

## Proper Names and Reference

Wylie Breckenridge

I shall take a proposition to be any function from possible worlds to truth values, a property to be any function from possible worlds to extensions, and I shall assume that by asserting a sentence we intend to determine a proposition, and to say of that proposition that in the actual world it is true.

According to what I shall call the *simple view*, the contribution that a proper name makes to the determination of a proposition is the determination of an individual, and no more than that. If two proper names determine the same individual, then they will make the same contribution to the determination of a proposition, and so they can be used interchangeably in sentences without changing the proposition that those sentences determine. When I assert, “Clark Kent likes chocolate”, I use the proper name “Clark Kent” to determine an individual, *c*, the predicate “likes chocolate” to determine a property, *C*, and thereby the whole sentence to determine the proposition, *p*, which is true in exactly those worlds in which *c* exists and is in the extension of *C*. I used “Clark Kent” to determine *c* and thereby *p*, but I could have used “Superman” and still have determined *c* and *p*.

The theories of Russell and Frege are not like this. According to Russell, the contribution of “Clark Kent” to the determination of a proposition is not the determination of an individual. “Clark Kent likes chocolate” determines the proposition that is true in a world iff the property *ClarkKentHood* is uniquely instantiated in that world and everything that has that property also likes chocolate, where *ClarkKentHood* is something like the property that is true of an individual iff that individual is male, is a reporter, is cowardly, and so on. “Clark Kent” contributes to the determination of this proposition by picking out the property *ClarkKentHood* and signalling that a claim is being made about it, including the claim that it is uniquely instantiated. Similarly, “Superman likes chocolate” determines the proposition that is true in a world iff the property *SupermanHood* is uniquely instantiated in that world and everything that has that property also likes chocolate, where *SupermanHood* is something like the property that is true of an individual iff that individual is male, is brave, does good deeds, wears an outfit with a big “S”, and so on. “Superman” contributes to the determination of this proposition by picking out the property *SupermanHood* and signalling that a claim is being made about it, including the claim that it is uniquely instantiated. Even though in the actual world the propositions that are determined in each case are both true they are nevertheless distinct - there is a possible world, for instance, in which *ClarkKentHood* is uniquely instantiated and in which whatever has *ClarkKentHood* likes chocolate (and so in which the first is true), but in which *SupermanHood* is not instantiated at all (and so in which the second is false).

According to Frege, I use “Clark Kent likes chocolate” to express a ‘thought’. A thought is much like a proposition in being a mind-independent abstract object that you and I both grasp when we understand what I have said, and in determining a truth value in each possible world. But thoughts are more fine-grained - they are individuated not only by the truth values that they determine, but also by the ‘way’ in which they determine them. So, unlike propositions, distinct thoughts may determine the same truth value in every world. I use “Clark Kent” to express a ‘sense’. The sense that a proper name determines is something like a function from possible worlds to individuals in those

worlds, but again more fine-grained - they are individuated not only by the individual that they determine, but also by the 'way' in which they determine them, and distinct senses may determine the same individual in every world. The sense determined by a proper name is something like a complex description of an individual. The sense of "Clark Kent", for instance, may be something like "is male, is a reporter, is cowardly, ...", whereas the sense of "Superman" maybe something like "is male, is brave, does good deeds, wears an outfit with a big 'S', ...". When I use a proper name in a sentence it contributes to the sentence's expression of a thought by expressing a sense, and that sense becomes a component of the thought. If I were to use in its place a proper name with a different sense, then my utterance would express a different thought, even if the functions determined by the proper names determine the same individual in each world. According to Frege, when I say "Clark Kent likes chocolate" and "Superman likes chocolate" I determine different thoughts because I use proper names with different senses, and even though these thoughts determine the same truth value in the actual world, they are nevertheless distinct.

