"Paging Dr. Lauben! Dr. Gustav Lauben!": Some Questions about Individualism and Competence

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1. introduction

Consensus has it that Frege is the arch proponent of the objectivity of content, that he is the very paradigm of a theorist who holds that the thoughts we entertain and communicate, and the senses of which they are composed, are public, not private, property.[1]

This view of Frege is well-founded: almost everything he wrote contains a stab at the psychologistic views about content prevalent among his idealist and empiricist contemporaries, and his central complaint against them is that they are unable to account for the shared nature, the intersubjective accessibility, of content. Frege argues that what are taken to be the building blocks of content, on a psychologistic approach—i.e., ideas, impressions, conceptions, and so on—are private and subjective, but that content cannot be private property, because the existence of so many human institutions depends on our co-operative capacity to think and talk about the very same things. This view is premised on such classic passages as: "it cannot well be denied that mankind possesses a common treasure of thoughts which is transmitted from generation to generation" (1892: 177).[2] It is also part of this view that, biographically speaking, Frege's top priority is to prove that arithmetic rests on the most solid ground possible—that "the laws of arithmetic are analytic judgements and consequently a priori" (1884: 99). That Frege is lead to his groundbreaking work on content down this avenue goes some way toward explaining why he ends up being such a zealous defender of the objectivity of content. To some extent, his views about content are tailored to suit this end of establishing the objective validity of the truths of arithmetic.

I'll call this the canonical view of Frege on content:

Since the objectivity of content is a precondition for many actual phenomena (including especially mathematics), private subjective stuff cannot be constituents of content, and idiosyncratic psychological facts about individual agents do not infect or affect the identity of content.

There are, however, a number of remarks in the Fregean corpus that are in tension with this view. This paper is centered on an investigation of the most notorious and extreme such passage: the 'Dr. Lauben' example, from Frege (1918). The essay falls (roughly, with considerable overlap) into two parts. First, the principal aim of sections 2 through 5 is to attain more clarity on the evident tension within Frege's views on content, between this dominant objectivism and some elements that seem to run counter to it, via developing an understanding of the 'Dr. Lauben' example. Second, in sections 6 through 9, I will argue that this interpretation goes some way toward undermining some prevalent contemporary views about language.[3] Based on the advice of Dr. Lauben, I will argue against a certain understanding of the causal-historical theory of reference—more specifically, of the phenomenon of deferential uses of linguistic expressions—upon which these views are premised, and I will draw out some morals that pertain to individualism and competence.

2. a preliminary complication

At least since the development of the causal-historical theory of reference,[4] it is widely held that there are some subjectivist strains in Frege's thought. There is controversy about the historical accuracy of the readings of Frege presupposed in these causal-theoretic arguments,[5] and rightly so—toward the end of unseating some longstanding descriptivist views of reference, in order to pave the way for some fresh and seminal insights, some unsubtle caricatures of Frege were set up and knocked down. Regardless of the exact degree to which these allegations are rhetorical, as

opposed to historical, though, briefly considering two such charges will help to sharpen my focal questions.

(a) One of Kripke's (1972) many strands of argument against what he calls 'the Frege-Russell theory' criticizes it for not giving due weight to the role played in naming practices by other elements of the speaker's community. Consider:

> The [Frege-Russell] picture … is something like this: One is isolated in a room; the entire community of speakers, everything else, could disappear; and one determines the reference for himself by saying—'By [the name 'N'] I shall mean [whoever the description 'the F' denotes]. Now you can do this if you want to. There's nothing really preventing it. … But that's not what most of us do. … [I]nstead, a chain of communication going back to [the referent, N] has been established, [and one is able to refer to N] by virtue of his membership in a community which passed the name on from link to link, not by a ceremony that he makes in his private study… (1972: 91)

Kripke attributes to Frege the view that it is up to individuals to decide what a name contributes to content. There is, it seems, nothing essentially public about content (at least in the case of names).

(b) Kaplan (1989) alleges that the subjectivist element in Frege's and Russell's views on naming practices is a symptom of a deeper problem, that their entire conception of a language gives too much autonomy to individual speakers. On his view, Frege fails to accommodate the point that, not just naming practices, but languages themselves, are things that speakers inherit from their community, rather than create for themselves. Kaplan discusses:

> … the feeling one gets in reading Russell on logically proper names, and even more so in reading Frege, that, like Humpty Dumpty, everyone runs their own language. When we speak, we *assign* meanings to words; the words themselves do not *have* meanings… [T]he *assignment* of meanings is subjective, and thus the *semantics* is subjective. (1989: 600)

Here we have the further suggestion that there is something fundamentally subjectivist about Frege's views. How are we to square this with the common store of objective thoughts?

3. subjectivism, individualism, and the transparency of content

The first step comes with some distinctions. Let us reserve the term 'subjectivism' for the view that content is private property, that everyone has their own store of content of which they are in charge and over which they enjoy full authority and autonomy. This is the view that Frege finds implicit in the works of his idealist and empiricist contemporaries, and against it he is unequivocally and consistently anti-subjectivist. (Note that Russell, at places, endorses subjectivism about names, claiming that we do not mean the same thing, or really know what anyone else means, by uses both of logically proper names (such as 'this') and of ordinary proper names (such as 'Bismarck' or 'Rumania').[6] However, Frege never espouses any such claim.)

