

Andrea Bianchi (ed.): *On Reference*  
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*On Reference* is a collection of eighteen new essays on topics related to *reference*, with relevance for philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and linguistics. The topics have, of course, been extensively discussed for years, and if nothing else this new collection – which covers a remarkable range of issues and questions discussed from a wide range of perspectives – will help the reader understand *why*. It should, however, be pointed out that *On Reference* is not an introductory book. Background knowledge of the central issues and arguments is assumed, and it is, even for those who have experience with the topics, sometimes tricky to situate particular contributions in the traditions to which they aim to contribute. The book is, however, invaluable for anyone interested in getting up to date on these issues.

The collection is divided into three parts – “The Nature of Reference”, “Reference and Cognition”, and “Reference and Semantics” – though the overlap is substantial and the allocation of articles to sections seems a bit arbitrary. Section II consists of only three articles, and although those articles are interesting it is hard not to notice some questions it does *not* cover, such as issues related to the nature of *singular thought*. Elsewhere, readers will look in vain for substantial discussions of e.g. the semantics of empty names (a few contributions touch on them) or the relationship between classical referential semantics and recent developments in discourse semantics, such as variabilist theories or theories that accommodate reference in discourse semantic frameworks (Cumming’s article is to some extent an exception). There is – with some exceptions – also little explicit discussion of whether there are necessary metaphysical or epistemic criteria for referring, and no discussion of the *acquaintance* condition, which seems to have received renewed attention in recent years. On the other hand, perhaps the fact that even a substantial and comprehensive collection is forced to forgo discussions of some central questions should be taken as testament to how important the topic of *reference* is for contemporary philosophy, and how wide-ranging the implications.

The first section, “The Nature of Reference”, adds up to a good overview of recent discussions. The first two chapters discuss two potential rehabilitations of non-referential views, perhaps most provocatively in Christopher Gauker’s “The

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Illusion of Semantic Reference". Gauker argues that there is no such thing as semantic reference that can be used to underpin a notion of *knowing what expression e refers to*; instead, he defends what amounts to a *skeptical solution* and attempts to spell out knowledge of meaning in terms of the social status we grant to someone when saying that she knows the meaning of a word. In "Reference and Theories of Meaning as Use" Diego Marconi attempts – rather successfully and thoroughly, if not entirely surprisingly – to show that Horwich's *use theory of meaning* cannot easily be made compatible with the types of meaning externalism that has become orthodoxy after Burge, Putnam, Kaplan and others.

Edouard Machery, Justin Sytsma and Max Deutsch's "Speaker's Reference and Cross-Cultural Semantics" provides new empirical data on cross- and intra-cultural intuitions concerning Kripke's famous *Gödel case*, offered as part of his *semantic argument* against descriptivism in *Naming and Necessity* (see Kripke 1980). The article presents results of five new experiments designed to circumvent worries raised over the findings reported in Machery et al.'s influential (2004) paper, in particular that the original experiments failed to distinguish intuitions concerning semantic meaning from intuitions concerning speaker meaning (cf. Ludwig 2007), and show that intuitions still exhibit striking cross-cultural variations when these worries are taken care of. I admit that I remain skeptical that the data really show anything particularly interesting about descriptivist accounts of reference fixing (which is what they seem to concern – not descriptivist views of semantic content). First, it is still entirely consistent with a causal-historical theory to hold that uses of "Gödel" in these cases refer to Schmidt. Second, the Gödel case requires a complex setup and relies on complex intuitions; surely, a well-designed test of descriptivism should rather start by testing intuitions about *simple* cases, or at least include a control question to ensure that the test subjects have understood the complex case properly (anecdotally, my own students often don't, and I see no evidence that such control questions were included). A test of Kripke's *Einstein case* – whether someone who associates only the description "inventor of the atomic bomb" with Einstein and says "Einstein invented the atomic bomb" is saying something false about Einstein or something true about someone else – would seem to fit the bill better.

