

## ***A Fregean Look at Kripke's Modal Notion of Meaning***

Gilead Bar-Elli

In *Naming and Necessity*<sup>1</sup> Kripke accuses Frege of conflating two notions of meaning (or sense), one is meaning proper, the other is determining of reference (p. 59). More precisely, Kripke argues that Frege conflated the question of how the meaning of a word is given or determined with the question of how its reference is determined. The criterial mark of meaning determination, according to Kripke, is a statement of synonymy: if we give the sense of "a" by means of "b", then the two expressions must be synonymous. The criterial mark of reference-determination is knowledge, typically a priori, of the truth of their identity: If the reference of "a" is given by "b", then we know a priori that a is b. Kripke then argues that Frege's conceptions of both meaning-determination and of reference determination were wrong, and proposes an alternative picture of reference determination.

I shall discuss some details of Kripke's arguments in the second part of this paper. In the meantime I wish to point out, in very general terms, that the main flaw Kripke finds in Frege's conception is that it is what we may call "over-cognitive": Frege, according to Kripke, mistakenly construes the reference of a term as being determined by beliefs, or conditions allegedly known to the speaker. Frege then, according to Kripke, compounds mistakes by identifying this with the meaning or sense of the term. \*Much of this attack on the Fregean cognitive conception of meaning is couched in terms of a detailed critique of a descriptive theory of the sense of names, which is the ostensive target of most of Kripke's arguments. The tacit assumption is evidently that a cognitive conception is manifested in a descriptive theory (the sense of) of names.

The relationships between a cognitive conception of sense and the descriptive theory of names are rather elusive. Many theorists assume (with Kripke) that the latter is

---

<sup>1</sup> S. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Harvard University Press, 1980 (1972), hereafter abbreviated as NN. Page numbers refer to this book unless otherwise stated. For abbreviations see list of reference.

implied by, or part of the former. They also assume that this was Frege's view. NN can be read rather narrowly as launching an attack on the descriptive conception of names, which Kripke ascribes to Frege. This, of course, is important enough, independently of whether the ascription of the descriptive view to Frege is correct (I shall come back to it in the second part of the paper). On this reading Kripke's arguments against the descriptive conception of names are, I believe, quite compelling. However, NN can be read more ambitiously as an attack on any cognitivist conception of meaning and of reference determination. It is, I believe, on this more ambitious reading that NN has been justly regarded as one of the most important landmarks in the philosophy of language, as cutting deep into the basic conceptions in terms of which we construe the notions of meaning and reference determination. It is mainly with the ambitious reading that I shall be concerned here. On this reading Frege's actual views deserve careful examination, for they, or a particular interpretation of them, is widely conceived as one of the most important versions of a cognitive conception of meaning. It suggests an important version of a cognitive conception of meaning, which does not seem to be committed to the descriptive theory Kripke attacks. \*\*

The alternative Kripke proposes for reference determination is couched, accordingly, in terms of two non-cognitive factors: (a) Causal relations between speakers and objects or situations in the real world, and (b) Intentions of co-referring, intention on the part of a speaker to retain the reference of previous links in the causal chain by which the name was passed on to him. Reference, according to Kripke is determined not by any piece of knowledge or by beliefs available to the speaker, but by a certain kind of semantical intention<sup>2</sup> and by causal factors in the actual situations in which the speaker utters the term and by which he has mastered its use.

---

<sup>2</sup> \*The exact nature of this intention raises some problems. One of them, pertinent to our present concerns, is whether this intention is constrained by epistemic considerations; whether one can form such an intention, on a specific occasion, contrary to his firm existential beliefs. One may well argue that given certain beliefs and epistemic conditions, the appropriate intention may be

One may wonder whether this causal theory of reference determination has not gone too far in its non-cognitive orientation. For the notions of reference and reference determination serve in a theory of meaning whose ultimate goal is to account for our use of words in our language. The causal chain, of which the speaker need not, and usually is not, aware may lead to a referent he doesn't know, and of which he hasn't even dreamt; it may lead to something utterly and categorically incompatible with whatever he intended to say. In fact it may lead to nothing at all. This may be entirely unknown to the speaker, and hence hardly affect his use of the terms involved. If the picture of reference determination is thus detached from anything that is within the cognitive horizons of the speaker, how can an account of his use of these words be gained on its basis?<sup>3</sup>

A quite common retort here (possibly held by Kripke himself) is that semantics and theories of reference should be separated from the cognitive aspects of our use of language. These aspects are of course important but they should be dealt with in other terms and by separate theories.<sup>4</sup> I believe that such a move undermines one of Frege's greatest insights: that a theory of thought, in its wide sense, cannot be thus detached from a theory of meaning; it is dependent on it and constrained by it. Again the issues involved are very intricate and I shall not go into them here.

