

PROPOSITIONS AND RELATIVE *APRIORITY*

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Abstract

This paper is intended as a contribution to the debate concerning the interplay between two important notions in philosophical logic: the proposition and the *a priori*. It is argued that a full appreciation of the interplay between these two notions is the key to an adequate assessment of one of the most hotly debated issues to have emerged from Saul Kripke's classic lectures "Naming and Necessity" - the issue of necessary *a posteriori* truths. Through a critical analysis of a recent suggestion by Nathan Salmon that *apriority* in the traditional absolute sense is still the basic notion of *apriority* in the way-of-taking-relative framework motivated by the theory of singular propositions, it is shown that whether propositions are direct objects of the application of "*a priori*" depends on one's conception of propositions.

Key Words: theory of reference, proposition, *a priori*, the necessary *a posteriori*, Saul Kripke

The problem of *necessary a posteriori* truths has been one of the most hotly debated issues to have emerged from Saul Kripke's classic lectures "Naming and Necessity" (Kripke 1972).¹ Many critics of Kripke's claim that such identity statements as "Hesperus is Phosphorus" are necessary *a posteriori* truths help themselves to the notion of *proposition* in their discussions in such a way that one may seriously doubt whether they could have expressed their objections without employing the notion.² Such an employment of the notion contrasts starkly with the fact that the term is debarred from even one *single* occurrence in the entire text of "Naming and Necessity" - save in the 1980 preface to the book edition, where Kripke briefly replies to some of his critics and declares, "I am unsure that the apparatus of 'propositions' does not breakdown in this area" (Kripke 1972, 21). The contrast is as significant as it is stark. Making sense of the absence of "proposition" in "Naming and Necessity," I believe, requires an appreciation of the *interplay* between two notions: *proposition* and *apriority*. Such an appreciation also holds the key to an adequate assessment of the debate about *a posteriori* necessities. Seldom has this, however, been fully grasped by participants in the debate.

This paper aims to contribute to the general issue concerning the above-mentioned interplay by way of scrutinizing the view on relative *apriority* held by Nathan Salmon, whose position is so particularly interesting in the

¹ See *e.g.* Swinburne (1975), Tichy (1983), Salmon (1982, 1986 & 1991), Bostock (1988), Casullo (1977 & 1988), Fitch (1976 & 1987), Plantinga (1974), Linsky (1977) and Geirsson (1994).

² See *e.g.* Tichy (1983), Fitch (1976), Geirsson (1994) and Michael (1998).

context of our investigation that it can profitably be singled out. The following discussions will be organized around what I shall call the “*proposition-talk argument*.” This argument, as a general objection against Kripke’s claim, not only helps focus issues but also provides a dialectic point of reference with respect to which various positions and views may be assessed.

Fregean Propositions and “Naming and Necessity”

At the beginning of the century, Russell espoused a theory of *singular propositions*.³ There has been a revival of the theory in the past three decades, owing largely to the influence of such theorists of direct reference (“direct theorists” hereafter) as David Kaplan, John Perry, Scott Soames and Nathan Salmon.⁴ During the period in between, it was, however, the Frege-Church-Carnap theory of propositions that gained the widest currency. According to the Frege-Church-Carnap theory, propositions must be *general*, i.e., composed of intensional reference-determining entities.⁵ In the case of a singular term, the obvious candidate for its proposition content is a conceptual representation (of the reference) built up from intensional entities. One can easily see that the description theory,

³ As Barwise and Ethchemedy put it, “it would be foolhardy to claim that Russell held any *single* view of propositions throughout his philosophical career” (1987, p. 27). The theory ascribed to Russell here is the one linked with his earlier theories of meaning and truth, as seen mainly in Russell (1904, 1906, 1912, and 1917).

⁴ See Perry (1977 & 1979), Kaplan (1979 & 1989), Soames (1987 & 1989), and Salmon (1986).

⁵ See *e.g.* Carnap (1956), Church (1943) and Frege (1982 & 1918).

