Heidi Savage
August 2014

# On Being Called Names

A recent defence of analyzing names as predicates that relies on a calling relation to explain their meanings,an account developed by Fara, is claimed to escape the problems afflicting standard meta-linguistic analyses. For Fara, this is because the calling relation itself is not essentially meta-linguistic; there are attributive uses of the calling relation as well. Distinguishing between meta-linguistic and attributive notions of calling is supposed to disperse with the common objection to calling accounts, specifically, Kripke's objection that these kinds of accounts cannot be informative. I argue that while the account may be informative in some superficial sense, it does not in fact increase our understanding of acts of naming. Indeed, I offer an objection to the account that shows that it cannot be the correct account of acts of naming.

## 1. Names as Predicates

The motives for treating names as predicates are varied, but one classical reason comes

from Quine's "On What There Is" (1953): names should be treated as predicates because

doing so allows us to avoid the traditional problems associated with analyzing the content of

empty names.[1]  At least in this article, Quine never develops this suggestion in any detail,

and we are left wondering what the meaning of name, if it is to be treated as that of a

predicate, might be.

One possible Moorean answer is that the meaning of each name is equivalent to that

of a simple, un-analyzable predicate, one for each named individual in a domain of

discourse. But this answer faces the same problems that any primitivist theory of any other

concept faces. As an explanation, it is rather unsatisfying.

---

[1]Additional reasons stem from linguistic data about the fact that names can actually appear in predicate position -- the primary motivation for Burge's (1973) treatment of proper names. One might also be motivated, as is Pietroski (2010), to assimilate names to predicates in order to simplify the underlying set of semantic categories.

Another more common answer is provided by the meta-linguistic approach, according to which the meaning of a name like 'Tyler' is analyzed in terms of what it is to be called "Tyler" (Kneale 1962; Katz 2001).This answer, however, faces Kripke's objection that it is uninformative (1980: 68-70). First, Kripke argues that an analysis of the meaning of any expression ought to be informative in the sense that it ought not to be tautologous. It must not already encode an understanding of the meaning of the expression being analyzed.

The meta-linguistic approach does not satisfy Kripke's criterion for being informative, since it mentions the name itself in its application condition.[2] To illustrate its inadequacy, Kripke applies this approach to the particular expression 'quark' (1980: 69). On Kripke's interpretation, the meta-linguistic analysis of the meaning of 'quark' is just this: the expression 'quark' picks out those things we call "quarks."[3] But while a speaker understanding the expression 'called' might recognize this as a truth, she would still not understand or be able to use the expression 'quark' unless she were already familiar with this expression. Kripke therefore concludes that a meta-linguistic account cannot give us

---

[2] We might think that an account that is tautologous might still determine a name's reference simply by fiat. However, even if that is correct, such an account would not allow us to determine a name's referent as speakers. We have to distinguish between theories of meaning that are materially adequate in pairing the correct symbols with their appropriate extensions from those that are truly informative. Truly informative accounts will at least allow some way of knowing how to go about learning the meaning of the expression in question.

[3] Actually, the use of double quotes here might reveal a problem with Kripke's objection. Namely, that the objection trades on conflating the meta-language with the object language. If the use of double quotes here is appropriate, as I believe it is, then we might say that a meta-linguistic analysis is indeed informative because the use of the expression being analyzed on the left hand side is understood in terms of the way language is actually used. So a speaker might, for instance, learn something about the meaning of the expression 'quark' if she knows something about people's speech practices with respect to the word 'quark', here shown by enclosing the word within double quotes on the right hand side. We might also see the mistake as one of assuming that the meta-linguistic analysis is to be taken as mentioning the word itself in the abstract sense, rather than a phonetic form. Again, this may well be informative, but it may also no longer be a meta-linguistic analyses.

any way of understanding the meaning of a name that is not tautologous, or any way of determining that name's reference.