In the first part of what follows I shall describe Kripke's modal conception of meaning, which I regard as a novel and important notion of meaning. This, alongside with the non-cognitive attitude towards meaning and reference-determination sketched above,

---

unavailable to the speaker, and that his use of a name will thus become spurious. I heard from a Kabbalist long stories about Bilar – the king of devils. Since I don't believe there are such creatures, it seems to me that I cannot form the appropriate intention (to refer to whatever the Kabbalist was referring to), even if, contrary to my convictions, it turns out that there are devils and they have a king, and the Kabbalist did refer to something.\*\*

<sup>3</sup> Related points have been widely discussed in the literature. See, for instance, Dummett FPL, pp. 146-51, and IF 182-86. I shall not go into it here.

<sup>4</sup> See, for instance, N. Salmon, RE, ch. 1; H. Wettstein "has Semantics Rested On a Mistake?", JP 1986, pp.185-209.

form, perhaps, the most significant contribution to the conception of meaning in this celebrated monograph. It may appear that the modal notion of meaning is a feature of the non-cognitive approach to meaning. The relationships between these two central doctrines is, however, more complicated than might at first sight seem, and I suggest that the modal conception is not, in itself, opposed to the cognitive conception, and can be incorporated in it. In the second part of this paper I shall examine Kripke's argument against Frege's (cognitive) conception of sense from a Fregean perspective. I shall try to show that the modal conception of meaning in itself does not suffice for discarding Frege's cognitive conception of sense and of reference determination. A Fregean cognitive conception of meaning may be, therefore compatible with something like the modal conception of meaning, or so I shall argue.

I mean to focus here on NN exclusively, but I cannot avoid mentioning an interesting link between this non-cognitive trend in NN and the view Kripke suggests, in Wittgenstein's name, in his later book on Wittgenstein. For, on the picture suggested in NN, objective reference is effected (and secured) not by subjective, conscious states of the speaker (like his beliefs) on the one hand, nor by a direct (cognitive) relation he has to the world, on the other, but, basically, by his belonging to a speech community. It is this belonging to a speech community, effected by both (a) and (b), which secures the objective reference of the speaker's words. NN may seem to be worlds apart from the book on W, and as far as I know Kripke has not suggested a connection between them, but this seems to me to be an important linking line between these celebrated monographs. (See however, SRSR note 20).

#### Kripke's Modal Notion of Meaning

I want to come back now to the main point. Frege, according to Kripke, proposed a cognitive notion of sense, and claimed that sense, cognitively construed, determines reference. It is this combination that Kripke challenges: Reference, according to him is not determined by any cognitive notion like Frege's notion of sense. In the sequel I shall examine some features of the challenge from a Fregean perspective. But before doing

that I would like to point out that although much of Kripke's discussion in NN is concerned with reference determination, there is a novel and distinctly non-Fregean conception of meaning proposed in NN. Kripke is surprisingly sparse on this. The notion of the meaning (sense) of a name is hardly mentioned in NN except for the above critical remarks about conflating synonymity and reference-determination.

Indeed, he is so sparse on the subject that many people ascribe to him the view that proper names have no meaning (sense) (Dummett, N. Salmon). Although some formulations of Kripke's may support such a view, I believe that ascribing it to him is wrong or, at least, overstated. In fact, the theses that proper names are rigid designators, that they are not synonymous with descriptions, as well as the thesis about the way their actual reference is determined (the causal chain theory) are theses about their meaning, or sense (cf. Pp. 33; 39; 55; 56; 57; 59; we shall come back to this). In another place, Kripke elaborates a bit more on the notion of the meaning of words:

The notion of what words can mean in the language, is semantical: it is given by the conventions of our language. What they mean, on a given occasion is determined, on a given occasion, by these conventions, together with the intentions of the speaker and various contextual features [...] If a speaker has a designator in his idiolect, certain conventions of his idiolect (given various facts about the world) determine the referent in the idiolect: that I call *semantic referent* (SRSR, p. 14)

(He makes it clear in this paper that by "semantic" he means "truth-conditional").