By way of motivation for the simple view, let me point out one problem for these theories. Lois might well agree to me saying, "Clark Kent might not have been a reporter". But according to both Russell and Frege she ought not to - I am asserting the possible truth of a proposition that they declare necessarily false. According to Russell, that proposition is the one that is true in a world iff ClarkKentHood is uniquely instantiated in that world and whatever has ClarkKentHood in that world is not a reporter. But it is part of the condition for an individual, in any world, to have ClarkKentHood that it be a reporter, so the proposition is necessarily false. The problem for Frege is similar. According to him, part of the sense of "Clark Kent" is being a reporter, and the sense of "is not a reporter" is not being a reporter, and so the thought which has these as components will determine the value "True" in a world only if there is an individual in that world which both is and is not a reporter, and there are no such worlds. Modal considerations like this strengthen the intuition that the simple view is on the right track - that a proper name is used to pick out *one* individual with which to test the truth of a proposition in *every* world, rather than to pick out, for *each* world, an individual *in that world* with which to test the truth of a proposition *in that world*. That is, to pick out one individual for *every* world, rather than one individual for *each* world. Or, perhaps more clearly, to pick out an individual, rather than a function from possible worlds to individuals.

But there is a problem for the simple view too. Suppose I were to say to Lois Lane, "Clark Kent likes chocolate", and then, "Superman likes chocolate", believing that I have used "Clark Kent" and "Superman" to determine the same individual, and thus that I have used each sentence to determine the same proposition. Lois may well find *both* claims informative, suggesting that she thinks that the second may have been false even if the first is true, thereby suggesting that she thinks I have determined different propositions (if she thinks that they are identical, then she ought to think that they have the same truth value in the actual world). How can the simple view account for Lois thinking that I have determined different propositions, when all I have done is use "Superman" instead of "Clark Kent", and when both determine the same individual?

There are some obvious ways, but the example can be strengthened to render them unsatisfactory. First, it might be that Lois *does* think that I have determined identical propositions, but fails to see that I have just asserted the truth of it twice. Against this,

and anything similar, lets add that Lois is perfectly attentive and rational, or whatever it would take to make this defence implausible. Second, it might be that Lois *does* think that I have determined identical propositions and *does* think that I have asserted its truth twice, but is informed by *something else* that I said with my second utterance but not my first, perhaps something conversationally implied by it. Against this we can add that I ask Lois what she finds informative in the second case, to which she replies that the proposition I determined is true. Third, it might be that Lois is mistaken about which individual either or both of my proper names determine, and so is mistaken about which proposition either or both of my assertions determine. Against this we can add that Lois, to clarify my assertions, brings me the man that she thinks “Clark Kent” refers to and I agree with her, and then the man that she thinks “Superman” refers to, and again I agree with her. Then it is implausible to suggest she might be mistaken in either case, and so implausible for a defender of the simple view to suggest that we might disagree about which proposition has been determined. For anyone concerned by this extension of the story relying on me and Lois both coming into causal contact with the same individual in each case, we can drop the extension and consider the following. Suppose Lois were to come to believe that “Clark Kent” and “Superman” determine the same individual. It is implausible that she would then say, “Oh, now I see who you meant by ‘Superman’. Before, I thought you were talking about someone else”. It *is* plausible, however, that she would say, “Oh, I knew who you were talking about in each case, but I didn’t realise they are the same person”.

The strengthened story shows that if the simple view is right then it is possible for me to determine two propositions, for us to agree in each case about which proposition has been determined, for me to think that they are identical, but for Lois to think they are distinct. Should we accept this and just be surprised, or take it to be a *reductio* of the simple view?

(Note that there is no problem here for Russell and Frege. According to Russell, my assertions of “Clark Kent likes chocolate” and “Superman likes chocolate” do not determine the same proposition. There are possible worlds in which the proposition determined by the first is true but in which that determined by the second is false, so it is no surprise that Lois might find it informative to be told that in the actual world not only is the first true, but so is the second. According to Frege, my assertions do not express the same thought. There are worlds in which the first thought is true and the second thought is false, so again it is no surprise that Lois might find it informative to be told that in the actual world not only is the first thought true, but so is the second.)