The final three articles of Section 1 defend the referentialist picture. Indeed, they all – in different ways – argue against a current tendency to view thought as prior to reference, that referring with the use of a name is secondary to having the referent in mind. In "Reference without Cognition" Genoveva Martí argues against this "neo-cognitive" trend, according to which referring requires a "cognitive fix" but not necessarily mediation of linguistic rules, and discusses cases where linguistic conventions determine reference independently of users' cognitive fixes; the

paper is a convincing contribution to a central issue. A similar motivation guides Andrea Bianchi's "Repetition and Reference", which aims to construct a substantive *theory* of reference based on the *picture* offered in *Naming and Necessity*. Bianchi requires of the theory that it makes no non-eliminable reference to intentions; instead, he provides metaphysical grounding in terms of causally linked repetitions. Finally, Michael Devitt's "Should Proper Names Still Seem So Problematic?" offers a fine-tuning of his familiar non-Millian theory of proper name meaning, according to which the meaning of a name is (just) its causal mode of referring. Although he doesn't address the worry that his theory conflates the meaning of a term with a meta-semantic story of how it *came to have* that meaning, at least he shows that his theory can stand on its own as a theory of meaning – albeit with the worrisome consequence that the standing meaning of a name changes from occasion to occasion. It is interesting to note how (neo)Fregean – though not descriptivist – the view ultimately is, at least as it is laid out in the present article.

Section II deals with issues related to cognition. Antonio Capuano's "Thinking About an Individual" defends an "outside-in" view of cognition on which (natural) processes bring objects to mind, as opposed to more traditional "inside-out" views according to which cognition proceeds by mental representations. The picture ostensibly amounts to a more fundamental shift in perspective than externalism or anti-individualism, and much of the article is concerned with comparing it to Burge's anti-individualist view; I am less sure how to compare it to the (to some extent) more radical externalist positions defended by, say, McDowell or some central contributors to the phenomenological tradition. Marga Reimer, in "Drawing, Seeing, Referring: Reflections on Macbeth's Dagger", starts by noting that "drawing a dagger" is ambiguous between an ontic (derivative) reading, which entails the existence of a dagger, and a non-ontic (creative) reading, which does not, and argues that "referring" is ambiguous in the same manner. In the non-ontic case an abstract object is (perhaps unintentionally) created that can serve as the target of thought and reasoning. John Perry, in "The Cognitive Contribution of Names", argues that the "direct" cognitive contribution of a name – what is determined by semantics – is just how it *looks* or *sounds*, an observation that he uses to help explain the apparent cognitive significance of "Hesperus is Phosphorus." Ultimately, the view Perry defends is reminiscent of Frege's *Begriffsschrift* view, and he does a compelling effort to defuse central worries associated with this type of approach.

The theme of Section III seems a bit nebulous. It is supposed to cover various semantic problems related to reference, but I have trouble seeing by what principle articles are assigned to Section III rather than Section I. That said, the section does

contain some of the most interesting contributions to the volume. The discussion of predicativism is a case in point: An exchange between Robin Jeshion (“Names Not Predicates” and “A Rejoinder to Fara’s “‘Literal’ Uses of Proper Names””) and Delia Fara (“‘Literal’ Uses of Proper Names”), as well as an article (“Names As Predicates?”) by Ernesto Napoli. According to Napoli, predicativists must claim that a name  $n$  means *being a bearer of  $n$* , where  $n$  is an expression (arbitrarily) assigned to individuals by a stipulation/baptism where it is used quotationally; however, such accounts face serious challenges insofar as they assume that a stipulation/baptism is necessary and sufficient for being named  $n$  (there are multiple counterexamples), and because assigning  $n$  to someone is not assigning  $n$  to the property of *being a bearer of  $n$* .