I'll use 'individualism' to refer to the view that competent speakers each individually have a grasp on the conditions for the correct application of their terms. (One specific brand of individualism, which might be attributed to Frege, is the view that a term's contribution to content is a concept (or sense) that specifies conditions for membership in its extension, and competence with a term is a matter of grasping the semantic association between the term and those conditions.) Unlike subjectivism, individualism is consistent with there being a common store of thoughts; it is just that, from the private isolation of one's room, without the help of experts, competent speakers are themselves able to tap into the precise confines of that common store. Frege is an individualist about content, in this sense, which is why, even though he holds that content is objective public property, the allegation that, for Frege, content is in the head is not off-base—i.e., the factors that determine a term's extension are introspectively accessible to speakers. The causal-historical theory is both anti-subjectivist and anti-individualist, at least for certain kinds of term.[7] On that view, competence with such terms as 'Feynman' or 'elm' does not require a grasp of the conditions for being the referent.

Among the other, more or less closely related, senses of the term 'individualism' in the literature, one central sense names the view that content is determined by factors intrinsic to the individual agent—i.e., that the precise content of my thought that water quenches thirst, or that Plato taught Aristotle, depends only on what goes on from the skin inward. In this second sense, individualism is committed to the view that two doppelgangers entertain exactly the same content, regardless of the differences between their environments. It is common to view Frege as an individualist in this sense, but this question is a little more complex.[8] This allegation depends on holding Frege to the tenet that what one is able to think and say depends only on factors intrinsic to the agent, and not on one's causal and communicative history; and it is not clear that Frege would happily accept this. On the one hand, Frege does not disavow the scarcely deniable view that interactions with one's community and environment effect precisely what one is able to think and to talk about. On the other hand, though, this path leads to tension with the introspective accessibility of content.[9] So, whether or not Frege would not have explicitly espoused this intrinsic-intentionality brand of individualism, then, he may be committed to it indirectly.

Individualism in this second sense has certainly done much rhetorical work in recent debates, as this much-maligned, pre-Brentano view that what one thinks about is an intrinsic fact about one's mind admits of stark contrast with the more extrinsic view of intentionality inherent in the causal-historical theory. On the causal-historical view, the referent is not solely determined by anything intrinsic about the speaker, but also depends on relations in which speakers stand to other elements of their community and to their environment.

For the present, I shall leave aside questions about the relations between these two senses of 'individualism' and stick to the first sense, according to which individualism is the view that

competent speakers each individually have a grasp on the conditions for the correct application of their terms. Again, Frege is explicitly an individualist in this sense. Like most anyone prior to, say, Wittgenstein (1953), and Kripke's (1972) and Putnam's (1975) work on natural kind terms,[10] he takes it as axiomatic that content is transparent to competent speakers. (To say that content is transparent is to claim that content is fully accessible to, in no way hidden from, speakers who entertain and express it. In particular, proponents of transparency hold that the criteria that determine the extensions of an expression are introspectively available to anyone who grasps the expression.) This, I take it, is the root of Frege's individualism.[11] It would not have occurred to Frege to argue in favor of transparency. However, several debates in the philosophical study of mind and language, over the last few decades, have focused on these questions of transparency, on the relations between what is introspectively accessible to competent speakers and what constitutes the content of their thoughts and utterances.

So the suggestion that emerges is that the allegations of Kripke and Kaplan concern not subjectivism about content but rather the transparency of content.[12] Frege is at once anti-subjectivist and individualist: while all heads have access to the same objective content, individuals are nonetheless autonomous to individuate the precise content of what they are thinking, or saying. I call this the revised canonical view of Frege on content:

Content is objective but completely introspectively available to competent subjects.

I will assume that this view is coherent, and that it explains how the canonical anti-subjectivist Frege can consistently espouse these strains of individualism. Both assumptions could benefit from further scrutiny; but my target here concerns what Frege says about content, in the following passage.

4. paging Dr. Lauben

Here is the excerpt, from Frege (1918: 207):

Consider the following case. Dr. Gustav Lauben says, 'I have been wounded'. Leo Peter hears these words and remarks some days later, 'Dr. Gustav Lauben has been wounded'. Does this sentence express the same [content] as the one Dr. Lauben uttered himself? Suppose that Rudolph Lingens were present when Dr. Lauben spoke and now hears what is related by Leo Peter. If the same [content] is uttered by Dr. Lauben and Leo Peter then Rudolph Lingens, who is fully master of the language and remembers what Dr. Lauben has said in his presence, must now know at once from Leo Peter's report that the same thing is under discussion. But knowledge of a language is a separate thing when it is a matter of proper names. It may well be the case that only a few people associate a particular [content] with the sentence 'Dr. Lauben has been wounded'. In this case one needs for complete understanding a knowledge of the expression 'Dr. Lauben'. Now if both Leo Peter and Rudolph Lingens understand by 'Dr. Lauben' the doctor who lives as the only doctor in a house known to both of them, then they both understand the sentence 'Dr. Lauben has been wounded' in the same way, they associate the same [content] with it. But it is also possible that Rudolph Lingens does not know Dr. Lauben personally and does not know that he is the person who recently said, 'I have been wounded'. In this case Rudolph Lingens cannot know that the same thing is in question. I say, therefore, in this case: the [content] which Leo Peter expresses is not the same as that which Dr. Lauben uttered.

