view rather than as an independently motivated desideratum, which Wittgenstein, Evans and D'Cruz take it to be.

As Searle's account presently stands, the other type of extraordinary case, an identity claim like (4) (repeated below) also lacks a stable semantic role:

(4) Tully is Cicero

It isn't settled exactly which descriptions are featured in the assertion when someone utters (4). Yet we don't have the kind of robust expectation of semantic instability that we had for singular existential claims. The identity claim simply doesn't invite the question: do you mean that the orator who spoke up against Mark Anthony is identical to ... or do you mean that the statesman and philosopher whose name means chickpea is identical to ...?, until that's clarified, it's unclear what you've meant. This suggests that on one minor point, with respect to identity claims, the principled basis and the unwanted ambiguity objections do have some traction against Searle's presuppositional account. Developing an alternative proposal for identity claims therefore remains an outstanding challenge.

I'd like to close this section by pointing out how this one aspect of deficiency concerning identity claims like (4) is connected to Searle's remarks about analyticity. Recall (from Section 3) that Searle suggested that (4) *can be used* to make an analytic statement and also a synthetic one (cf. Searle 1958, 167); he claimed also that (4) "is analytic for most people" (Searle 1958, 173). Searle thus seems to subscribe to a notion of analytic-for-an-individual rather than analytic-for-a-linguistic-community. Bear in mind, however, that the issue of a statement being analytic for some individuals but not others is quite limited on the presuppositional view we have developed: it isn't as though *referring uses* of names yield statements that are analytic for some individuals and not others. Variation among individuals arises only in extraordinary cases like (4) in which variation in the associated descriptions issues in variation in what's asserted, and hence variation in analytic/synthetic status.²⁰

²⁰ Now we are in a position to address an issue raised in footnote 6: it turns out that on Searle's proposal, a single individual may use (4) to make a

Searle's individual-relativized notion of analyticity arising with respect to (4) does invite the two objections: what's a principled basis for selecting which description are and aren't in the cluster featured in the assertion?; and what do we do about unwanted variation in meaning across speakers?²¹ The fact that Searle lacks a notion of analyticity for a linguistic community in connection with identity claims like (4) goes hand in hand with his view being susceptible to the two objections. The susceptibility is extremely limited, however: it concerns only one type of extraordinary case: identity claims.

6 Concluding remarks

Towards the beginning, I cited Searle's own summary of his view in "Proper Names": according to him, descriptive presuppositions provide a loose sort of logical connection between proper names and definite descriptions that fit the object that is the bearer of the name. In this paper, I have tried to flesh out this summary to show just how different Searle's presuppositional view is from the cluster view philosophers like Devitt – Sterelny (1999) and Ludlow (2007) attribute to him. These philosophers have concentrated on the "loose sort" aspect of Searle's characterization; they focused on clusters of descriptions rather than

synthetic statement at one time and an analytic statement at another (so it is more accurate to talk about Searle's use- or occasion-relative notion of analyticity). Let me explain. Recall that in extraordinary cases, the associated descriptions are part of what's asserted when making an utterance; now, the descriptions a speaker associates with a name can change over time (some descriptions are added, some removed or revised) *without the linguistic rules (the cluster for 'Tully' and 'Cicero', say) changing*; as a result, a speaker might at one time use (4) to make an analytic statement, and at another time, to make a synthetic one while the linguistic rules remain unaltered. Crucially, this sort of occasion-relative analyticity arises for the extraordinary cases only, in which descriptions associated by the individual make it into what's asserted.

²¹ The remaining objection, about unwanted analyticity, doesn't arise in the context of Searle's account of identity statements: the only way it could arise is if we want 'Cicero is Tully' to *not* be analytic for a certain individual yet Searle's presuppositional view would make the statement come out analytic. But in such a situation, with the individual's descriptions associated with 'Cicero' and 'Tully' being different and being featured in what is asserted when making the identity claim, the result wouldn't be an analytic statement.

a single description giving the meaning of a proper name. But they ignored the presupposition aspect that I aimed to bring to the fore, showing that it yields an interesting view worth reconsidering. Searle's presuppositional view has two parts. First, in *ordinary cases* – referring uses of proper names that include most uses apart from the exceptions to be cited – utterances involving 'Aristotle' *presuppose* that the weighted majority of the cluster for 'Aristotle' fits the bearer of the name. Second, in the *extraordinary cases* – for which Searle cites just two types, singular existential claims and identity claims – utterances involving 'Aristotle' *assert* that the weighted majority of the cluster for 'Aristotle' fits the bearer of the name.