A third answer to the question of how the meaning of a name might be given as that of a predicate is offered by Fara (2011). According to this account, a name's meaning likewise depends -- as in the meta-linguistic account -- on a calling relation, but on one that is not itself meta-linguistic. In fact, this other calling relation is understood on the model of property attribution. Just like someone can be called stupid, in the sense of having the property of failing to be intelligent, so too can someone be called a name in the sense of having the property expressed by that name. If naming ought be understood using this notion of calling, then not only does Fara's account escape the problem afflicting the meta-linguistic analysis, it also offers even stronger motivation for thinking of names as predicates.

If Fara is correct, her account offers a viable alternative for those sympathetic to the idea of treating the meanings of proper names as equivalent to those of certain predicates involving the calling relation, since her account, unlike the meta-linguistic account, and unlike the primitivist account, will not be ruled out by the previous objections.

Our examination of Fara's account, then, will involve investigating whether, granting her arguments, her account is fully informative in the Kripkean sense in which she claims it is (2011: 493). Second, we will examine whether her notion of calling is the notion appropriate for understanding names or acts of naming.

## 2. Notions of Calling

According to Fara, there is more to the notion of being called than the meta-linguistic notion. Several examples are used to illustrate this fact. For instance, Fara claims that while it might be true that

(1) Quine was called Willard,

it might also be false that

(2) Quine was called 'Willard'.

The first use is supposed to indicate that we know that Quine is Willard, but that we do not know that Quine was ever addressed as 'Willard', since he may never have been so addressed using that expression at all. Perhaps he was always called or addressed as 'Will' by his parents, and as 'Quine' by philosophers. If the only notion of calling was the meta-linguistic notion, that is, If (1) was ill-formed, as Fara's Kripke supposes, or if (1) and (2) were merely different formulations of the same point, then the observed discrepancy in the truth of (1) and (2) should not be possible, but in fact, it is.

Because it may at first be difficult to understand the two different notions in play with respect to proper names, Fara further illustrates that there are different notions of calling than simply the meta-linguistic notion by considering our use of calling in attributing properties to various individuals as compared to using them to address an individual. For example, we might say that

(3) Maude was called 'stupid'

is true, but still maintain that it is false that

(4) Maude was called stupid.

This is the case because it might be true that Maude had 'stupid' as a derogatory or ironic nickname' as in

(5) Hey, stupid, help me with my calculus homework

as opposed to being attributed the property of stupidity as someone might do by saying

(6) That stupid Maude caused me to fail my calculus class.

That is, Maude might be called stupid but not have 'stupid' as a conventional label referring to her'.

Fara reduces the meta-linguistic notion of being called to that of being addressed as thus and so, which anyone can do with whatever expression she chooses at any time she likes. To call in this sense is to relate someone or something to a linguistic item. To make the case that being called by a certain name cannot be reduced to meta-linguistic phenomenon, Fara points out that being called Willard cannot simply be a matter of being addressed as 'Willard', since 'Willard' might be Quine's name, but as before, still fail to be something others use to address him. Thus making it true that if Quine is called Willard, this must be accomplished in virtue of someone or other having a certain special authoritative relation to Willard, such as being his parents. Parents are in the position of being able to make it true that Quine is called Willard, but not that Quine is called 'Willard'. Naming, then, is not a matter of meta-linguistic actions, but rather as acts of property attribution. That is, to call in the attributive sense is to relate someone or something to a property, not a linguistic item.

In addition to Fara's two notions of calling, I wish to distinguish yet another understanding of the notion of calling that is neither meta-linguistic, nor attributive. Consider for instance the fact that I named my dog Jackson, and address him as 'J'. I might also perform callings besides give him a certain name and address him using the word 'Jackson' as in

(7) I called Jackson to come inside.

The notion of calling in play here is that of performing a certain action -- that of using Jackson's name in order to induce a certain behavior in him. Note that, of course, we could not felicitously say that

(8) I called 'Jackson' to come inside.