Suppose further that Herbert Garner knows that Dr. Gustav Lauben was born on the 13th September, 1875 in N.N. and this is not true of anyone else; against this, suppose that he does not know where Dr. Lauben now lives nor indeed anything about him. On the other hand, suppose that Leo Peter does not know that Dr. Lauben was born on 13th September, 1875 in N.N. Then, as far as the proper name 'Dr. Gustav Lauben' is concerned, Herbert Garner and Leo Peter do not speak the same language, since, although they do in fact refer to the same man with the name, they do not know that they do so. Therefore Herbert Garner does not associate the same [content] with the sentence 'Dr. Gustav Lauben has been wounded' as Leo Peter wants to express with it.

Frege here concedes that the content of one unambiguous sentence can vary from speaker to speaker. Contra the canonical view, private psychological stuff does affect what content is expressed with an utterance. Contra the revised interpretation, not only is the content expressed not introspectively available (i.e., even though "Rudolph Lingens … is fully master of the language", he does not "know at once" the content expressed with Leo Peter's utterance) it is also, it seems, not objective (i.e., there is no one thought, out of the common store, expressed by 'Dr. Gustav Lauben has been wounded'). Ultimately, this line of thought entails that no two speakers speak the same language, as no two speakers will associate exactly the same content

with every single name. This sounds like a rather radical subjectivism, hardly befitting the great defender of the objectivity of content.

I will argue that this passage is consistent with a suitably qualified version of the revised interpretation. The qualification is that proper names are to be set off as anomalous special cases. It is not that there is anything subjective, or private, about content; it is rather that, because of the atypical nature of the semantic link between name and referent, that which determines the referent of a name is not introspectively accessible to competent speakers. The point that Frege struggles with here is, it turns out, a critical point at the root of the causal-historical theory: Transparency fails for names, because, unlike other types of expression, there is no one uniquely identifying reference-determining condition semantically associated with a name. (I will explain and defend this compact claim, over the next few sections.) Dr. Lauben prescribes that we restrict the scope of, rather than abandon, the revised canonical interpretation.

5. the required qualification

Call an expression 'descriptive' if and only if it is semantically associated with a condition that specifies: (a) what must be grasped in order to competently use and understand it, (b) what it takes to be (among) the referent,[13] and (c) the term's contribution to content. I call this property 'descriptive' because definite descriptions are paradigm cases—'the tallest woman in Mongolia', for instance, semantically expresses a condition the grasp of which constitutes competence with the expression, the extension is whatever satisfies that condition, and that condition is the expression's contribution to content. In its most specific sense, 'descriptivism' denotes the view that names are descriptive—Russell holds this view, and Frege says some things that suggest affinity for it.[14] There is a more general usage, according to which 'descriptivism' denotes the

view that this is how reference works, that words hook onto and express information about specific things by expressing a condition that determines an extension. Underlying this generalized descriptivism is a general picture of how substantive expressions (i.e., common nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs) relate to the minds of speakers and to things in the world—from 'doctor' to 'wounded' to 'beach rock', expressions are semantically associated with a defining condition, those who are competent with the expression grasp this association, and the expression is used to transmit information about the things that satisfy the condition. That condition is the word's contribution to content.

The causal-historical theorists argue against descriptivism, for certain kinds of expression.[15] Specifically, they argue that names are not descriptive: in the case of 'Aristotle', for instance, its relation to speakers' heads, to a referent, and to content, is rather unlike that in the case of 'the tallest woman in Mongolia'—there is no one uniquely identifying condition semantically associated with 'Aristotle' that is introspectively accessible to all of those who use it, the grasp of which constitutes competence with the name, and which is its one objective contribution to content.[16] From here, the causal-historical theorists build a positive view of how the referent of a name is determined. This view explains how utterances of names can be about something, not via identifying conditions grasped by the speaker and expressed by the name, but rather via a succession of uses of the name, linking back to an initial connection between word and referent. The account explains why transparency can fail, in the case of names, why referring to Aristotle does not depend on the ability to identify him.

Herein lies the required restriction to the revised canonical view prescribed by Dr. Lauben. The point with which Frege wrestles in this passage is precisely a critical point at the root of the causal-historical theory, that names are not descriptive. Knowledge of a language is a

separate thing when it comes to proper names because names are semantically atypical, in that they do not semantically express and contribute to content any single reference-determining condition. Unlike in the case of other kinds of expression, there is no one specific thing that need be operative in one's head in order to talk about Dr. Lauben; there is no one thought, out of the common store, that is semantically associated with that, or any, name.

The point that names are not descriptive is of course not original. My more ambitious aims are to defend the following two conclusions: [1] this point is occurring to Frege, however dimly, in the 'Dr. Lauben' example, and this explains what otherwise seems to be a concession to subjectivism about content, and [2] properly understood, this point only applies to proper names.[17] As I'll now proceed to argue, understanding precisely why names are not descriptive is in tension with a prevalent understanding of the morals of the causal-historical theory of reference.

