Two accounts have dominated the recent debate over names in the philosophy of language. The first account, descriptivism, asserts that names are just linguistic shorthand for descriptions which pick out a unique individual. Descriptivism is attractive because it explains the different truth values of sentence pairs such as:

(CK) Lois believes that Clark Kent is Clark Kent.

(SM) Lois believes that Clark Kent is Superman.

'Clark Kent' and 'Superman' refer to the same man yet (CK) is true whereas (SM) is false. This discrepancy can be explained if we take the names as short for a cluster of descriptions which happen to refer to the same man. Lois may not know that the referents of the two names are identical; in fact, it is quite reasonable that she would believe that they refer to different people because the descriptions associated with each are so different.

Descriptivism runs into serious problems when the modal truth conditions of sentences are considered. As Kripke showed in *Naming and Necessity*, if a name is equivalent to a collection of descriptions, then a sentence such as:

(1) Clark Kent is a reporter

expresses a necessary truth if $reporter(x)$ is one of the descriptions associated with 'Clark Kent' (Kripke 1981, p. 30). Suppose that the actual cluster of descriptions associated with him is:[1]

$$\text{'Clark Kent'} \stackrel{\text{def}}{=} \phi_1(x) \wedge ... \wedge reporter(x) \wedge ... \wedge \phi_n(x)$$

[1]An actual descriptivist account would have a more subtle treatment of the way that clusters of descriptions are associated with names beyond simple equivalence to a conjunct of properties. For example, they might assert that only a majority of the properties need hold. Kripke's argument can be reformulated in this case however, by simply picking one of the descriptions that is supposed to apply to the referent of the name. For simplicity, I use a näive version of descriptivism in this example.

The descriptivist analyses the sentence as:

$$[\text{the x} \ : \ \phi_1(x) \wedge ... \wedge \textit{reporter}(x) \wedge ... \wedge \phi_n(x)] \text{ is a reporter.}$$

On this descriptivist interpretation, the sentence is a necessary truth; however, it actually expresses a contingent fact because Clark Kent might have chosen a different profession.

The second account, direct reference, is motivated by the concerns about the modal truth conditions raised by Kripke and traces back to Mill (2001). Kripke argues that the only way to accurately describe the modal truth values of sentences containing names is to treat them as rigid designators. Rigid terms are ones that denote the same object in every possible world where the object exists. Treating names rigidly solves the modal concerns; a sentence like (1) is contingent because 'Clark Kent' would refer to him even in a possible world, w, where he is a baker and (1) is false. For the proponent of direct reference, the meaning of a name is simply the object that it refers to. This follows from the thesis that names are rigid designators; if the meaning of a name included descriptive, contingent properties, then in a possible world where that property did not hold, the meaning of a name would include false properties. For example, if $\textit{reporter}(x)$ were part of the meaning of 'Clark Kent', then in w his name would include the property $\textit{reporter}(x)$ even though he satisfies $\textit{baker}(x)$. While the direct reference theory answers the modal challenge from Kripke, it stumbles when used to analyse (CK) and (SM). If names are rigid, then two names referring to the same object have the same meaning (their common referent: the object). Hence, the sentences (CK) and (SM) have the same meaning because they only differ in an occurrence of a coreferential name. But clearly the sentences have opposite truth values. This example shows that the

direct reference theory, which treats names as rigid designators also has unresolved problems.

In his *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (subsequently, BR), Scott Soames attempts to solve both of these issues regarding names. In this paper, I first describe Soames's semantic account including his treatment of a special class of partially descriptive names which he identifies. I then give a critique of his theory regarding partially descriptive names and show how it contradicts his conceptions of competent use and semantic content for some names. Finally, I show that this contradiction can be resolved in a non-descriptivist theory, and how it explains the puzzles about names.

Soames's Semantic Account of Names

Soames's foundational, semantic account of names is based on a distinction between the semantic contents of sentences and the information conveyed by them, originally due to Grice (Grice 2001, pp. 166-167). Colloquial use of the term 'meaning' conflates these two conceptions. Consider the sentence:

(2) George loves eating broccoli.