Jeshion’s target is the Uniformity Assumption, the predicativist’s claim to be able to offer a unified account of predicative and referential uses of names. In particular, if a name  $n$  is true of  $x$  if and only if  $x$  is called  $n$ , there will, Jeshion argues, be many cases where the theory yields the wrong results, for instance when I truthfully say of my barber Joe Romanov that “Joe Romanov is not a Romanov” because he has no relation to the Russian dynasty. Fara, in her response, attributes to Jeshion the following argument: i) predicativists think all literal uses of names satisfy the *being-called* condition; ii) there are non-metaphorical uses of predicative proper names that do not satisfy the *being-called* condition; iii) so, there are literal uses of predicative proper names that do not satisfy the *being-called* condition and hence no unified analysis of literal uses of predicative proper names, which means that the predicativist is not better off than the referentialist. Fara rejects the assumption that all non-metaphorical uses are literal uses, and argues that most of Jeshion’s examples concern non-metaphorical *and* non-literal uses. The Romanov cases remain problematic, however, and Fara argues that such examples involve proper nouns, not proper names. In her response, Jeshion points out that she didn’t offer an argument *against* predicativism, but an argument showing that the predicativist’s *own unification argument* doesn’t hold up – in particular, it cannot be used to argue that predicativism is superior to referentialism. So for instance, while Fara can certainly argue that Romanov cases involve use of “Romanov” as a proper noun that doesn’t need to satisfy the *being-called* condition, nothing stops the referentialist from saying the same about “there are three Alfreds in Princeton,” and the referentialist’s distinction seems no less arbitrary than the one Fara introduces. Hence, the predicativist’s uniformity argument fails as an argument in favor of predicativism. Though the debate has become fairly complex, Jeshion’s and Fara’s contributions are among the most valuable in the volume, and should be read by anyone with an interest in contemporary discussions of the semantics of proper names.

Marco Santambrogio, in “Empty Names, Propositions, and Attitude Ascriptions”, uses the problem of empty names as a frame for introducing a new theory of language-bound propositions (or the propositional contributions of names) that allows empty names to have expressive value even if they have no referent; the guiding idea being that direct reference doesn’t require singular propositions. Though Santambrogio does a fair job of allaying certain worries, the view also requires more justification than space allows him to give it here; certain moves seem *ad hoc* and the results (fascinating but) somewhat baroque. In “Millianism, Relationism, and Attitude Ascriptions” Ángel Pinillos develops further his version of *semantic relationism*, based on Fine (2007), to circumvent certain objections raised by Soames (2010) related to certain versions Frege’s puzzle (Pinillos also provides a lucid introduction to relationism). Relationism explains the difference in informativity between “Hesperus is Hesperus” and “Hesperus is Phosphorus” by the two occurrences of “Hesperus” in the former being *coordinated*, whereas the occurrences of “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” in the latter are not (where *coordination* is a semantic property). Soames objects that coordination obviously cannot explain problematic *de dicto single* occurrences, such as “Lois Lane believes that Clark Kent can fly” uttered in isolation. Fine’s response is to appeal to inter-discourse coordination (cf. Fine 2010). Pinillos argues that inter-discourse coordination fails; instead, the problematic *de dicto* belief ascriptions always implicitly involve other mental state ascriptions, which can then be used to facilitate appropriate coordination-based solutions.

Sam Cumming’s “The Dilemma of Indefinites” is one of the most thought-provoking contributions to the volume. Cumming argues that there is good empirical evidence for a referential analysis of sentences of the form “an *F* is *G*” but also good evidence that such sentences have existential – i.e. not object-dependent – truth-conditions. His radical, but intriguing, response is to deny that the truth-value of an utterance is determined by its semantic content and circumstance of evaluation; if semantic content doesn’t determine truth-conditions it can be consistently maintained that “an *F* is *G*” has both singular content and existential truth conditions. He goes on to sketch a novel view of the relation between semantic content and truth: it is possible to secure reference through *private commitment*, which we do when we use indefinites; *truth-conditions*, on the other hand, are a matter of *public commitment* and “an utterance is true if things are the way the speaker’s utterance publicly commits to them being.” When we use indefinites (rather than definites), then, our utterances, though they have singular contents, eschew such public commitments to reference and object-dependence; it is only for utterances that refer by way of public commitments (those involving definites) that semantic content and truth-conditions coincide.