6. the extent of the failure of transparency

Some (see note 3) move from this premise that names are non-descriptive to the conclusion that the descriptivist picture of how language functions is fundamentally wrong-headed and obsolete. They take an extreme position in the stampede away from transparency initiated by the causal-historical theory, categorically rejecting transparency as a Cartesian hangover.[18] However, recent work allows us to define what counts as being relevantly similar to 'Dr. Lauben'.[19] There is a reason why knowledge of a language is a separate thing in the case of names. They form a limited, atypical set, performing a distinctive semantic function of tagging or labeling; this particular line of explanation for why transparency fails for names (based on the role that causal-

historical chains of transmission play in determining their reference) does not apply to expressions that semantically express a defining condition.

Compare the expressions ‘Gustav’ and ‘doctor’. The semantic function of the former is to single something out; that of the latter is to express a property and designate things that have that property. (As for ‘doctor’, the same for ‘wounded’, and so, generally, for most any substantive expression.) Unlike ‘doctor’, which semantically expresses a condition for membership in its extension, ‘Gustav’ does not specify anything about anyone—i.e., there are no properties required in order to be called ‘Gustav’. As Mill (1843) famously observes, names uniquely identify, but not via semantically specifying any property or condition. The link between name and named is stipulative; whereas the link between most expressions and what they are about is mediated by a condition semantically associated with the expression, that is shared among interlocutors, and that is roughly and fallibly but pretty reliably related to the term’s extension. In contrast to typical substantive expressions, there is no one uniquely identifying defining condition for a name to contribute to content. Thus, there is a (somewhat vague but nonetheless useful and explanatory) general criterion for competence with a term—i.e., roughly, grasp of its conditions of satisfaction—and there is a reason why it does not apply to names—i.e., proper names do not have these sorts of conditions of satisfaction.

Here are two points to further illustrate the atypical semantic status of names. The first is that proper names have radically different inferential properties than other substantive expressions. Consider, for instance, the case of analytic truths. Compare what is plausibly analytically true of all wounds or all beach rocks with what might be analytically true of all things that could be called ‘Gustav’. It is undeniable that—whatever one thinks about the much-maligned analytic/synthetic distinction—the claim that there are analytic connections among

typical substantive expressions like ‘wounded’ or ‘beach rock’ is considerably stronger than the correlative claim involving proper names. Second, ever the good Millian, Soames (2002: 71-72) explicitly defends the claim that competence with a name is quite a thin, syntactic matter, a matter of knowing that asserting ‘N is F’ involves saying of N that it is F. Surely this does not apply to substantive expressions in general—i.e., this thin syntactic knowledge is far from sufficient for competence with, say, specific adjectives and verbs. The claim that names are connotationless tags is considerably stronger than the claim that adjectives are, or that verbs are, and so on. Both these points are further evidence of the unique semantic status of names, and hence are further reason to reject this neo-Russellian inference from premises about proper names to conclusions about linguistic expressions in general.

So, these causal-theoretic considerations support Kaplan’s (1989: 607) observation: “The Babylonians knew what Hesperus was, and knew what Phosphorus was, but didn’t know that they were the same”. That the referent of a name is not determined via some defining characteristic explains why competence with a name does not depend on the ability to discriminate or identify the referent. There are attempts to generalize this failure of transparency, without further argument, to the general run of linguistic expressions;[20] but surely we would need some good solid arguments to convince us to so drastically sever content from what is in the head. To the contrary, there are grounds to hold that one cannot be competent with ‘ketchup’ and ‘catsup’ while thinking that they are disjoint substances, because that would be ruled out by a grasp of the conditions the terms semantically express. True, one could use ‘ketchup’, just as surely as ‘molybdenum’, without much of a grasp on it; but that just establishes that a competent messenger need not fully grasp the content of the message. There is still a relevant difference between these terms and proper names. There is something that counts as understanding the term

'ketchup', in a way that does not apply to 'Aristotle'. It is precisely the grasp of what it takes to count as ketchup, of the reference-determining condition that is the term's contribution to content; and, according to the fundamentals of the causal-historical theory, no such correlative point applies to proper names (i.e., the theory denies that there is a uniquely identifying condition one needs to grasp for competence with 'Aristotle').

Thus, the considerations against transparency for proper names, with which Frege struggles in the above passage, do not support conclusions about other linguistic expressions. Of course, there are other lines of argument against transparency. A central aim of the next three sections is to develop a better understanding of the most deep and sweeping such line of argument, and of precisely what it shows about individualism and competence.

7. what about deference?

Burge (1979b: 80) emphasizes that "most of our vocabulary is taken over from others who, being specialists, understand our terms better than we do". Does this show that transparency can fail for any expression? Well, it might turn out to, but that needs arguing. It does force us to be more careful about the notion of competence.[21] Even if Frege is wrong to demand a grasp of a precise reference-determining condition for competence, that hardly shows that competence is compatible with all manner of ignorance and error. Again, there are principled differences between these specialists' terms and 'Gustav'. In the case of the specialist's terms, there is one item in the common store of thoughts that speakers are able to tap into with help from others; but there is no one concept of Gustav out there. 'Molybdenum' semantically expresses a certain elementary property; although one can use the term without knowing precisely which property, it

is still very different from ‘Gustav’, which just names someone, without semantically expressing any characteristics or features.

The phenomenon of deference is real and prevalent; no one should deny that the medium of language provides a means for speakers to express things that they have no firm grasp on. This shows interesting things about our linguistic behavior, but it does not yet show that most any expression is relevantly similar to a name, in the respects discussed above. Introducing expressions to directly name a specific individual creates terms with a distinctive stipulative semantic link to a referent. Further down the chain, this engenders the ability to entertain and express content about the referent of a name, without a grasp of conditions that single it out. This explanation, per se, does not apply to terms that are semantically linked to a defining characteristic.