If we were to ask different competent English speakers what (2) means, we would get a variety of answers. A hearer who knows George, but not much about his eating preferences, would take it at face value and reply that it asserts that he is fond of eating broccoli. If the same sentence is uttered in a context where George is notorious for his hatred of broccoli, then it is probably being used sarcastically and in fact, might convey the information that George *does not* like eating broccoli. It is important to distinguish between these two kinds

of meaning. Soames definition of the distinction reads as follows:

> (SC) The *semantic content* of a sentence s consists of the 'information that a competent speaker who assertively utters s asserts and intends to convey in any context in which s is used nonmetaphorically ... with its normal literal meaning' (BR, p. 57).
>
> (IC) The *information conveyed* by a sentence s depends on the context in which s is uttered as well as other factors such as 'conversational implicatures' and other 'special, idiosyncratic features of speakers and hearers in particular contexts' (BR, pp. 56-57).

Semantic content is the meaning that is stable across all contexts where it is uttered by competent speakers whereas the information conveyed by a sentence varies from context to context.[2] The notion of meaning as semantic content, encoded in logical propositions, is originally due to Russell (Russell 2001, p. 224). It says that semantic content is what remains when all of the context-dependent information in a sentence is eliminated (Blackburn 1984, p. 305).

Soames argues that the semantic content of a simple proper name is its referent. Recall that semantic content as defined by Soames is the information which is asserted by *all* competent speakers in all contexts. Thus, competence impinges upon semantic content. He gives two conditions defining competent users of names:

> (CC-i) One must have acquired a referential intention that determines o as the

[2]Some terms, such as ambiguous designators and indexicals, are necessarily context-dependent. However, I ignore these complicating factors in this paper.

referent of n.

(CC-ii) One must realize that to assertively utter ⟦n is F⟧[3] is to say of the referent, o, of n that it "is F" (BR, p. 65).

These conditions express the basic notion of direct reference as proposed by Kripke, who gave the following description about how referential intentions are typically gained:

> Someone, let's say, a baby, is born; his parents call him by a certain name. They talk about him to their friends. Other people meet him. Through various sorts of talk the name is spread from link to link as if by a chain (Kripke 1981, p. 91).

On this account of competence, the only possible content of a sentence containing a name 'n', referring to o, which is invariant across all contexts where it is uttered by a competent speaker, is the referent, o. If we wanted an account where the semantic content included stronger descriptive properties, then we would have to strengthen (CC-i/ii) so that all competent speakers associated the properties with the name in all contexts. As the conditions are stated, the only requirement that a speaker must satisfy to use a name competently is an intention to refer to the object in accordance with the way that others in a chain of transmission use it. Thus, the only datum which is consistently expressed in sentences containing 'n' is o.

Soames's story about simple names also explains the puzzle about propositional attitude reports which usually causes problems for direct reference theories. As was stated previously, if the semantic content of a name is just its referent, then a sentence s containing 'Superman' should have the same content as s with 'Clark Kent' substituted for some of the occurrences of 'Superman'. However, pairs of sentences like (CK) and (SM) have different truth values,

[3] I use '⟦⟧' to indicate quasi-quotation.

suggesting that accounts based on direct reference describe the truth conditions of propositional attitude reports incorrectly. Soames overcomes this problem by appealing to the distinction between semantic content and information conveyed to account for the difference in truth conditions in (CK) and (SM). He argues that the semantic contents and thus, the truth conditions, for the sentences are the same. In many contexts however, information shared between speakers and hearers is implicitly conveyed, though not contained in its semantic content (BR, pp. 217-227). For example, in a context where both speakers know that Lois associates certain descriptive properties with Clark Kent and different properties with Superman, and know that each knows this, the information conveyed by (SM) includes this shared information:

> (SM-IC) Lois believes that Clark Kent, the reporter at *The Daily Planet* is Superman, the caped super hero of Gotham.

Clearly (SM-IC) is false because Lois does not believe the content of the embedded clause as enriched with extra descriptions. But though this may capture the information conveyed by (SM), the semantic content of (SM) is the identity expressed by (CK). These sentences cause a misunderstanding only because our everyday conception of meaning focuses on the information conveyed by a sentence. We do not go about computing semantic content (BR, p. 68), especially when it seems that a sentence is being used literally. The (SC/IC) distinction allows Soames to account for the difference in truth conditions in (CK) and (SM) as well as other propositional attitude reports.