Kripke's main target in "Naming and Necessity," stands and falls together with this Fregean picture of propositions. Consider for example the sentence, "Socrates is wise." According to the Fregean semantics, "Socrates is wise" expresses a general proposition, which contains as one of its constituents the descriptive sense expressed by the name "Socrates." Kripke's arguments for the theory of direct reference claim to have shown that the reference of "Socrates" (or, in general, any ordinary name or indexical) is not mediated by a descriptive sense; that is, the term "Socrates" does not express such a sense. Put in another way, if the theory of direct reference is correct, the corresponding propositional components of such kind of terms as names and indexicals cannot be the associated conceptual representations. There is no need to repeat Kripke's arguments in order to see that, as arguments against the description theory, they, if successful, show that the Fregean picture of general propositions is in serious trouble.

Since the anti-Fregean arguments advanced in "Naming and Necessity" were as much a revolt against the then popular Fregean conception of propositions as a revolt against the Fregean description view of reference, it is understandable that its author would have thought it well advised to eschew talk about propositions. This absence of proposition talk in "Naming and Necessity" strikes us as all the more appropriate in Kripke's arguments for the necessary *a posteriori* when we remind ourselves of his repeated remark that epistemic notions are distinct from metaphysical notions, and that "it is not trivial to argue on the basis of something's being something which maybe we can only know *a posteriori*, that it's not a necessary truth" (Kripke 1972, 38-39). The Fregean theory of

propositions is not epistemically neutral. A major theoretical motivation for the postulation of “Thoughts” (Frege’s term for “propositions”) is to solve the cognitive issue now commonly referred to as “Frege’s Puzzle” or “Frege’s Paradox of Identity.” So the Fregean notion of proposition is fundamentally a cognitive one closely tied up with the notions of understanding and knowledge. Hence John McDowell says:

Frege’s notion of sense belongs with the notion of understanding, and we can get what is involved in understanding a language by careful employment of the notion of knowledge. (1977, 162)

On this cognitive conception, propositions are *epistemically intimate* entities *directly graspable* by the mind. There is no incomplete, or one-sided, apprehension of a proposition.

Such a notion of proposition, however, would be too epistemically-charged for the kind of task undertaken by Kripke. In “Naming and Necessity,” Kripke’s strategy, as far as the issue of *a posteriori* necessities is concerned, is to establish the modal leg of his claim (the necessity of, say, “Hesperus is Phosphorus”), taking for granted the truth of the epistemic leg (the *aposteriority* of “Hesperus is Phosphorus”). For his purposes, he only needs to make available to himself such notions as “truths” or “statements” (as epistemically neutral truth bearers). Such a substantively cognitive notion of proposition as the Fregean Thought would be too heavily epistemic for the job, and would invite a conflation of the epistemic dimension and the metaphysical dimension, a conflation that Kripke has never tired of warning us against.

A General Objection: The Proposition-Talk Argument

But one may here object that by refusing to engage in proposition talk, Kripke has cleverly eschewed a most serious problem which his claim about the necessary *a posteriori* faces. The objector may explain as follows. “Propositions” has been the traditional label for the things that are primary truth bearers and objects of beliefs. True, Frege’s theory of propositions is a *substantive* theory about what these things are. But rejecting the Fregean theory need *not* mean rejecting all talk about propositions. Thus, even granted that Kripke has in effect shown that the theory is in serious trouble, nothing in “Naming and Necessity” shows that *no* proposition talk should be allowed.

Now, the objection continues, once the employment is granted of a minimal, basic notion of “proposition” in the sense of “primary truth bearer and object of belief,” a straightforward argument becomes available, which shows that something must be *seriously wrong* with Kripke’s examples of *a posteriori* necessity. The argument, call it the “proposition-talk argument,” goes like this:

Given Kripke’s view of names,

- (1) Co-referential names cannot differ in the contribution that they make to a proposition.

It follows that:

- (2) “Hesperus is Phosphorus” and “Hesperus is Hesperus” express the *same* proposition.

Granted that propositions are objects of knowledge and belief, there is no reason to object to the following rule:⁶

- (3) It can be known *a priori* that P
that P=that Q (i.e., “P” and “Q” express the same
proposition)
-

It can be known *a priori* that Q

Now, since Kripke would accept as unexceptional that:

- (4) It is *a priori* that Hesperus is Hesperus,
it follows that
(5) It is *a priori* that Hesperus is Phosphorus.