One thing that is for certain is this: the notions of ‘competence’ and ‘deference’ stand in need of some careful critical work, before any firm conclusions should be drawn.

8. deference and competence

The Fregean view is that, typically, terms are descriptive, and hence their precise contribution to content is introspectively accessible to speakers. (This holds true of all terms, according to the canonical view from which we began, and of terms except names, according to the view of Frege defended up to here.) The neo-Russellian view is that transparency can fail for all sorts of terms—if ‘ketchup’ then, in principle, what not?—and hence that the descriptive paradigm is much less applicable than Frege would have us believe.

Underlying this contrast are two distinct notions of competence: there is the Fregean notion, which I’ll call competence[1], according to which competence demands a grasp of a

(more or less rough) reference-determining condition; and there is the neo-Russellian notion, henceforth competence[2], according to which competence with a term is compatible with being ignorant of or mistaken about precisely what it refers to. Transparency is built into competence[1]; failures of transparency are built into competence[2]. Competence[2] is a matter of standing in an appropriate causal-historical relation to the referent; competence[1], in contrast, is a matter of having in mind the appropriate conditions of satisfaction. Competence[2] may well be necessary, but is certainly quite far from sufficient, for competence[1].

Crudely put, the neo-Russellian view is that the causal-historical theory—specifically, the cases of ignorant but deferential speakers who are nonetheless able to use the relevant expressions to refer[22]—has shown competence[1] to be obsolete. At least two points should be made in response to this. First, strictly speaking, the arguments only undermine the appropriateness of competence[1] for a limited range of terms (i.e., a certain set of semantically unstructured referring expressions) and do not support any conclusions about linguistic expressions generally. These points about what it takes to refer to Feynman or elms do not show that, say, one does not need to grasp the relevant conditions of satisfaction in order to count as competent with, say, 'and' (or 'green' or 'wounded' or 'politician'); or that ordinary substantive terms are more like 'Feynman' than 'and' in this respect. Second, even in these cases, it is, at best, misleading to suggest that any specific sharp notion of competence[2] has been established. That is, conceding that the phenomenon of deference shows that competence[1] is not a necessary condition for participation in the communication of information, in these sorts of cases, does not show that competence[2] is the only or best option left standing, for ordinary or for theoretical purposes. Concerning ordinary purposes, intuitions pull in both directions, on the question of whether Kripke's person in the street counts as competent with 'Feynman', or

whether Putnam counts as competent with ‘beech’. As for theoretical purposes, what the phenomenon of deference shows is that questions of competence are more complicated than either Frege or the neo-Russellians let on. Let us explore this a little further.

Let us start from proper names. Our ordinary uses of names stretch along a continuum, from deferential to autonomous. At one extreme, there are the sorts of cases wherein the name is used as a label for something the speaker knows not what, and the speaker is entirely deferential about the referent (as in Kripke’s ‘Feynman’ example). We are all in this boat frequently, upon first encountering an utterance or inscription of an unfamiliar name. At the other extreme, there are cases in which a speaker has a rich background of beliefs about the referent, and is not in the least deferential, not in the least willing to be corrected that the referent of their utterance is not the kind of thing specified by their referential intentions. (Think of somebody trying to convince you that you are hugely mistaken about the name of your hometown, that the name does not name what you think it does. You would take a lot more convincing than it would take to convince Kripke’s speaker, say, that Feynman is not a physicist after all, but rather a chemist or an economist.) As one picks up more information about the referent of a name, about Aristotle or Bismarck or Bette in the mailroom, one makes a gradual transition from the deferential toward the autonomous. A pretty reliable way to test where one stands on this deferential-autonomous continuum is to monitor how one would respond to correction. The more prone one is to alter one’s beliefs and linguistic behavior in the face of correction, the more deferential, and less autonomous, one is.

At the deferential end of the spectrum, competence depends on leaving it up to other elements of one’s community to determine the referent of the name. To the extent that one is deferential, false beliefs about the referent do not undermine the ability to use the name to refer.

Think here of Kripke's (1972) cases of a speaker whose only belief about Einstein is that he invented the atomic bomb, or one whose only belief about Columbus is that he was the first European in the Americas. Provided that these speakers are not dogmatic about these beliefs, that they would give them up or refine them under the appropriate pressures, there is reason to think that their utterances refer to Einstein and Columbus. Crucially, deferential speakers are prone to leave it up to other factors, aside from their tenuous beliefs, to determine the referents of their terms.

As one moves toward the autonomous end of the spectrum, the veracity of one's beliefs becomes more crucial. If one's attitude is an autonomous referential intention, as opposed to the compliant deferential intention—i.e., if one clings to false beliefs in the face of correction—then that will jeopardize one's competence with the name.[23] (There are, of course, no hard and fast criteria here. There is no clear cut-off point at which mistaken speakers stop thinking and talking about Einstein or Columbus, say, and something else becomes the object of their thoughts and utterances.) Insofar as one's attitude is an autonomous referential intention—"Listen. Let me handle this. I know who I'm talking about."—then one runs the risk of stepping out of line from the rest of one's community, of not talking about the same thing as everyone else.