Soames's account offers a solution to the two important issues regarding names. Thus far, it is not much more than a careful exposition of a complete account of names in line

with other direct reference theorists going back to Kripke and Mill. Soames diverges from this tradition when he considers a new problem arising with complex names. Specifically, he considers pairs of sentences such as:

(3a) Prince Charles lives at Highgrove.

(3b) There is a prince who lives at Highgrove.

(3c) Dartmouth College is located in Hanover, NH.

(3d) There is a college located in Hanover, NH.

He claims that a competent hearer, upon hearing utterances of (3a) and (3c) would be justified in believing (3b) and (3d).[4] If names such as 'Prince Charles' and 'Dartmouth College' act like simple names, then this inferential jump is not supported by their semantic contents. For if the semantic content of 'Prince Charles' in (3a) is just Charles, then the proposition that a prince lives at Highgrove is not entailed by the content of (3a). Competent speakers commonly make inferences like these. Therefore, Soames argues that the competence conditions for complex names like these must include an understanding that the referent has some descriptive properties along with the usual referential intentions. On Soames's view, a competent speaker of 'Prince Charles' and 'Dartmouth College' will realise that they have the properties $prince(x)$ and $college(x)$ respectively. More formally, he claims that the semantic content of a partially descriptive name n whose descriptive property is D, is equivalent to $[\![\text{the } x \ : \ D(x) \ \wedge \ x = y]\!]$, relative to an assignment of the referent of n to 'y' (BR, p. 110). For Soames, (3a) is analysed as:

[4]On an account of testimony where a believable assertion of (3a) gives justification for believing propositions which it implies.

[the x : $prince(x)$ $\wedge$ $x =$ Charles] lives at Highgrove.

which, if 'x' exists, clearly entails (3b). Partially descriptive names are introduced by Soames because they explain how certain sentences containing them can be used in valid inferences which rely on contingent descriptive properties associated with the names.

To summarise, Soames's theory of names describes several categories of designators with varying semantic contents and competence conditions:

> (SN) The semantic content of a *simple name* is just its referent. In order to be a competent user of a simple name, one must have an intention to refer to its referent with it and also to assert of its referent that it has the property F, when used in sentences of the form $[\![n \text{ is } F]\!]$ (BR, p. 65).
>
> (PDN) The semantic content of a *partially descriptive name*, with descriptive property D, is the same as the content of $[\![\text{the } x : D(x) \wedge x = y]\!]$, relative to an assignment of the referent to 'y'. A competent user of the name will have the same referential intentions as for simple names, and will also assert of its referent that it is both F and D when uttered in sentences of the form $[\![n \text{ is } F]\!]$ (BR, p. 88).

Additionally, Soames briefly entertains the possibility that there is a third class of simple partially descriptive names. These terms, such as 'Superman' or 'Hesperus' seem to have descriptive connotations (*e.g.*, possessing super powers, or being visible in the evening sky respectively) but do not have the complex structure of members of (PDN) (BR, p. 121). But Soames eventually rejects the notion that any simple names could be partially descriptive because he believes that our rigidity intuitions about simple names are too strong. We

would be willing to say that a speaker who refers to the man from Krypton as 'Superman' is competent, and speaks coherently, even if being from that planet gave him no super powers on Earth. Similarly, we would want to classify 'Hesperus is a planet' as true even in a possible world where Venus were not visible from Earth. Thus, the rigidity considerations for simple terms trump any descriptive connotations that language users might sometimes associate with them.

A Critique of Partially Descriptive Names

Soames asserts that to be a competent user of a complex, partially descriptive name one must associate certain descriptive properties with the referent of that name. There is a competing intuition about what it is to be a competent user of a complex name; namely, that one need only intend to refer to the referent of that name by its use. On this competing view, we should tell the same story about complex names as was told for simple names. The key consequence of this move is that complex names are treated as rigid designators and that no descriptive information in included in their semantic contents. This critique is also noted by Genoveva Marti, who possesses strong rigidity intuitions about names:

> once an expression has, by whatever means, acquired a life as a name ... any descriptive material that might at any point have been connected to the expression does not play any role in determining who or what speakers are talking about when they use the term (Marti 2002).