Again, (7) can be true, while (8) is most certainly false. Call this the "inducive" use of the notion of calling. Note that to accomplish the purpose of inducive calling, we might do any number of things that may or may not involve the name 'Jackson'. I *may* use the name in order to accomplish my inducive goals, but I may also simply use the word 'come' to do so.

Fara does not discuss the inducive use of the notion of calling, but it has the same markers for distinguishing it from the meta-linguistic notion as does the attributive case -- that some sentences that use the inducive notion of calling without quotes are sensible and true, while the sentences that do use quotes are false, and in this case, not even sensible.

That there is yet another notion of calling shows that Fara's assimilation of naming to an act of property attribution may be mistaken, since there are not merely two notions of calling, but at least three, and perhaps more. Because there are not merely two notions of calling, we might be led to question whether naming might not be captured by yet another, as of yet, undiscovered notion of calling. Fara's argument then, rather than being one that is deductive in nature, is instead understand properly understood as an argument by analogy.

## 3. Fara's Argument

On Fara's view, the reason Kripke's objections appear to be sound is that he does not recognize any notion of calling that is not itself meta-linguistic. But, as we saw, we can distinguish different notions of calling in natural language. For Fara, first, the meta-linguistic notion that we have already seen; and second, a non-meta-linguistic, attributive notion, which finds its home most naturally when using adjectives like 'stupid'.

For instance, a person may not mind being addressed as 'stupid', but would not like having the property of stupidity attributed to her. This person might make make her opinions known by uttering the sentence:

6

(9) You can call me 'stupid', just don't call me stupid.

The calling relation in the first part of this utterance is the familiar meta-linguistic notion, holding between a person and a linguistic symbol, while the calling relation in the second part is the different, attributive relation, holding between a person and a property.[4] Having established this distinction, Fara argues that being called a certain name should be thought of as analogous to being attributed a certain property by relying on the attributive calling relation.

If this is correct, then an informative account of the meaning of a name can be given in terms of the second, attributive calling relation, rather than the first, meta-linguistic relation. In order to show how such an account can be provided, Fara introduces the schema

*'N'* is true of an object just in case that object is called *N*

as a general application condition for proper names interpreted as predicates in which the notion of calling on the right hand side of the schema should be understood in her attributive sense.

To illustrate, Fara's schema entails, for instance, that the name 'Tyler' is true of an object just in case that object is called Tyler. Specific to the naming case, we can rely on a kind of disquotation principle, a principle that Fara herself endorses (2011:496), such that if an object is named *N*, then that object is, in fact, *N*. For instance, if an object is called Tyler, then that object is in fact Tyler.

Of course, as Fara admits, whether an object is called *N* is itself dependent on our linguistic practices: the fact that someone possesses the property of being called Tyler, for example, holds only because that individual was, at some point, named 'Tyler'. This is something Fara points out when discussing the fact that, although no one addresses her as

---

[4] Bach (2002) also points out this distinction.

'Delia Ruby Graff Fara', nevertheless she was given that name, making it true of her that she is, in fact, Delia Ruby Graff Fara. Still, even if being called Tyler, for example, is true of an individual in virtue of our naming practices, this does not make the condition meta-linguistic, since to be Tyler is not understood as being related to a linguistic symbol, but instead is understood as having a certain property -- that of being Tyler.

Fara illustrates that her schema is informative by showing that the substitution of other predicates, predicates like 'stupid' result in the schema being false, thereby proving that the schema is informative given that it is falsifiable. In the case of the predicate 'stupid', the schema yields the result that 'stupid' is true of an object -- so that the object is stupid -- just in case it is called stupid. And, of course, this is not only falsifiable, but false. Some stupid individuals are not called stupid, and some individuals are called stupid even though they are not.