These points generalize, beyond the case of names. Any sort of term can be used with this kind of deferential intention, wherein one leaves it up to some subset of one's community to determine its criteria for correct application. This kind of deference is of course more prevalent for technical jargon: we do not, in fact, divide up the linguistic labor, at least not in the same way, for ordinary non-technical predicates. However, there is nothing semantically devious about a deferential utterance of 'doctor' or an autonomous utterance of 'molybdenum'. (In fact, it is easy to imagine contexts in which they would be appropriate—for example, respectively, one

involving a speaker who knows nothing about western medicine, and a discussion among expert chemists who disagree over certain properties of molybdenum.) In general, this deferential-autonomous continuum of sorts of uses applies to all kinds of term.[24]

Evidently, competence[1] is tailored to suit autonomous speech acts—if you exhibit this kind of autonomous attitude, then you had better be able to single out the referent of your term—while competence[2] is more appropriate to deferential speech acts.[25] So both these notions of competence have wide a range of application, and both are pretty clearly unsuited to a wide range of everyday uses of terms. Instead of continuing an entrenched debate between these opposing factions, each of which having much to be said both for and against, or of further proliferating distinct relevant senses of competence—something that I think would be eminently worthwhile, but I won't try to do here—I submit that a comprehensive concept of competence lies in the direction of tying competence to deference.

Competence[3] is a matter of appropriately situating oneself on the deferential-autonomous continuum, where appropriateness depends on one's grasp on the conditions that determine the term's referent. To be competent[3] is to exhibit the appropriate degree of tenuousness or tenacity with respect to one's beliefs about the referent, in the face of correction. To the extent that one is deferential, one compliantly leaves it up to factors apart from one's beliefs to determine the referent. To the extent that one is autonomous, one singles out the referent oneself, without relying on any resources afforded by other elements of one's community.

Competence[3] is a matter of having a good sense about what one does not know. Concerning that which one cannot identify, one should pass the buck. Where one is ignorant, leave it up to others; where one does not leave it up to others, false beliefs can stand in the way

of competence with the term. Deference is a matter of mediation at work, between speaker and referent (in the form of the division of linguistic labor, say, or of a causal-historical chain of transmission); competence[3] is letting those mediating factors do their work, when appropriate.

To illustrate: A physicist and I can both be competent[3] to pass along the details of superstring theory—where she is strong on richness of reference-determining beliefs associated with the terms and far toward the autonomous end of the spectrum, I'd tend markedly toward the deferential end of the spectrum, deferring to experts to determine the referents of the terms I utter, should the need arise for that level of precision. If I were to get carried away, and fall prey to vainglorious illusions of autonomy —"Let me handle this. I know what I'm talking about."—there is really no telling what I might end up saying. (See note 23.) As long as I keep those impulses in check, there is a way of telling what I end up saying: namely, ask the experts. To the extent that my attitude is deferential, I'm just borrowing their terms, and thus competent[3] to use them to express what they use them to express.

So, there are degrees of deference, and they correspond to how one would react to correction. Competence[3] is a variable notion, depending on where one ought to situate oneself on this deferential-autonomous spectrum. At one end of the spectrum, competence[3] is a matter of being duly deferential; at the other, autonomous end of the spectrum it is a matter of knowing what you are talking about; and, stretching between these two extremes, it involves an intermediate blend of the two that is appropriate to one's degree of resistance to correction.[26]

9. back to individualism

Let us return to a question left open in section 3, as to the relation between the following two senses of individualism. Individualism[1] is the view that competent speakers each have a grasp

on the conditions for the correct application of their terms; individualism[2] is the view that content is determined by factors intrinsic to the individual agent, so that two doppelgangers entertain exactly the same content, regardless of the differences between their environments. I suggested that while Frege explicitly endorses individualism[1], he might not readily endorse individualism[2]; but that, regardless, there may be a sense in which he is committed to individualism[2] by other claims he makes. Now we're in a position to get closer to the bottom of this matter.

I earlier distinguished two strains of anti-individualism (see note 10: one focuses on the effects of other elements of one's linguistic community, the other focuses on the effects of the actual environment in which the term evolved, on the conditions for the correct application of a term). Both strains tell against individualism[2]; i.e., they both provide reason to think that factors extrinsic to the agent play some role both in determining what one is able to think and talk about, and in individuating the content entertained and expressed. They also tell against individualism[1], if it is understood as an unqualified claim about all uses of all types of term. However, whereas [2] is an all-or-none matter, and hence (I think) should be rejected on the strength of these anti-individualist considerations, [1] can be retained if it is restricted in scope, along the lines defended here—i.e., individualism[1] need not hold of proper names, or of deferential uses of semantically unstructured referring expressions, but it does hold true of most ordinary uses of common expressions.

Therefore, individualisms [1] and [2] do not amount to the same thing. The position developed here categorically rejects [2], while holding that [1] does afford a general, rough, useful, explanatory criterion of competence, that fails for deferential uses of names and other semantically unstructured referring expressions. That [2] is mistaken about content, in a

fundamental way, is Brentano's legacy; one legacy of the causal-historical theory of reference is that there is a limited but important category of counterexamples to [1]. So, to endorse an extrinsic view of intentionality, according to which factors external to the speaker affect the identity of the content that the speaker is able to entertain and express, is not yet to reject transparency entirely. Transparency and deference stand in an inverse-proportion relation. Most ordinary terms, like 'sock' or 'block', are transparent to most speakers; there is a large class of terms for which there is some measure of transparency and deference—pseudo-technical terms like 'weather front', 'Nasdaq', or 'tectonic plate' might be examples; and, for any speaker, there is a considerable set of technical terms that are absolutely not transparent, about which the speaker is entirely deferential.