Kripke is usually credited with advancing an effective critique of what he regards as the Fregean conception of how reference is determined. He is also credited with proposing an alternative picture of the determination of the reference of proper names. He hardly deals in NN with the question of what reference is, what the very ascription of a reference to a word amounts to, and may be regarded as accepting the essentials of the Fregean answer to this question, namely, that the reference of a term is its contribution to determining the truth-value of sentences containing it. Kripke is then credited with making the distinction mentioned above between reference determination and meaning determination and with pointing out the Fregean conflation of these. On many of these points Kripke was criticized by Fregean scholars of misrepresenting Frege's views, which,

when properly understood, allow, with slight modifications, for most of Kripke's right observations. I have voiced doubts of this sort myself, but I won't go into these here.

But beyond all these I think that Kripke suggested in NN a novel, distinctly non-Fregean conception of meaning, a conception that underlies the main tenor of argument of that work, which I would call a modal conception of meaning<sup>5</sup>. Let me quote from the Preface to NN.

Consider: (1) Aristotle was fond of dogs.  
A proper understanding of this statement involves an understanding both of the (extensionally correct) conditions under which it is in fact true, *and* of the conditions under which a counterfactual course of history, resembling the actual course in some respects but not in others, would be correctly (partially) described by (1). (NN p. 6)

This is couched in terms of understanding, not of meaning. But I shall not persist on the distinction. I assume that these two are correlative notions. Again, in explaining the notion (or rule) of rigidity, Kripke says that it is

"The rule that there is a single individual and a single property such that, with respect to every counterfactual situation, the truth conditions of the proposition are the possession of the property by that individual, in that situation." (p. 10)

This is a conception of meaning and understanding that dominates the course of argument in NN. It is, I believe, a novel one. What is its basis? Why should one, in order to understand the statement, know which counterfactual course of history would be correctly described by the statement? Kripke evidently thinks that this is not a stipulation concerning an artificial notion of meaning (in the formal semantics of systems of modal logic), but an explicative condition required by our intuitive notion of understanding. Kripke would agree, I suppose, with a conception, championed, e.g. by Dummett and ascribed by him to Frege, that the notion of meaning concerned should serve in an explanation of understanding. But unlike Frege (and Dummett) he thinks that this notion of meaning is intrinsically modal, in that the mastery and understanding of simple sentences involve understanding its truth conditions in counterfactual situations.

---

<sup>5</sup> Surprisingly, "meaning" does not appear in the index of the book, though, "theory of meaning" occurs under other entries, such as "description theory of proper names".

In thus saying that this notion is intrinsically modal I do not mean to imply that we are concerned here with the notion of the meaning of sentences involving modal operators, or with their role or meaning within complex sentences involving modal operators. Kripke is entirely clear on this, and he emphasizes the point again in the Preface to NN (pp. 11-12), where he also accuses Dummett of misunderstanding this point.<sup>6</sup> The doctrine of rigidity, he says, “is a doctrine about the truth conditions, with respect to counterfactual situations, of (the propositions expressed by) all sentences, including simple sentences” (p. 12). So, in understanding a simple sentence, we have to know its truth conditions *simpliciter* and its truth conditions with respect to a counterfactual situation. I mention here what Kripke regards as a misunderstanding on Dummett’s part in order to sharpen the novelty of this modal conception of meaning, which is probably what escaped Dummett. Relying on the conventional (i.e. non-modal) conception of meaning, Dummett naturally construes Kripke’s insistence on the modal factor in understanding the meaning of a term as understanding the meaning of modal sentences containing it.<sup>7</sup> But this, on Kripke’s view is a mistake. Understanding the truth-conditions of a sentence in a counterfactual situation is required, on Kripke’s conception, for understanding any sentence, including simple ones (sentences without modal, or other, operators), with no view to their possible role in modal complexes. In order to understand a simple (non-modal) sentence like (1) one should know not only its actual truth-conditions, but also its truth-conditions in a counterfactual course of history (a course, for instance, where Aristotle was not a philosopher, and had never seen dogs). And it is precisely these truth

---

<sup>6</sup> Dummett probably remained unconvinced, for he repeats virtually the same point, ignoring Kripke’s remarks, in his The Interpretation of Frege, p. 184, and later in his “The Logical Basis of Metaphysics”, Harvard, 1991, p.48.