Since according to Fara, "if the being-called condition for the applicability of names as predicates were trivially true, then analogous schemata for other predicates would be trivially true."[5] Recall that Kripke's complaint was as follows: an analysis of, say, the expression 'quark' as that expression that picks out quarks is simply equivalent to saying that 'quark' has the same meaning as the expression 'quark', and this analysis is clearly a

---

[5] There are several issues here that need to be clarified about the relation between informativeness and falsifiability before we can properly assess Fara's account. First, she cannot be committed to it as a necessary and sufficient condition for informativeness since the necessity of identity claims prove that falsifiability is not necessary for a claim to be informative. Furthermore, it is far from clear that falsifiability is the correct criterion for evaluating the informativeness of accounts of the meanings of expressions. For instance, we could know that a claim is falsifiable without fully understanding the content of the claim itself, as shown by Kripke's example of a speaker who understands the concept of calling can understand that the claim that quarks are called "quarks" without thereby coming to know the meaning of the expression 'quark'. So not only does the condition fail to be necessary, it may not even be a sufficient condition for understanding the meaning of an expression. Relatedly, it is unclear whether we should understand informative and substantive as interchangeable. Instead, we might think of a substantive truth as a metaphysical matter, while informativeness is an epistemic matter. However, it is not my aim to engage this matter directly here.

tautology, and is therefore unfalsifiable. Bu Fara shows that calling analyses are not one and all tautologies and that therefore Kripke's complaint is misguided. Fara argues, then, that her schema leads to an analysis of names as predicates that is informative; it provides a substantive, falsifiable account.

## 4. Two Arguments Against Fara

Since Fara herself is focused mainly on offering an account that satisfies Kripke's informativeness requirement, the first objection we will consider deals with this issue specifically, pointing out a disanalogy between being called a name and being attributed a property by relying on the calling relation. Secondly, Fara also offers us some way of understanding the nature of meta-linguistic acts, one that rules out a meta-linguistic account of naming. However, Fara's understanding of meta-linguistic actions leaves out some important features that meta-linguistic actions might have. Both of these arguments reveal that the analysis of calling offered by Fara does not actually fully answer Kripke's objection to analyses of the meanings of names in terms of the calling relation.

On the surface, Fara's schema is not explicitly meta-linguistic; and, for sake of argument, let us grant that the falsifiability criterion is itself a sufficient marker of informativeness for theories of semantic competence. Even so, Fara's argument that her account is informative shows only that her schema can be falsified for adjectives like 'stupid'. But, of course, her schema cannot be falsified when applied to proper names. Instead of taking this as proof that we have an account of names as predicates, we might instead, take this result as showing that Fara's analogy between acts of naming and acts of property attribution breaks down. If this is right, then, in order to see whether Fara's schema provides an informative account of names, we should investigate whether there could be any instances of it, as applied to names, on which it could be false.

9

And, in fact, there is at least one kind of case in which I can imagine this occurring, involving names that are translatable across languages. Imagine a French individual, baptized as Jean, and consider the relevant instance of Fara's schema in French:

'Jean' est vrai de x ssi x s'appelle Jean

Because 'Jean' is translated as 'John' in English, this instance of the schema can be translated into English as

'Jean' is true of x iff x is called John.

And here we have an instance of the schema that is clearly false, since 'Jean' is true of the individual but he is not called John -- that is, no one standing in the authoritative naming relation to Jean identified him as John.

We could even imagine that, in parallel with Fara's own example, this individual, annoyed at the habits of Anglophones, says:

You can call me 'John', just don't call me John.

In uttering this sentence, the speaker would then be agreeing to be addressed as 'John', while insisting that he is not John, or that the property of being called John is not true of him. This case is analogous to that involving the adjective 'stupid', since both show that, while we might attribute a particular property to an object, this does make the property true of that object.