10. conclusion

The tension at work in the 'Dr. Lauben' example betrays that Frege sees the limits of transparency, for the case of proper names, without quite rejecting it. Here is the revised and restricted canonical view of Frege on content:

Content is objective, not private psychological stuff, and speakers typically have introspective access to content; but [1] failures of transparency are built-in to the semantics of proper names, because of their distinctive stipulative link to a referent, and [2] in general, transparency can fail for any sort of term, to the extent that the speaker's attitude in using the term is deferential.

One merit of the restricted, revised canonical view is that it affords a satisfying explanation of the tensions at work in the 'Dr. Lauben' example, an overall coherent conception of Frege's views on content. Another merit is that it serves as an antidote to the neo-Russellians' categorical distinction between what is introspectively available to competent speakers and what constitutes the content of their thoughts and utterances. For those who are wary of the way in which content

has been severed from what is in the head, I hope I have given some grounds to be confident that stopping short of the unqualified rejection of transparency does not commit one to an uncritical and untenable individualism. At the very least, a view intermediate between Frege and the neo-Russellians, on these questions of individualism and competence, is worth further investigation.[27]

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[1] I will formulate my questions about content, as opposed to sense or meaning. There are difficult questions about the relations between Fregean sense and linguistic meaning; I'll try to presuppose as little as possible about this. I start from a rough, intuitive notion of content, and it will get more sophisticated as the discussion proceeds. To begin, content is truth-evaluable, and can be expressed with utterances and entertained in thought; the same content can be entertained by more than one speaker, and distinct sentences (whether of the same language, or of different languages) can express the same content.

[2] This sentiment is ubiquitous throughout Frege's works. Cf., for instance, Frege (1903: 17, 1918: 211, 218).

[3] Specifically, my target is a strand of neo-Russellianism whose influential proponents include Kaplan (1989), Salmon (1986, 1989, 1998), Soames (1989, 2002), and Wettstein (1986). I will be more precise about my target in due course, especially in sections 6 and 8.

[4] Cf. Donnellan (1970), Kripke (1972), Putnam (1975), Kaplan (1977), Perry (1979).

[5] Cf. Burge (1979a), Dummett (1981).

[6] Cf. Russell (1911, 1918).

[7] The original case was built on proper names (Donnellan (1970), Kripke (1972)) and natural kind terms (Kripke (1972), Putnam (1975)). (Kaplan (1977) and Perry (1979) develop some related points about indexical pronouns, but I'll not get into the unique complications posed by indexicals). It is controversial just how widely the relevant points extend, exactly which kinds of linguistic expressions they apply to. I'll return to this issue in sections 6-9.

[8] This is one of the questions debated in the neo-Fregean literature. Cf. Recanati (1993: Chapters 11-12) for an overview.

[9] That is, if Frege rejects this second, intrinsic-intentionality, brand of individualism, it is not clear that he can consistently hang onto individualism in the first, introspective-access, sense. I will not stray further along this tangent now, but will come back to this question in section 9.

[10] Two main lines of argument against individualist views criticize them for not giving due weight, in determining the conditions for the correct application of terms, to the influence of [1] other elements of one's linguistic community and of [2] the actual environment in which the term evolved. Wittgenstein (1953) gives some influential articulations of the first charge, and Kripke (1972) and Putnam (1975) are seminal sources of the second.

[11] Note that the assumption of transparency is indispensable to the characteristic Fregean inference from a difference in cognitive significance (between, say, statements of the form 'a = a' and 'a = b') to a difference in propositions expressed.

[12] So, contra the spirit of (at least parts of) the above excerpts from Kripke and Kaplan, it is not very Fregean to stipulate willy-nilly (as does Humpty Dumpty) what the content of one's utterances is to be. It is, however, Fregean to have complete access to that content, to be able to access introspectively the properties of the content one entertains. One could shut oneself off in one's room, rather than having to muck about in the world, to determine the precise criteria for the correct application of the terms with which one is competent.

[13] This relation between defining condition and extension is typically more or less rough. Many terms may well not have precise extensions across logical space. There is reason to think that, for virtually any putative extension-determining criterion, there is a philosopher clever enough to come up with a counterexample. So, it is debatable whether there are, strictly speaking, many descriptive terms, in this sense.

However: [1] this notion of 'descriptive' has played a role in these debates, and [2] regardless of the above consideration, it must be conceded that ordinary competent speakers are extremely reliable gauges for the extensions of the ordinary, non-technical terms in common currency. Typically, speakers associate with the terms with which they are familiar criteria that, although rough and ready, revisable, fallible, subject to correction if circumstances warrant, are nonetheless extremely well correlated to their extensions. (More on this in section 8.)

[14] Cf. Russell (1911), Frege (1892: note 2).

[15] Cf. note 7; in keeping with the terms of this discussion, I'll concentrate on proper names.