<sup>7</sup> I state this with great hesitation, for, in later writings Dummett seems to endorse the modal notion of meaning. See for instance “Could There Be Unicorns?” in The Seas of Language, p. 335b: “Any thesis about the meaning or reference of a word must draw its substance from how we use it or should use it in hypothetical circumstances”; cf. Also 340 c-341a.

conditions in a counterfactual course of history, which render the meaning of (1) different from that, e.g. of its Russellian analysis (p. 9).

It is reasonable to understand this Modal conception of meaning in a strong way according to which one should know the truth-conditions of (1) in any counterfactual course of history relevant to the sentence (under some specification of relevance here). Thus, all counterfactual situations which differ from the actual ones concerning Aristotle, and all counterfactual situations which differ from the actual ones concerning dogs (for instance, a situation in which dogs are huge animals tearing to pieces whatever they can get hold of) should be relevant to understanding (1).

One may question my emphasizing the novelty of this conception. For it obviously has its roots in the notion of interpretation in formal semantics and model theory, and as Kripke himself remarked, some of his observations sprang from work in the semantics of modal logic (p. 3). It was moreover brought into philosophy, one may argue, by philosophers like Carnap, who proposed a modal notion of meaning e.g. in Meaning and Necessity. But I believe that as a requirement of our general, intuitive conceptions of meaning and of understanding simple (non-modal) sentences in natural language, it is novel.

This conception has a strong intuitive appeal. One may still wonder about its philosophical basis: What are the general principles governing the notion of meaning and its role in a theory of understanding that warrant it?

Our previous remarks seem to suffice for rejecting one possible answer to this query, namely, that the modal conception of meaning is based on the role of words in modal contexts. In understanding a name like "Aristotle" we should know how to evaluate modal contexts in which it occurs. The justification for that might be derived from Frege's context principle: If the meaning of a word is its systematic contribution to all sentences in which it occurs, modal sentences should be considered as well as others. But this, from a Fregean point of view, is a weak defense, and I don't think it plays any role in Kripke's view either. It is weak because, following Frege's compositional conception and his clear

hostility to holistic views it is clear that the meaning of a simple sentence is prior to and independent of the meaning of a complex sentence containing it. The meaning of a word (a name) is therefore primarily its contribution to simple sentences containing it. Hence, the context principle does not provide a justification for the modal conception in the manner suggested.

Alternatively the modal conception of meaning may have its ultimate grounds in a view Wittgenstein proposed in the Tractatus to the effect that understanding a sentence should be construed as independent of the facts, or of knowing the truth of any sentence (cf. 2.0211-2.0212). This is one of the central theses of the Tractatus, which Wittgenstein later explicitly rejected. It is unclear to me whether Kripke would want to base his modal conception of meaning (and understanding) on it.

Up to here I have suggested that NN proposes an important and novel conception of meaning, according to which understanding a sentence, any sentence, involves understanding not only its actual truth conditions, but also its truth conditions in any “relevant” counterfactual situation. It may seem quite natural to regard this modal conception as a feature of the non-cognitive attitude towards reference determination, which, as I said before, dominates NN. For in holding that understanding a sentence involves knowing its truth conditions in counterfactual situations, one is in fact saying that it is independent of the facts we know (for instance, of what we know of Aristotle or dogs). \*I suggest, however, that this temptation should be resisted. A cognitive conception should not be thus reduced to knowledge of facts: Senses and the ways things are given to us are cognitive factors that are not reducible to facts and their knowledge. Moreover, our ability to assess truth conditions in counterfactual situations presumes, and is completely dependent on, our understanding their descriptions, which is itself in the realm of sense and is constrained by the ways things are given to us. Hence, it is not evident that a cognitive conception, in this broad (Fregean) sense, is incompatible with the modal notion of meaning. In the sequel I shall examine some of Kripke’s arguments against the Fregean conception. The point of this examination is not only to see whether Kripke’s

presentation is faithful to this or that feature of Frege's views, but to demonstrate at what turns Frege's cognitive conception can accommodate the modal notion of meaning, by dissociating itself from Kripke's version of the descriptive theory.\*\*

### Kripke's Challenge From a Fregean Perspective

Let us consider a typical example of the kind of arguments advanced in NN against the Fregean conception of the meaning of a name.<sup>8</sup> Consider a simple sentence like (1) "Aristotle was fond of dogs". The argument proceeds in the following main steps.