The cross-linguistic test for informativeness thus seems to vindicate Fara's account. It is questionable, however, whether the success of the cross-linguistic test really shows that the naming case is, in fact, akin to the predicative case, since no such cross-linguistic test was required for other expressions, expressions like 'stupid'. If we are to find Fara's analogy convincing then, we should explore whether there could be an instance of Fara's schema on which it might be false for names not only cross-linguistically, but also intra-

linguistically.[6] But, of course, since even by Fara's own lights, the property of being, let us say John, is had purely in virtue of language-relative naming practices, this would be impossible.

Why is Fara's schema is falsifiable for other expressions intra-linguistically, but not for names? The answer is that, while certain expressions, such as 'stupid', have applicability criteria that are not entirely dependent upon linguistic practices, others, such as names, do not, at least if Fara is correct. It is not sufficient for someone's being stupid that they are called stupid -- other factors are in play as well, having to do with what it is to be stupid. The property of being stupid has some language independent application criteria. In contrast, it is sufficient for someone's being John that they are called John. Being John is an entirely language specific property.[7] The fact that Fara's schema is not falsifiable for names intra-linguistically illustrates this fact.

The lesson to be drawn is that Fara's schema is not informative for names in the same way as it is for other predicates, precisely because the attributive calling relation for names, although not superficially metalinguistic, is still wholly supported by particular linguistic acts of naming. These acts of naming can, somehow, make certain language specific properties true of objects, and it is this fact that is in need of analysis.[8]

---

[6] This may not seem obvious. For instance, one might propose that names form a special class of predicates for which this generally informative schema is guaranteed to hold. That would represent an interesting way to characterize names against the backdrop of a generally informative schema. While this is an alternative way of understanding Fara's project, it treats that the claim that we can understand names as predicates as having independent motivation, motivation that is not provided by Fara. For this reason, we might instead, for instance, think of the falsifiability test as a means of providing motivation for the claim that names can be treated as predicates in an informative way.

[7] Another issue that might be raised about Fara's account is that it inherits all of the problems of semantic instrumentalism about names, except now those problems are applied to properties, given that Fara is apparently committed to the idea that stipulative acts of naming are acts that bring into existence certain properties. For example, the property of being Tyler.

[8] We might think that non of our naming practices are purely linguistic practices, and therefore reject Kripke's criteria on an account of the meaning of names, but Fara does not

A second objection concerns Fara's definition of meta-linguistic acts. According to Fara, meta-linguistic acts are willy-nilly in a certain way: we can address anyone with any expression we like, but this does not make it true of them that that expression is their name. Fara concludes, then, that there must be something different about acts of naming that distinguishes them from mere meta-linguistic acts of addressing an individual by using an expression of the speaker's choice. For Fara, the meta-linguistic analysis then is mistaken not only because it is uninformative, but also because meta-linguistic speech acts just cannot capture how acts of naming really work.

Fara chosen explanation of the difference between addressing an individual with a certain expression and naming an individual is that acts of naming are special authoritative acts that can make certain properties true of an individual -- that of having the property of being called by a certain name, and by our previous disquotation principle, that of having the property expressed by that name. Clearly, an act of naming is a kind of performative speech act, or at least it is plausible to think of it on this model.

What Fara has not established is that because acts of naming are performative, that therefore they ought to be understood as acts that make it true of individuals that they have certain properties. We might instead distinguish between different types of meta-linguistic actions -- performative and constative. Fara recognizes only constative meta-linguistic actions, and does consider the possibility that there might be other kinds of meta-linguistic acts. Specifically, she does not consider the idea that in naming a child, one does in fact mention a particular expression -- engages in a certain kind of meta-linguistic act -- but in so doing, one performs an act of christening via that meta-linguistic act.

After all, if the actual name that gets bestowed upon an individual is not mentioned, it is not clear why an individual might not be called a certain name in any number of ways, as do so, and therefore it is fair to evaluate whether her account meets Kripke's criteria.

we saw with the inducive case of calling. Recall, for example, that I can call Jackson by uttering the expression 'come'. If acts of naming do not involve any mentioning of a specific expression, then it is unclear why Delia Ruby Graff Fara could not come to be so named by using another expression to do so. But clearly this cannot be right.