In the ordinary cases, the role of the description cluster is quite limited; I have argued that it is plausible and promising to develop Searle's view in a way that is consistent with his "Proper Names": my version of the presuppositional view denies that the descriptions in the cluster are featured at all in the truth conditions of the utterance; instead, the truth conditions plausibly feature the object only, to wit, the person Aristotle. This Searlean view is far closer to Kaplan's influential (1977/1989) post-Kripkean direct reference theory – according to which the only truth-conditional contribution of a proper name is its referent – than it was previously assumed. The idea that Searle's theory is a largely Fregean interlude between Frege's description theory of proper names and Kripke's proposals presented in "Naming and Necessity" is in major ways a myth, a mythical chapter in how the story of 20th-century philosophy of language is often told.

Granted: in the extraordinary cases, the description clusters step in to play a greater role than in the ordinary cases. Descriptions from the cluster for 'Aristotle' are part of what is asserted by an utterance like 'Aristotle never existed'. But it is well to bear in mind that the extraordinary cases are quite isolated, the exception rather than the norm.

The way philosophers have been telling the history of 20th-century philosophy of language prominently included three objections taken to apply to Searle's view: the principled basis, the unwanted ambiguity and the unwanted necessity objections. My aim has been to show that these objections leave Searle's presuppositional view largely untouched; moreover, the presuppositional view is an interesting one worthy of further consideration. I haven't tried to defend the presuppositional view against all Kripkean objections, focusing instead on just these three. In particular, the unwanted necessity objection mistakenly

attributes to Searle—writing “Proper Names” in the 1950s—Kripke’s metaphysical notion of necessity, which did not emerge in a clarified form until at least a decade later.

Kripke was characteristically cautious, paying attention to the details of Searle’s view more closely than Devitt, Sterelny and Ludlow did: he distinguished theories of meaning from theories of reference determination, and unlike the other philosophers, did not take it as a given that Searle was putting forth a theory of meaning in terms of description clusters (cf. Kripke 1970/1980, 31-34, 57-61).²² Nonetheless, he did point out several times that a theory of reference determination is rather limited in scope: it doesn’t provide a way to *analyze* any sentences involving proper names, including ‘Aristotle never existed’. To give an analysis in terms of description clusters, what is needed is a theory of the meaning of proper names, Kripke pointed out in (1970/1980, 33-34, 58-59). From this, his audience and readers probably drew the conclusion that Searle’s goal was to appeal to description clusters within a more ambitious theory of the *meaning* of proper names: the cluster theory. After all, Searle did say that ‘Aristotle never existed’ “asserts that a sufficient number of the conventional presuppositions, descriptive statements, of referring uses of ‘Aristotle’ are false” (Searle 1958, 173). But drawing this conclusion ignores the fact that Searle considered sin-

²² Kripke (1970/1980, 31, emphasis added) quotes a passage from Wittgenstein, following it up with “According to this view, and a *locus classicus* of it is Searle’s article on proper names, the *referent of the name is determined* not by a single description but by some cluster or family”. Kripke thus initially takes a conservative approach, interpreting Searle as giving a theory of reference determination. By contrast, Sterelny – Kim (1999, 50) and Ludlow (2007, Section 8), respectively, introduce Searle’s (1958) view as follows:

... the most influential exponents of the [“cluster” or modern] theory were Peter Strawson and John Searle. Instead of tying a name tightly to one definite description, as the classical theory goes, the modern theory ties it loosely to many. *This cluster of descriptions expresses the sense of the name and determines its reference...* (emphasis added)

Consider a name like ‘Socrates’. Is it really part of the meaning of that name that its bearer drank hemlock, taught Plato and did all the other things that we are told that he did when we study the history of philosophy? Searle suggests that we needn’t associate the meaning of a name with a description that contains *all* of these elements – it might be enough if most of them hold, or that a suitably weighted bundle of them hold. (first emphasis added, second in the original)

gular existential claims to be out of the ordinary; he took the role of description clusters to be crucially different in the ordinary cases.

More generally, the very idea of offering just the two options – theory of meaning versus theory of reference determination – for characterizing Searle’s view ignores two aspects of Searle’s proposal: first, that he sets apart his treatment of the extraordinary and the ordinary cases, and second, that he employs the notion of presupposition in the latter cases. In the ordinary cases, neither option gives an accurate characterization of Searle’s proposal: the description cluster for ‘Aristotle’ certainly isn’t what gives the meaning of ‘Aristotle’ the way we usually understand what meanings are about; but nor is its role nothing over and above determining the reference of ‘Aristotle’. This role presuppositions play in Searle’s view has been widely ignored for half a century, giving rise, within an important chapter of the philosophy of language, to myth rather than history about Searle’s (1958) “Proper Names”.²³

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