1.           The Descriptive Claim: The sense of a name like "Aristotle" is given by a description, say, "The Greatest philosopher who studied under Plato".
2.           The synonymy assumption: A name and its sense-giving description are synonymous - have the same sense.
3.           The Kripkean counterfactual move: Imagine a counterfactual situation in which Aristotle never studied under Plato, and Antisthenes was Plato's only student.
4.           The reference question: To whom does "Aristotle" refer in that counterfactual situation? – Obviously, to Aristotle, not to Antisthenes.
5.           The meaning claim: The meaning of (1) determines also its truth conditions in the counterfactual situation described (and the meaning of "Aristotle" should be construed accordingly). (cf. NN p. 30; N. Salmon RE pp. 29-30)<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> Kripke has other arguments, which I shall not discuss here. About one – an epistemic argument – I shall remark later on.

<sup>9</sup> . A typical example of Kripke's argument on this point is the following. "If 'Aristotle' meant *the man who taught Alexander the Great*, then saying 'Aristotle was a teacher of Alexander the Great' would be a mere tautology. But surely it isn't; it expresses [...] something we could discover to be false" (30). One peculiarity of this passage is the use of italics here: why doesn't Kripke put the italicized expression in quotation marks, as he does with "Aristotle"? If to say that "A" means "B" is to state a synonymy, to state that the two expressions have the same meaning, then both expressions should be mentioned – not used.

This is by now almost a standard move against the Fregean conception, and it is widely considered to be conclusive. But is it?

The argument seems to rely on some assumptions, which are worth spelling out:

- a. The meaning of a sentence is couched in terms of truth conditions.
- b. In general (perhaps always), the sense of a name is given by a description.
- c. If “m” gives the meaning (sense) of “n”, they are synonymous – have the same sense.
- d. If two expressions are synonymous they have the same reference in all possible worlds. (“Sense determines reference”).
- e. Sense is “conceptual”: it is basically a set of properties (or conditions) satisfaction of which is sufficient and necessary for determining the reference.
- f. The modal conception of meaning – understanding a sentence involves understanding its truth conditions in counterfactual situations, and understanding a term is understanding its use in such situations.

I would like to make some comments on these assumptions from a Fregean perspective.

The issues are rather intricate and I must be very brief. Let me repeat, however, what I said at the beginning, that the following is written on the assumption of the ambitious reading of NN according to which it aims as an attack on a cognitive conception of the meaning of names, and not merely on a descriptive theory of names.

A. Sense and Truth Conditions – According to a wide-spread conception, meaning is given in terms of truth: the meaning of a sentence, according to this conception, is its truth-conditions. The meaning of other, sub-sentential expressions, is their systematic contribution to the meaning of all, or at least, a distinguished class of the sentences in which they occur. This picture is often ascribed to Frege, who is even acclaimed as being its inventor.

The term “meaning” is notoriously ambiguous as between Frege’s late sense (Sinn) and reference (Bedeutung). The aforementioned conception applies, of course, to meaning in the sense of sense. However, Frege, to my knowledge, never speaks of the

sense of a sentence as its truth-conditions. By this I don't wish to deny the centrality of the notion of truth in Frege's conception of meaning (and of logic), but this in itself does not mean conceiving of the sense of a sentence as its truth-conditions. In Begriffsschrift (1879) the notion of truth is hardly used at all. Frege there explains his logical operators and logically compound sentences in terms of affirmation and denial of sentences and their possible combinations. (Likewise in his later unpublished "Boole's Logical Formula-language..." of 1882. The analogues of the affirmation-denial table in "Boole's Logical Calculus..." of 1880, though, is couched in terms of truth, in something like the modern truth tables, PW, p.11). The notion of truth and its centrality in logic and semantics comes to prominence in Frege's writings subsequent to Begriffsschrift, but, again, not in a way that warrants equating the sense of a sentence with its truth-conditions. He usually talks of the sense of a sentence as the Thought it expresses (for instance in SR and many subsequent writings), where Thought is taken as a primitive, undefinable and irreducible notion, on a par with Truth. This is particularly true of the sense of simple sentences. The closest Frege comes to the general truth-conditions conception of the sense of a sentence is in section 32 of BL:

"Every such name of a truth-value expresses a sense, a thought. Namely, by our stipulations it is determined under what conditions the name denotes the True. The sense of this name – the thought – is the thought that these conditions are fulfilled".

There is a marked difference between saying that the sense of a sentence is its truth-conditions, and saying, with Frege, that it is the thought that its truth-conditions are fulfilled. The most obvious difference is that truth-conditions are often construed extensionally: two sentences that are true in exactly the same conditions then have the same truth-conditions. On this view, the way the truth-conditions are given to us, the way we conceive of them is of no moment. This is evidently not true of Frege's conception, where the senses of two sentences may be radically different even when they have the same truth-conditions. (Tautologies are clear examples for that; statements of identity, as

argued in SR are others. I've elaborated on this elsewhere<sup>10</sup>). Frege's formulation in terms of the thought that the truth-conditions are fulfilled is evidently not open to this charge. For such thoughts may be different even when the truth-conditions concerned are extensionally the same.

In distinction to many alternative approaches, the Fregean conception is "modest", or non-reductive in its orientation. Sense is explained as the thought that the truth-conditions are satisfied. Thought and its intrinsic opacity or perspectiveness are uneliminable. There can be two different thoughts, with respect to the same truth conditions, that these truth conditions are satisfied. Hence, though sense is "couched" in terms of truth conditions, Frege would reject the thesis that the sense of a sentence is its truth conditions.

B. The Descriptive claim – This is a central and a very wide-spread assumption, but it has been rejected by many Frege scholars. I shall therefore not go into it in detail here. The idea is that the description involved is, ultimately, "pure" or "completely universal" in that it does not include names or indexicals like pronouns demonstratives etc. Ascribing it to Frege has very slim basis – a note in SR in which Frege gives an example of a case in which two persons can use the same name (with the same reference) in two different senses. When read in context this note says nothing like the general descriptive claim. It is implausible that if Frege meant the descriptive claim in this general way he would leave such a central doctrine to what can be implied by a note. In general' Frege speaks of the sense of a name as the way its reference is presented or given to us. There is no reason to suppose that this way can be expressed by such a "pure" description.

C Giving the Sense and Synonymy – This assumption is not less problematic from a Fregean perspective. In discussing meaning-determination Kripke assumes that the only way one could "give" or determine the meaning (sense) of an expression is by giving a synonymous one. Determining the meaning of "A" is accomplished by determining a synonymy between it and another expression "B". Kripke often talks this way, and passes

---

<sup>10</sup> In my The Sense of reference – Intentionality in Frege (1996), e.g. pp.172-3.

smoothly from meaning determination to synonymy determination, as if they were the same. This is a possible, and quite widespread conception, but from a Fregean perspective it is definitely not correct. Giving the sense in terms of synonymy is, for Frege, possible but trivial, almost empty, and in fact a very untypical case. From this perspective, there is something too flat or one-dimensional on the way Kripke presents the determination of meaning. One can, for example, “give” the meaning (sense) of a name by a particular way of stating what its reference is (Dummett presented Frege’s view in a similar manner, using Wittgenstein’s distinction between saying and showing). Alternatively, one can explain the meaning of a term, in a Wittgensteinian spirit, by explaining the way it is used, or by giving examples of its application, etc. Another approach, perhaps less Fregean and more Davidsonian in spirit was argued by J. McDowell<sup>11</sup>, and there are others. It is not clear which of these approaches is non-Fregean in the sense that it is incompatible with Frege’s basic doctrines about sense. In fact, at least the first two examples stated above seem to me to be compatible with Frege’s doctrines.

