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Names Introduced with the Help of Unsatisfied Sortal Predicates: Reply to Aranyosi

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Abstract

In this paper I answer Aranyosi's (2009) criticism of my "Is Phosphorus Hesperus?" (2009).

In the Abstract of his reply to my "Is Phosphorus Hesperus?" (2009), Aranyosi writes "Hesperus is Phosphorus' has to be true, if it is true, regardless of which theory of persistence one is committed to" (2009, p. 223). By saying this he implies that I argued that the truth of the *conditional* "If 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is true, then 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is necessarily true" hinges on which theory of persistence is true. But this I did not do. Supposing that the names are rigid designators, surely the identity statement is necessarily true *if* it is true, regardless of which theory of persistence is true.¹ What I did argue was that the truth of the *antecedent* (i.e. "Hesperus is Phosphorus' is true") can be questioned assuming the conjunction of (a) the perdurance theory of persistence and (b) the thesis of unrestricted mereological composition²: someone endorsing (a) and (b) may hold that the proper referent of "Hesperus" is the aggregate of the temporal parts of Venus which are visible in, and only in, the evening, and that the proper referent of

¹ However, if the names are non-rigid designators, then the consequent may be false even if the antecedent is true (see Kripke, 1980, p. 3).

² According to the perdurance theory of persistence, an entity perdures iff it persists by having distinct temporal parts at distinct times (see Lewis, 1986, p. 202). The thesis of unrestricted mereological composition says that whenever there are some things, no matter how disparate and unrelated, there is something composed of just those things (again see Lewis, 1986, p. 211).

“Phosphorus” is the aggregate of the temporal parts of Venus which are visible in, and only in, the morning.

In the main text Aranyosi argues that there is simply no question about the truth of the identity statement, even assuming (a) and (b). He illustrates this by considering spatial analogues. He mentions, for example, his mother’s name “Aranka”: there is no question of whether “Aranka” refers to his mother, the *whole* person, or only to her visible skin. Same with “the Moon”: there is no question of whether “the Moon” refers only to the visible front (as seen from Earth) of the celestial object orbiting the Earth or to the whole spatial object, the far side included. Moreover, Aranyosi writes: “It would also be strange for an attorney to object to my testimony in court, after I have affirmed that I saw – through a keyhole, by clearly seeing his face – the accused being present in some location, that what I saw was only his face, not the whole of the accused.” (p. 224) These alleged spatial analogues Aranyosi takes to refute the idea that “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” refer to distinct (and temporally scattered) proper parts of Venus. But do they refute this?

Take the court case first. The attorney’s objection may be understood in an epistemological way and in a metaphysical way, the latter being the relevant one here.³ Taken in the latter way, the attorney should be understood as objecting: “It is not the case that you see an entity x purely on the basis of seeing a proper part of x !”. Understood in this way, the objection is indeed rather strange: I share Aranyosi’s intuition that if you see a proper part of an entity x , then you see x , at least *derivatively* – i.e. *in virtue of* seeing a proper part of x .⁴ But I never denied this in the original paper. On the contrary, I explicitly wrote: “Granting the suggested outlook, then, what we see shining on a particular early morning is a common proper part of at least two distinct things: of Venus and of Phosphorus (i.e. we see Venus and Phosphorus ‘*derivatively*’)” (Hansson

³ Taken in the epistemological way, the attorney should be understood as saying: “But how do you know that you saw the accused person in the location if you only saw (or thought you saw) his face?” In this epistemological sense, the objection seems pretty fair because the experiential content of the observation does not rule out that what was actually seen was, for example, just a photograph of the face of the accused, held up by the real criminal in front of the key hole.

⁴ I would deny, though, that you see an entity x directly, or non-derivatively, purely on the basis of seeing a proper part of x . Also, it seems to me that if one adds “the whole of” to “seeing x ” then one signals that the subject sees x directly, or at least every exterior part – if not every interior part – of x directly. So if the latter was what Aranyosi said in court, then I believe he said something false.