The attraction of this alternate account is best shown by considering sentences such as:

(4) Dartmouth College is not a college.

(5) Prince Charles is not a prince.

Analyses of (4, 5) diverge depending on which intuition one follows. If we accept Soames's (PDN) theory, then (4, 5) are interpreted as:

(4pdn) [the x : $college(x) \wedge x = \text{Dartmouth}$] is not a college.

(5pdn) [the x : $prince(x) \wedge x = \text{Charles}$] is not a prince.

which are both necessarily false because they assert of Dartmouth that it is both $college(x)$ and $\neg college(x)$ and similarly for Charles. The competing interpretation posits that 'Dartmouth College' is more rigid than Soames's account allows and that (4, 5) should instead be interpreted as

(4dr) [the x : $x = \text{Dartmouth}$] is not a college.

(5dr) [the x : $x = \text{Charles}$] is not a prince.

which expresses the contingent propositions that the institution in Hanover satisfies $\neg college(x)$ and similarly for Charles. I claim that one can be a competent user of a complex name solely by having intentions, in accordance with those of other speakers, to refer to a particular object with it. The critique of Soames which follows from this claim is that his (PDN) theory maintains that (4pdn, 5pdn) are the correct interpretations of (4, 5) while denying the competence of speakers who interpret the sentences as (4dr, 5dr). Yet for many speakers, these interpretations are coherent; we do commonly refer to objects denoted by (what Soames calls) partially descriptive names even when the descriptive properties that Soames ascribes to them are false.

Soames anticipates this objection and offers two possible replies. First, he says that if a contingent property of a partially descriptive name is false, yet speakers continue to use

the name to refer, then we can treat it as rigid. For example, in (4, 5) if speakers know that Dartmouth is not a college and that Charles is not a prince, then interpreting the sentences as (4dr, 5dr) is valid if speakers use 'Dartmouth College' and 'Prince Charles' to refer to the institution and the man. Alternatively, if upon discovering that a complex name does not satisfy the descriptive property which Soames ascribes to it we alter its name to a different partially descriptive name, then Soames claims that old and new uses are both partially descriptive. For example, if we decide that Dartmouth is not really a college (*e.g.*, because it awards advanced degrees), and begin to referring to it as 'Dartmouth University' to more accurately capture its institutional status, then we have 'evidence that [we] are treating both the original name and the new name as partially descriptive' (BR, p. 119). This argument allows Soames to classify complex names as partially descriptive or rigid designators depending on how they are treated by speakers.

The reply provides an answer my critique because in situations where there is overwhelming evidence that treating a complex name rigidly is the correct interpretation, Soames can admit that the term is rigid. He can also maintain that there is a large, non-empty class of partially descriptive names. For example, he can admit that (4dr) is the correct interpretation of (4) because in the actual world, Dartmouth is not, strictly speaking, a college and simultaneously argue that (5pdn) captures the semantic content of (5) because Charles is actually the Prince of Wales. Yet there is a serious problem with this response, because it leaves open the possibility that the same name can be ambiguous between the categories of rigid and partially descriptive terms. If a single term is allowed to fluctuate between these two categories, depending only on its use by a speaker, then its semantic content will be

limited to its referent.

To see this, consider two competent speakers of English, both of whom are competent users of the name 'Dartmouth College'. At time t, both are informed that Dartmouth does not satisfy $college(x)$ because at that instant, it awards its first advanced degree. Still, S_1 continues to use 'Dartmouth College' to refer to the institution despite this new information. According to Soames, the fact that S_1 continues to use the original complex name indicates that for S_1, the name is not really partially descriptive but is a rigid designator. In fact, Soames must admit a slightly stronger claim; namely, that S_1's use of the name has always been rigid. This follows from the observation that if S_1's uses 'Dartmouth College' rigidly after t then (for S_1) 'Dartmouth College' refers to the same object in every possible world where it exists, including the actual world before t. Meanwhile, according to the argument described by Soames, if S_2's renames Dartmouth to 'Dartmouth University', then her past and present complex names for it are both partially descriptive.