The sense of a name is, for Frege, the way its reference is given to us. It is not clear what “giving the sense” of an expression, as it occurs in (b), means here. The clear exception to this is the very special case of giving a definition (what Frege calls, in “Logic in Mathematics”, PW p. 212 “constructive definition”), where an expression which was senseless (“not in use”) is given sense by stipulating a definition. This is a case, in which “giving the sense” of an expression is clear, and this is a case in which such a procedure results in stating a synonymy – the two expressions have the same sense. But this is a very special case, which is rare outside mathematics and logic, and even there cannot apply to all terms. In the case of most words (names) in a natural language, one does not “give” the sense of an expression by another. Rather, the sense is expressed by using the term to refer to its reference. And even when the sense may be suggested by another

---

<sup>11</sup> “The Sense and Reference of a Proper Name”, Mind, 1977, 159-185, reprinted in M. Platts Reference Truth and Reality, 1980),

expression, they are not synonymous. The criterion of synonymy for Frege is that it must be self-evident, which is rarely, and with respect to proper names almost never, the case. Even the definitions of the natural numbers were not regarded by Frege as self evident, or as resulting in synonymous expressions. “Analytical definitions”, definitions, or explications, of terms in use, are in general not synonymous to these terms. (See PW, pp. 208-212, in particular 210).

Hence, it is very doubtful whether Frege could accept (b); I think he would reject it.

D Frege, of course, did not think of sense in terms of possible worlds or counterfactual situations, and it is hard to know what he would say on this. But in so far as this thesis expresses the Fregean doctrine that sense determines reference, it is quite Fregean in spirit.

E Thesis (d) is again objectionable from a Fregean perspective. Properties, for Frege, are concepts – the references of predicates: “I call the concepts under which an object falls its properties” (CO p. 51)

Therefore, clearly, a sense is not a property (concept) or a set of properties. The sense of a name is the way in which its reference is presented or given to us, and Frege was very clear and persistent in distinguishing it from properties of the referent (object). It is also misleading to think of the sense of a term as a condition satisfaction of which determines the reference:

“Now it is easy to become unclear about this by confounding the division into concepts and objects with the distinction between sense and meaning (reference), so that we run together sense and concept on the one hand and meaning (reference) and object on the other” (PW p. 118).

Frege’s conception of sense was intrinsically intentionalistic. A sense is not a mediating entity between a term (or a subject) and its reference – it is the way in which the reference is given, a way that is intrinsically connected to its reference. Frege’s conception of

reference is, in this light, direct; it is not mediated by a conceptual condition that the reference has to satisfy.<sup>12</sup>

We thus see that the argument against Frege's conception of meaning is inconclusive, from a Fregean point of view, independently of the modal conception of meaning. In other words, a Fregean may accept this modal conception of meaning, without accepting the argument in its entirety – he may have enough degrees of freedom to incorporate the modal conception of meaning within the general principles of his theory of sense.

Kripke advances another main argument against the descriptive theory, and claims that the theory is wrong not only with regard to the meaning of names but also with regard to the determination of their reference. This kind of argument is exemplified in detail mainly in the second lecture of NN, and has often been referred to as “the epistemic argument”. The descriptive theory allegedly claims that the reference of a name is determined by a description – “the so and so” – even though the description is not supposed to be giving the meaning (sense) of the name, i.e. the name and the description are not supposed to be synonymous. Kripke advances two arguments as against the theory.

(i) It is rarely, if ever, the case that a speaker knows or believes a description, which individuates the referent of a given name. Thus very few users of "Einstein" know or believe individuating descriptions about him (see e.g. pp. 80-2).

(ii) It is a fortiori not the case that even if the identity between a name and a description is in fact true, it is known a priori, as one could expect it to be if the referent of the name were determined by the description (see e.g. pp. 87-90). In other words, even if the description in fact applies to the referent of the name, we can easily conceive that it might turn out not to be so. And even if we strongly believe such an identity, we can easily imagine ourselves to be proved, after all, wrong.

---

<sup>12</sup> I have elaborated on this conception of sense and on its implications in *The sense of Reference – Intentionality in Frege*, De Gruyter, 1996, esp. chs. 1 and 7.

There are two remarks I wish to make about this argument, and, since I am concerned in this paper mainly with the notion of meaning (not of reference) I shall be very brief here.