(5) is *incompatible* with Kripke’s claim that “Hesperus is Phosphorus” is necessary *a posteriori*. But, provided that proposition talk is allowed, (5) is a consequence of Kripke’s theory of reference, from which his examples of *a posteriori* necessity are supposed to be derivable. Thus, talk about propositions enables us to show that there must be something seriously wrong about Kripke’s claim.

It should be noted that the construal of “proposition” in the above argument is not entirely neutral, although it is not committed to any substantive view as to what sort of entities a proposition is composed of. The proposition components corresponding to co-referential names, according to (1), cannot differ. That is, this construal expresses a central constraint

⁶ It is important to distinguish (3) from the principle of substitutivity (of co-referential names) in epistemic context, a highly controversial principle which Kripke, as he stated clearly, never asserted (Kripke, 1979, note 9; 1972, p. 20). The objection presented here focuses on “propositions” and makes no use of this controversial principle. See also Fitch’s clarification (Fitch, 1976).

that must be met by any account of propositions considered congenial by Kripke, or the direct theorist, who holds that names are mere tags and have no descriptive content. This is precisely what gives the above argument the bite it has. For the objector can claim that the argument has taken into account the direct theorist's semantic insights; and, more importantly, that the problem the argument has posed for Kripke does not arise in "Naming of Necessity" only because its author refuses to engage in proposition talk. Kripke may have been justified in refraining from talking in terms of *Fregean* propositions so as not to beg the question of the description theory, but that should not exempt him from facing the challenge of the "proposition-talk argument."

The major claim of this paper is that proposition talk is, however, compatible with Kripke's position on the necessary *a posteriori*. There is no need for him to eschew all such talk because the "proposition-talk argument," as I shall argue, does not work. There is a way to block the inference from (1) to (5). I will not question (1) or (2). I doubt that Kripke would question them himself, should he ever talk in terms of propositions. Moreover, (1) and (2) are true according to the theory of *singular propositions*, the most widely accepted fine-grained account of propositions among direct theorists. Given that (4) is clearly unexceptional, the inference will go through only if (3), which presupposes that "*a priori*" applies to propositions in an *absolute, simpliciter* sense, is valid. My aim in what follows is precisely to show that an absolute notion of *apriority* would not be available, and thus that (3) would emerge

as an *invalid* rule, in a framework that accommodates singular propositions.⁷

Singular Propositions and Direct Reference

A sketch of some of the main ideas of the theory of singular propositions is in order. According to the theory, the *proposition content* corresponding to a directly referential term is identical with its *referent*. This gives a nice expression of the direct theorist's rejection of the Fregean view that propositions are general. The theory holds that the proposition content of, say, "Socrates" is Socrates the *individual*, and thus that the proposition expressed by "Socrates is wise" - the complex $\langle \text{Socrates, being wise} \rangle$ - is not, *pace* the Fregean, a purely intensional entity.

The theory also offers nice expressions of some other core ideas of the theory of direct reference. The latter theory holds that the truth condition of a sentence Fa (where " a " is a directly referential term referring to the object x) is *not* a matter of whether the unique object having a certain set of properties is F ; instead it is a matter of whether x is F . The object x *itself* is what " a " contributes to the truth condition of Fa . This idea underlies Kripke's modal argument against the description theory: the truth condition of a sentence, for instance, "Aristotle is fond of dogs," as it describes a *counterfactual* circumstance is such that the sentence is true if the individual fixed to be the

⁷I argue against (3) in the context of possible-world semantics in Wong (1996). See also Stalnaker (1978).

referent would have had the property F had the circumstance obtained. That is why Kripke says:

The doctrine of rigidity supposes that a painting or picture purporting to represent a situation correctly described by ["Aristotle is fond of dogs"] must *ipso facto* purport to depict Aristotle himself as fond of dogs. No picture, purporting to represent someone else and his fondness for dogs, even if it depicts the other individual as possessing all the properties we use to identify Aristotle, represents a counterfactual situation correctly described by ["Aristotle is fond of dogs"]. (Kripke 1980, 12)