Now consider the semantic content of 'Dartmouth College'. In the theory just described, we have two classes of competent users of the name. One group of speakers, of which S_1 is a member, treats it rigidly and thus, the semantic content of 'Dartmouth College' as used by these speakers is just its referent. Another group of speakers, containing S_2, call it 'Dartmouth University' after t. For these speakers 'Dartmouth College' was partially descriptive before they discovered that it was not a college. The propositions asserted by speakers in these different groups vary greatly. In particular, a speaker such as S_2 who utters (4), before discovering that Dartmouth is not a college, uses the name to refer to the institution and to assert of it that it is $college(x)$. Hence, the proposition expressed

when S_2 utters (4) asserts that Dartmouth is both $college(x)$ and $\neg college(x)$. In contrast, when S_1 says (4) he asserts (4dr), not (4pdn), because he uses the name rigidly. The proposition asserted by him does not include the descriptive information that Dartmouth satisfies $college(x)$.

According to Soames's principle (SC), the strict semantic content of a term includes the information that is asserted invariantly by all competent speakers. The only datum which is common to what the term 'Dartmouth College' contributes to the propositions asserted when S_1 and S_2 utter (4) is the institution itself. The property of being $college(x)$ is not asserted by S_1 and thus, does not count towards its semantic content. This result is highly damaging to Soames's (PDN) theory because it shows that for complex names which are used ambiguously as both rigid and partially descriptive, the semantic contents of those terms are just their respective referents.

One way that Soames might try to escape the damaging result just shown is to give stronger competence conditions for complex terms which would block speakers from treating them both rigidly and as partially descriptive. If Soames modifies the competence conditions so that in cases where a complex name is used both rigidly and partially descriptively, the partially descriptive use is characterised as incompetent, then he admits that most complex names really are rigid (further supporting my critique). Thus, Soames must characterise speakers who use a complex name rigidly as incompetent if the name is also being used partially descriptively. But this leads to conditions that are much stronger than most would want to admit. Kripke's original exposition of a (partial) theory of direct reference included the requirement that a new user of a name must 'intend when he learns it to use it with

the same reference as the man from whom he heard it' (Kripke 1981, p. 96). This is a weak requirement of shared referential intention. Kripke showed that stronger conditions on reference lead to counterintuitive results. For example, if we define the referent of 'Gödel' as the first man to prove the famous incompleteness theorem, then we admit the possibility that some other man, Schmidt, actually proved the theorem first and is the true referent of 'Gödel' (Kripke 1981, p. 89). This is obviously not how most people intend to use 'Gödel'. Kripke's requirement captures an important intuition about reference which the competing descriptivist account about reference misses: most people would be willing to say that a person refers to an object using a name, because they follow the referential intentions along a chain of speakers. In contrast, many people do not follow the descriptive intentions of others when they learn a name. This explains why when we say 'Gödel' we always mean one man and not Schmidt (even if Schmidt really proved the theorem first). In order to block a name from being used rigidly, Soames would have to deny that users of the term 'Dartmouth College' refer to the institution in Hanover because it is not a college. Plainly, a large class of speakers intend to (and do) refer to it though they do not believe that it is $college(x)$. The strengthened competence conditions for complex names would clash with Kripke's well supported thesis about reference. The best that Soames can do is to argue that names may be ambiguously rigid and partially descriptive. But as was just shown, this leads to a result which seriously undermines the (PDN) theory.

A second response which Soames gives to my main critique is that whatever mechanism is used for ordinary descriptions which do not refer can be harnessed and applied to partially descriptive names whose descriptive property does not apply to its intended referent (BR,

p. 118). For example, even in a possible world where Charles is not the son of Elizabeth, the sentence,

(5ed) The resident of Highgrove and the Prince of Wales is not a prince.

can still be used to convey information about Charles even though he does not satisfy the description. Here, Soames appeals again to the (SC/IC) distinction. Though the semantic content of (5ed) includes the content contributed by the semantic content of an empty description, in many contexts it still conveys information about Charles because speakers may have shared contextual information which suggests that the person picked out by the description is Charles. On this view, the intuitive appeal of readings of sentences like (5) as (5dr) is a confusion of (IC) with (SC). If Soames's theory of partially descriptive names were correct, then the occurrence of 'Prince Charles' in (5) does not refer (if Charles is not actually a prince) and (5)'s semantic content is given by (5pdn) – a false proposition. The information conveyed by (5) however, is more like that given by (5dr) because speakers usually try to convey truth. This response explains the attraction of (5dr) as the correct interpretation of (5): it is the result of confusing semantics with pragmatics.