1) Few people, I believe, would deny (i). It is usually handled by some version of what Putnam has called “the division of linguistic labor” (and to which Kripke himself hints in NN, see, ). But this seems to suggest that when the speech community is considered as a whole, and when we consider the meaning of a name in a language, not in this or that idiolect, Kripke’s counterexamples lose much of their force. For in the community at large some identifying descriptions of the reference are known. It is moreover hard to see, on these conditions, how a name could have a reference without its being determined by some identifying description.

2) As to (ii), if considered as a thesis against Frege’s view, much depends here on how one understands “sense” or “way of being given” or “a mode of presentation” (all translations of Frege’s Art des Gegebeseins) in these contexts. Many scholars, including notably Dummett, construe this notion as “a way of determining the referent”, something like a sort of an algorithm that one has to follow in order to get to the referent, as “a route to the reference” or a sort of a magic machine that one holds on to and slides down with it to the referent. In some very special contexts this picture of sense may be adequate and present Frege’s views fairly, but as a general picture of the senses of names, and of the Fregean notion of “a mode of presentation”, it is I believe, wrong and misleading. The mode of presentation of an object, the way it presents itself to us, as understood by Frege, need not lend itself to a non-circular descriptive articulation. The picture is naturally associated with the descriptive theory, but even when dissociated from it, it is, I believe, wrong. Debarred of this picture, there is no reason to expect a non-circular description to be a priori true of the referent. So here again, strong as the Kripkean arguments may seem to be against a descriptive theory, conjoined with the algorithmic picture of “determining the reference”, they lose much of their force when directed against a cognitive approach, which is dissociated from these.

To sum up, I believe that although its ultimate philosophical grounds may be unclear, NN makes a strong case for an important, and quite novel, modal feature of the notion of meaning. But this conception, in itself, doesn't tell against the basic principles of Frege's notion of sense. Rather, it can be incorporated within the framework of these principles. As noted in the beginning, NN may be read narrowly, as launching an attack on the descriptive conception of names. This of course is important enough, and from this perspective the question of whether Frege actually held such a position is of minor significance. NN may be read, however, more broadly as having a more ambitious aim: to discard any cognitive conception of meaning and of reference-determination. It is under this more ambitious reading that NN is rightly regarded as a landmark in the philosophy of language, and this, I believe, is the way many people have read it. For people like myself, who believe that Frege founded and paved a way for a viable cognitive conception of meaning, an argument against such a conception cannot disregard Frege's actual views (even if amended here there). If the arguments in NN are not directed against them as they are, its sting against a cognitive conception of sense is somewhat blunted.

This may hold good, however, also if we disregard Frege's actual views. It is enough if a non-descriptive, cognitive conceptions of sense and of reference determination are viable, if they can be based on the notion of a way of being given (objects and other types of referents). For any such view the Kripkean arguments may remain effective against a descriptive conception of sense and of reference determination, but leave untouched the other sort of cognitive approach to these notions.

REFERENCES and ABBREVIATIONS

- Bar-Elli, G - The Sense of Reference – Intentionality in Frege, De Gruyter, 1996.
- Carnap, R - Meaning and Necessity, University of Chicago Press, 1956.
- Dummett, M - The Logical Basis of Metaphysics, Harvard University Press, 1991.
- The Interpretation of Frege, Duckworth, 1981.
- The Seas of Language
- Frege, G - Translations From the Philosophical Writings of Frege (Geach and Black, eds.), Blackwell, 1951.
- SR - “On Sense and Reference” (in Frege (1951), pp.
  - CO - “Concept and Object” (in Frege (1951) pp.
  - PW - Posthumous Writings, (translated by Long and White) Basil Blackwell, 1979.
- Kripke, S - - NN - Naming and Necessity, Harvard, 1980.
- SRSR - “Speaker’s Reference and Semantic Reference”, in Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language (edited by P. French et.al.), 1979, pp.6-28.
- Wittgenstein on Rule Following and Private Language
- McDowell, J. On the Sense and Reference of Proper Names”, Mind, 1977.
- Salmon, N - Reference and Essence, Princeton University Press, 1981.
- Wettstein, H - “has Semantics Rested On a Mistake?”, JP 1986, pp.185-209.
- Wittgenstein, L - Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus (translated by Pears and McGuinness) Routledge, 1971.