Nathan Salmon suggests that we should accept this result and, in fact, not be surprised – it is an example of a more general phenomenon that is well known to us: recognition failure.<sup>1</sup> In each case Lois knows which individual I determine, and she knows which proposition I determine, she just fails to recognise that the individuals and hence the propositions are identical. She fails to recognise that my second claim is the same as my first, and so she fails to recognise that what she accepts in the second case she has already accepted in the first. Had she not failed to recognise – had she recognised that the individual I determined with “Superman” is the same individual that I determined with “Clark Kent” then she would not have found my second assertion informative. What Salmon is saying here is nothing stranger than what seems like the right thing to say in the following case. I have a friend and I know that she likes chocolate. She comes

---

<sup>1</sup> *Frege’s Puzzle*. Bradford, 1986.

to my house one day dressed in disguise, and I don't recognise her. I ask her in and, having nothing but chocolate to offer her, ask if she likes chocolate. She tells me that I *know* that she likes chocolate. I say, "no I don't". She takes off her disguise then I say, "oh, yes I do. I didn't recognise you." I know what she said, and I know that it's true. I just didn't recognise it.

Suppose that this is the right thing for a defender of the simple view to say. Still, he has another problem. Consider Lois' state after my (informative) assertion, "Clark Kent likes chocolate", but before my (informative) assertion, "Superman likes chocolate". It is natural for me to say that "Lois believes that Clark Kent likes chocolate" is true, but that "Lois believes that Superman likes chocolate" is false. But *I* recognise that "Clark Kent" and "Superman" determine the same individual, and so *I* should recognise that these sentences determine the same proposition, and so *I* should recognise that their truth values are the same. So why do I say that one is true and the other false? Salmon suggests that the ordinary binary relation of belief between a subject and a proposition should be analysed in terms of a *ternary* relation of belief\* between a subject, a proposition, and something else, which I shall call a *guise*. A guise is something like a manner of presentation to a subject. Propositions can be presented to a subject in more than one guise, just like my friend can be presented to me in more than one guise. Just as whether or not I recognise my friend depends upon the guise in which she is presented, whether or not I believe\* a proposition depends upon the guise in which it is presented. What I'm denying, Salmon suggests, when I declare that "Lois believes that Superman likes chocolate" is false, is not that she stands in the belief relation to the proposition determined by "Superman likes chocolate", but that she stands in the belief\* relation to the proposition when it is presented in the guise determined by that sentence. There *is* a sense, also, in which I might say that "Lois believes that Superman likes chocolate" is *true* - Lois *does* believe it, although she doesn't recognise it when it is presented to her in that particular guise (i.e. with those particular words). What I'm affirming in this case is not that Lois stands in the belief\* relation to the proposition determined by "Superman likes chocolate" in the guise determined by this sentence, but that she stands in the belief\* relation to the proposition and *one* of its guises (for example, its guise when determined by "Clark Kent likes chocolate"), which, for Salmon, is what it means to stand in the belief relation to that proposition.

If what Salmon says is right, then we have a way of defending the simple view against the problems posed by my Clark Kent/Superman case, and more generally against the Hesperus/Phosphorous and other standard cases. But does Salmon's solution allow us to maintain, in the spirit of that view, that the task of a proper name is simply to refer? At first sight the answer might seem to be no - Salmonian guises are just like Fregean senses. But they do play quite different roles in their theories. For Frege, a proper name expresses a sense which determines, for each possible world, an individual - possibly different individuals for different worlds - which contributes to the determination of a truth value in that world. The sense acts like a function from possible worlds to individuals. For Salmon, a proper name determines a guise, the guise determines an individual, and the individual contributes to the determination of a truth value in every world. The guise acts like a function from a singleton set to individuals. The main difference between Salmonian guises and Fregean senses is the point at which they determine an individual. A guise determines an individual in order to determine a proposition. A sense determines an individual in order to determine the truth value of a proposition. This difference allows Salmon to avoid the problems faced by Frege when

dealing with modal propositions. Salmon's theory adds an extra detail to the simple view. According to it, the role of a proper name is to determine an individual. According to Salmon, the role is to determine a guise, and the guise then determines an individual. This extra detail is what allows him to avoid the problems posed by the Clark Kent/Superman case. But the extra detail makes it less clear that proper names do nothing more than refer. When it comes to determining a proposition that's all they do, in the sense that proper names that determine the same individual can be used interchangeably to determine the same proposition. But when it comes to making informative assertions they do more - proper names that determine the same individual can be used to make the same claim about the same proposition, but not necessarily in a way that is equally informative.