A Simpler Account of Complex Names

The appeal to pragmatics is a robust reply. Indeed, by taking the problem out of the semantic arena, and explaining it at the pragmatic level, it seems likely that any counter-argument to it could in turn be resolved by Soames. Ultimately however, his theory is more complex than is needed. The Millian opponent of Soames's (PDN) theory can give a simpler

account with the same explanatory power by appealing to pragmatics. First, consider the inferences which originally motivated Soames's development of the (PDN) theory. If the (PDN) theory were correct, then the inferences are supported because the name contained in (3a), 'Prince Charles', includes the property $prince(x)$ in its semantic content. In contrast, the opponent of the (PDN) theory claims that 'Prince Charles' is rigid and refers to Charles in every possible world where he exists. Thus, the semantic content of his name in (3a) is just Charles. But the information conveyed by an utterance of (3a) might include the extra-semantic information that Charles is a prince. For example, both conversation participants might know that he is the Prince of Wales, and know that both of them know this fact (BR, p. 221). Thus, when the speaker utters (3a), she knows that the hearer will associate the descriptive information that Charles is a prince with him. Hence, the information conveyed by (3a) includes bits of this shared knowledge. On my simpler Millian account, the inference to (3b) is not supported by semantic content but by the information conveyed by (3a) in some contexts.

Given that all three issues — explaining propositional attitude reports, describing modal truth conditions, and supporting inferences in sentences containing complex names — can be explained without a (PDN) theory, it is puzzling that Soames chooses to depart from strict Millianism. It seemed that explaining inferences from (3a) to (3b) was the motivation. But these can be explained in the same way as inferences in sentences such as these:

(6a) Charles lives at Highgrove.

(6b) There is a prince who lives at Highgrove.

Many speakers will accept this inference if the information conveyed by (6a) includes the

datum that Charles is a prince. However, as his simple name is rigid, its strict semantic content does not include the descriptive property *prince*(x). There are also many speakers who are competent users of his name, but who do not know that he is a prince and hence, who will not make the inferential jump. The only potential advantage that the explanation which Soames's (PDN) theory offers has over this simpler explanation, is that in sentences such as (3a) and (3b), the inference is *always* supported because *prince*(x) is contained in the semantic content of 'Prince Charles'. But as I have argued, when complex names are used ambiguously, as both partially descriptive and rigid, then the rigidity considerations dominate the semantic content of the name. Hence, if any speakers use 'Prince Charles' rigidly, then the semantic content of the name is only its referent. Then the advantage offered by the (PDN) theory is lost! Hence, the inference from (3a) to (3b) is only supported if *prince*(x) is conveyed by utterances of 'Prince Charles'; in some contexts, the information is not conveyed and the inference is not supported. This is precisely the same explanation that results from my simpler account.

Perhaps Soames introduces (PDN) as a concession to descriptivism, a gesture admitting that while the descriptivist theory does not properly describe the roles of simple names in language, it does have something to add to a more complete account. As I showed by the argument involving speakers who treat a complex name as both rigid and partially descriptive, this concession to descriptivism does not even answer the problem that it was originally formulated to explain (inferences of the sort from (3a) to (3b)). Thus, even if my critique can be answered by shifting the issues to pragmatics, it is at best an unnecessary and redundant appendage to his overall semantic account. If Soames wishes to make a token gesture to de-

scriptivists, he should insist that their attraction to equating names with descriptions shows that they are sensitive to pragmatic considerations. In many contexts, the descriptivist accurately explains what goes on in at the pragmatic level where descriptive connotations and other implicatures contribute much to the data which is ultimately conveyed. This is particularly clear in propositional attitude reports and in inferences of the sort from (3a) to (3b). But the semantic content of a name, simple or complex, is best given by a theory of direct reference and is limited to the referents of those terms. There is no reason to give descriptivism an inch in semantics.

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