The fact is, properties can be described in several different ways. We might, as Fara points out, ascribe the property of being stupid to someone by saying that this person is dim-witted and ignorant. Why, then, if having a name is to have a certain property bestowed upon a person, could this not be accomplished in any number of ways? But this is simply not how people get the names they do. Mentioning a certain expression is an essential part of the act of naming, and it is unclear on Fara's account why this should be the case.

Reconsider our previous Jean example. It is not clear why we could not in principle, on Fara's account, name an individual 'John' by using the expression 'Jean'. After all, 'Jean' is in fact a translation of 'John', just as the expression 'dim-witted and ignorant' is a translation of the expression 'stupid'. The names 'Jean' and 'John' then should express the very same property. We should then be able to make it true of John that he has the property of being John by using the expression 'Jean' in naming him. Our Jean example, however, illustrates that this cannot be the case. And even Fara would agree.

The implications of making names express properties show that Fara's view is flawed. For instance, if Fara is to maintain that we cannot name John 'John' by using the name 'Jean', then she would have to deny that the name 'Jean' is a translation of the name 'John', or that we cannot ascribe certain properties to individuals by using different words that express the very same property. Neither of these moves is easy to defend.

## 5. Conclusion

The real issue, then, centers around the nature of the special authoritative calling relation underlying acts of naming, which are sufficient on Fara's view to make a name predicate apply to an object, as distinct from those predicates whose application conditions are not settled by linguistic practice alone.[9] As Kripke notes "whatever this relation of *calling* is is really what determines the reference..." (1980: 70)[10] Presumably, the answer is to be found in an analysis of the phenomenon of naming itself, and just how our linguistic apparatus allows us to engage in successful acts of naming. On my reading of Kripke, it was this deeper kind of explanation he was seeking that Fara's account does not provide.[11]

SUNY Geneseo

**Bibliography**

Austin, J.L. (1962). *How to do Things with Words.* Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Bach, K. (2002). "Giorgione was so-called because of his name." *Philosophical Perspectives*16: 73–103.

Burge, T. (1973)."Reference and Proper Names."*Journal of Philosophy* 70: 425–39.

Fara, Delia Graff. (2011). "You can call me 'stupid',…just don't call me stupid." *Analysis* 71(3).

Katz, Jerrold. (2001). The End of Millianism: Multiple Bearers, Improper Names, and Compositional Meaning.*Journal of Philosophy*.XCVII.3 (March): 137-166.

Kneale, William (1962) 'Modality de dicto and de re'. In Ernest Nagel, Patrick Suppes & Alfred Tarski (eds.), *Logic, methodology and philosophy of science. Proceedings of the 1960 International Congress*. Stanford University Press. Stanford, CA. 622-633.

Kripke, Saul A. (1980). *Naming and Necessity*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press).

---

[9] This issue arises for Fara's account even supposing we do not treat the falsifiability test as needing to be passed by names independently.

[10] In fact, this very quote from Kripke reveals that, contra Fara, he is indeed open to an analysis of the very notion of calling itself that may not be meta-linguistic.

[11] Thanks specifically to Michael Caie for correspondence, and to John Bennett, Jeff Horty, Duncan MacIntosh, Robert Stainton, and anonymous referees for *Thought* and *Dialectica* for comments on drafts. Thanks also go to all of the attendees at the University of Rochester Analysis group for discussion.

Orwell, George. (1949). "1984." London: Secker & Warburg.

Pietroski, Paul. (2010). "Concepts, Meanings, and Truth: First Nature, Second Nature, and Hard Work."*Mind and Language* 25: 247-78.

Quine, W.V.O. (1953) "On What There Is."*From a Logical Point of View* (Harper & Row, New York).