Wahlberg, 2009, p. 102; emphasis added) Nor did I base the reasoning concerning the case for the non-identity of Hesperus and Phosphorus on the obviously false idea that an entity must be “directly” (i.e. wholly) visible in order for a name to attach to it, e.g. in an act of naming.

What about the other two refuting spatial analogues? What accounts for the fact that “Aranka” refers to Aranyosi’s mother and not to her visible skin, I think, is (roughly) that “Aranka” was introduced with the explicit or implicit help of a certain satisfied sortal predicate, namely “person”. Presumably Aranka was named via a phrase such as “Let us name her (i.e. our daughter, i.e. that person) ‘Aranka’”. Since the skin (visible or not) of Aranyosi’s mother is not a person, but Aranyosi’s mother is, the name refers to Aranyosi’s mother and not to her (visible) skin. A similar story may, I suppose, be told about the reference of “the Moon”.⁵

The Hesperus/Phosphorus case is different in this respect. The names “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” were probably introduced with the help of *unsatisfied* sortal predicates, namely “is a god” or “is a star god” (or some Greek equivalent). Since there are no gods (certainly not any star gods of the kind occurring in Greek mythology) these sortal predicates were not satisfied. Does this mean that “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” are empty, non-referring names? Some theories of naming apparently entail this (e.g. Thomasson’s, 2007, p. 48). But this seems unacceptable. Surely the names refer to *something* even if mistaken sortal terms were used when the names were introduced (see Kripke, 1980, n. 58, pp. 115-116). But to what do they refer?

For someone endorsing (a) and (b), I think there are three main candidates to consider: (1) Venus, the whole four-dimensional space-time worm⁶; (2) the aggregate of the temporal parts of Venus which are visible in, and only in, the morning; and (3) the aggregate of the temporal parts of Venus which are visible in, and only in, the evening.

⁵ Let me say the obvious: we can, and certainly do, introduce names for proper parts of things: “Cerebellum”, “Mount Everest”, “Alaska”, “the Far Side of the Moon”, etc. Also, there are names purporting to name, and predicates satisfy-able by, spatially scattered entities: “the Andromeda Galaxy”, “the Solar System”, “U.S.A.”, “university”, “family”, “species”, “atom”, etc.

⁶ Presumably, “Venus” was also introduced with the help of an unsatisfied sortal predicate (“is a god”). But here I see no relevant reason not to take the name to refer to the *whole* planet, i.e. to the whole four-dimensional space-time worm (given assumption (a)), if we take the name to refer at all.

Now, what referent-word mapping best fits the beliefs and the mythology of the ancient Greeks?⁷ According to the mythology, Hesperus and Phosphorus were half-brothers: Hesperus' father was Cephalus, a mortal, while Phosphorus' was the star god Astraios; their mother was dawn goddess Eos. According to the mythology, then, Hesperus and Phosphorus were *distinct*. Moreover, Phosphorus, but not Hesperus, was supposed to be a “dawn-bearer” or “light-bearer”, while Hesperus, but not Phosphorus, was supposed to be an “evening star”. Arguably, then, the referent-word mapping that best fits the beliefs and mythology of the ancient Greeks is the one which says that “Phosphorus” refers to (2) and “Hesperus” refers to (3). At the very least, it would not be totally implausible for someone who endorses (a) and (b) to treat “Hesperus is Phosphorus” as false. However, I do not think that there is any reasonable choice for someone endorsing the doctrine of endurance – i.e. the thesis that entities persist through time by being wholly present at distinct times as numerically the same 3D entity – but to identify Hesperus and Phosphorus, at least if she does not want to treat the names as empty.

All in all, contrary to the apparent view of Aranyosi, I hold that the metaphysics of persistence and composition are factors to consider when evaluating identity claims involving time.⁸

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⁷ No doubt, we in the 21st century may simply decide to *stipulate* that “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” refer to Venus. But the question is whether such a decision is consonant with the linguistic behaviour of the ancient Greeks (see Linsky, 1959).

⁸ I thank Lena Wahlberg for helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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