[16] Here one might object that, in the case of ordinary naming practices, there do exist small communities in which a name is commonly associated with one reference-determining condition, with one contribution to content. That is, there are common, familiar contexts in which I can be virtually certain that, when I utter, say, 'Aristotle', or 'Betty', my interlocutor will be directed to the same referent via (more or less, closely enough) the same uniquely identifying condition that I have in mind.

In response, I point to two considerations: [1] Except in some very rare cases—e.g., utterances of 'Homer' in a classics seminar—this really does not seem all that plausible. We all see Betty in so many different guises and situations; we all have so very many ways of uniquely singling her out. It is highly unlikely that any one guise or reference-determining condition comes to mind for us all, when we utter or hear her name. If the response to this is: "That's OK. The route doesn't matter. What matters is that we all single out Betty.", then my point is conceded, because that is not true of typical substantive expressions. That's precisely one key respect is which names are unique. [2] Even barring [1], this is still a considerable semantic difference between proper names and other sorts of linguistic expression. We do not need to break down into such small sub-communities in order to explain the semantics of 'doctor' or 'beach rock' (or even 'molybdenum'—see section 7). So 'Betty' is still quite distant from 'the oldest woman in Mongolia'.

[17] To be sure, my claim is not that every conceivable, or every cogent, consideration against transparency only applies to proper names. It is rather that names are unique with respect to this particular challenge to transparency, based on the role that causal-historical chains (as opposed to conditions semantically associated with the term) play in determining reference. There are of course other considerations that mitigate against transparency, more on which in sections 7-9.

[18] Cf., for instance, Soames' (2002: 70) allegation that many mistakes in semantics, and mistaken motives in semantic theorizing, are due to "the error [of] thinking that what something means is fully transparent to a person who understands it, so that such a person cannot in any significant way be mistaken or ignorant about it". This sentiment runs through much work by Salmon, Soames, and Wettstein. (Millikan (1993) develops another influential argument that transparency is an unwanted vestige of Cartesianism, but I will not get into Millikan's views here.)

[19] Here I am influenced by Recanati (1993) and Neale (1993), but they are by no means alone in this view. Philosophical logic has gradually converged toward this point that semantically unstructured referring expressions are in important respects distinctive. Consider, for instance, the following five steps toward that end:

(1) Mill's (1843: 20) doctrine that names are special in that they "… are attached to the objects themselves, and are not dependent on … any attribute of the object"
(2) Frege's (1879: 109-11) seminal remarks about the differences between the semantic properties of such noun phrases as '20' and 'every even number'
(3) Russell's (1905) distinction between referring and denoting
(4) Kripke's (1972) work on rigid designation
(5) Kaplan's (1977) work on direct reference

This is a respect in which I—along with Neale, Recanati, and others—see clear progress in the philosophy of language.

[20] This line of thought runs through the work cited in note 3; I take up Salmon's (1989: 265-6) case of Sasha, an agent who believes that 'ketchup' and 'catsup' refer to different substances. To parallel the aforementioned quote from Kaplan, the claim is that Sasha knows what catsup is, and knows what ketchup is, but does not know that they are the same.

[21] I take one of the lessons here to be that Frege is hopelessly uncritical about the notion of competence. Consider also, in a related vein, his claim that "knowledge of the expression 'Dr. Lauben'" is required for "complete understanding". What could this mean, exactly? At what point did the Babylonians acquire knowledge of the expressions 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus'? At what point did the NYPD acquire knowledge of the expression 'Son of Sam'? This locution 'knowledge of the expression' is also terribly uncritical.

[22] Seminal examples include Kripke's (1972) 'Feynman' case and Putnam's (1975) 'beech'-'elm' case.

[23] This is one of the morals of Evans' (1973) *prima facie* counterexample to the causal-historical view, involving Marco Polo and the name 'Madagascar'. If Polo's uses of 'Madagascar' had been deferential, his utterances would have referred to the portion of the African mainland to which his interlocutors used 'Madagascar' to refer. Instead, his intentions were autonomous. Due to the combination of his non-deferential attitude and his mistaken beliefs about the previously existing naming practice, his uses of 'Madagascar' referred to the island that we now know by that name.

[24] This is of course not to assert that there are no deep or interesting differences between natural kind terms and other sorts of term. (One relevant difference is how few of us make it to the autonomous end of the spectrum, with respect to 'molybdenum', and how few of us do not, with respect to 'doctor'; and there are many others.) The claim here is just that this deferential-autonomous continuum applies in common to all terms; this is consistent with there being all sorts of interesting and illuminating ways to further carve up different sorts of terms.

[25] Cf. Kaplan's (1989: 600-2) remarks about subjectivist vs. consumerist conceptions of language, wherein he discusses some of these points, in a slightly different way. However, he draws precisely the kind of conclusion I here criticize: namely, that (in my terms) competence[1] has been proven obsolete and must be replaced by competence[2].

[26] Some of the questions raised in this section are pursued further in my ms. "The neo-Russellian view of singular thought".

[27] This paper grew out of conversations with Adele Mercier. (She still disagrees, but at least now we're clearer on what we disagree about.) Thanks to Stephen Schiffer, Philip Hanson, James Cargile, and Rob Stainton for helpful conversations, and to an anonymous referee for critical comments. Versions of the paper were presented at the October 2002 meeting of the Western Canadian Philosophical Association and at Carleton University in January 2003; both sessions

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