Perhaps even more provocative is the account Joseph Almong, Paul Nichols and Jessica Pepp sketch in “A Unified Treatment of (Pro-)Nominals in Ordinary English”. Rejecting a level of *logical form*, they argue that there is no difference between deictic, anaphoric and bound uses of pronouns like “she” – rather, “she” is always *referential*. And arguing that the “formalist program” in semantics is at odds with the referentialist, externalist tradition that emphasize causal-historical factors in determining linguistic meaning, they instead promote a semantic framework that incorporates such factors. So, for instance, “the contribution of a pronoun to the semantics of a complete utterance is never determined by the application of a semantic rule;” rather, it refers “in virtue of causal-historical connections, and pronoun interpretation is *a posteriori*.” The difference between anaphoric and deictic pronouns is neither syntactic nor semantic, but a function of communicative situation and the aspects of context that makes pronoun application appropriate – the aspects audiences use to identify the referent. As the authors admit, the approach cannot be fully developed or justified in the context of the present article alone, and for readers it is perhaps a bit frustrating that they frequently refer to an upcoming “Part II”. Theirs is an interesting take, though I will remain skeptical until I see how the gaps are filled in. For instance, if anaphoric pronouns are really referential, then it seems to me that *reference* must be a *brute* word–object relation and not a matter of satisfying certain criteria; but in that case the account does not obviously square with the spirit of the externalist, causal-historical approach emphasized elsewhere – the examples they discuss may fit the “perceptual-chain” model they appeal to, but are difficult to generalize to, say, pronouns in conditionals (“if the US ever gets a queen, she will be tall”).

The final article, Edward Keenan’s “Individuals Explained Away”, is the most technical article in the volume, but it certainly rewards close study. It is also a defense of the formalist approach. In contrast to Almog et al., Keenan argues that natural semantics can do without recognizing individuals at all; indeed, we can do without propositions and possible worlds (to interpret non-intensional contexts). Without going into details of the formal apparatus, Keenan suggests generalizing standard extensional model theory, and replaces the universe of objects our naïve ontology may appeal to with a universe of atomic properties playing the roles that objects play in classical semantics. To do so, he first recasts standard extensional semantic – a booleanly structured set of truth-values, {T, F}, in which sentences are interpreted, and an unstructured universe U of individuals in which individual constants and predicates are interpreted – in purely Boolean terms, where U is eliminated in favor of a booleanly structured set of properties that provide interpretations for common nouns; proper name

interpretations are derivative, defined in terms of properties and truth values (a similar move was suggested in Lewis 1970), and *individuals* are nothing more than “homomorphisms from the property lattice to the truth value lattice.” The approach is then generalized to evaluative adjectives, which exhibit properties that make them difficult to account for in standard model-theoretic semantics – successful treatment of these are accordingly justification for using an extended version of extensional model theory. The consequences of eliminating a universe of individuals that singular terms denote or refer to and variables range over are potentially far-reaching, but what Keenan *doesn't* really do is explore the potential impact on foundational discussions about the semantics of proper names. For instance, since the account gives priority to common noun interpretation over proper name interpretation, it might potentially be well-suited to predicativist views.

In conclusion, *On Reference* is a rich and far-reaching collection, and contains a good mix of provocative novel takes on old debates and refinements of familiar positions. And even if not every interesting topic relevant to *reference* is covered, or every article breaks new ground or offer entirely convincing defenses of the positions they seek to defend, it is an invaluable companion to anyone who wishes or needs to stay on top of current trends in discussions about reference, the semantics of proper names or philosophy of language in general.

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