What account of propositional components can provide a better expression of this idea than the theory of singular propositions? According to the theory, we may think of the proposition expressed by "Aristotle is fond of dogs" as something like the ordered pair <Aristotle, being fond of dogs> (call this proposition *q*). Now, since *q* contains the flesh and blood Aristotle, to evaluate the truth value of *q* at a counterfactual circumstance *c*, it is obvious which individual in *c* is the one that we should be looking at: Aristotle himself, rather than the unique object in *c* that happens to have the properties specified by a certain individual concept. Rigid designation (the central idea in Kripke's modal argument) is thereby guaranteed. This point has been put, a trifle picturesquely, by Kaplan in the following remark about rigid designation.

If the individual is loaded into the proposition (to serve as the propositional component) before the proposition begins its round-the-worlds journey, it is hardly surprising that the proposition manages to find that same individual at all of its stops, even those in which the

individual had no prior, native presence. The proposition conducted no research for a native who meets propositional specifications; it simply “discovered” what it had carried in. In this way we achieve rigid designation. (Kaplan, 1989b, 569)

Of course, a general proposition, for instance $\langle C, \text{property } F \rangle$, where C is an individual concept of some “individual essence,” whatever this may mean, will also manage to find the same individual at all its stops; but the rigidity, in this case, is achieved by conducting “research for a native who meets propositional specifications.” To think of direct reference in terms of singular propositions, therefore, provides us with a clear account of how the rigidity of, say, a name, comes in only as a *result* of, and is underlain by, the direct referentiality of names.

Singular Propositions and Guises

Let’s return to the “proposition-talk argument”. According to the theory of singular propositions, both (1) and (2) are unobjectionable. Now if propositions are construed as playing the dual role of primary truth bearers and objects of belief, there seems no reason to object to (3). So the argument does look forceful. Indeed, Nathan Salmon has recently argued that it can be known *a priori* that Hesperus is Phosphorus precisely because the singular proposition expressed by “Hesperus is Phosphorus” is the *same* as that expressed by “Hesperus is Hesperus,” and that proposition, call it “ A ,” having the form $\langle \text{identity, } x, x \rangle$, is clearly knowable *a priori*.

But to think that A is *a priori* by virtue of its having the

form $\langle \text{identity}, x, x \rangle$ only shows that one is in the grip of the “orthodox” conception⁸ of the nature of propositions, according to which all propositions are composed of “epistemically intimate” entities made up entirely of conceptual or intensional entities residing in a mind-independent “third realm” (*a la* Frege), or analyzable into simple propositions consisting of concepts or particulars directly graspable by the agent through a certain kind of privileged access, something like what Russell called “acquaintance.” Singular propositions, in contrast, have an *unorthodox* nature. Most ordinary names are, according to the theory of direct reference, genuine naming devices. Correspondingly, a person, a tree, or a copy of *Word and Object* may literally be a part of a singular proposition. Just as there are different ways to represent a person, a singular proposition can be *apprehended*, or *presented*, or *grasped*, in different *ways* or under different *guises*. As a matter of fact, this general notion of a *guise* under which a proposition is apprehended (or a way in which a proposition is taken, or a mediator by means of which one is given access to a proposition)⁹ is widely employed by proponents of singular propositions, for it seems to offer a solution to Frege’s Puzzle. The core idea of this solution is that since the common singular

⁸ The term “orthodox” is Salmon’s. The orthodox camp, according to Salmon, includes both the Fregean account of general propositions and Russell’s account of propositions, which restricts propositional constituents to entities with which we are directly acquainted.

⁹ The most explicit account is Salmon’s one of ways-of-taking (Salmon, 1986). For variants of the notion, see Perry (1977) (roles), Fitch (1987) (content of cognitive states), Soames (1989) (sentences), Richard (1990) (sentences), Kaplan (1989) (characters), and Geirsson (1994) (nonlinguistic modes of presentation).

proposition expressed by, say, “Hesperus is Hesperus” and “Hesperus and Phosphorus” can be grasped by us in different ways, we may believe it when we grasp it by way of the former sentence but may *not* believe it when we grasp it by way of the latter.

The major claim I want to make is that the wide acceptance of the notion of a guise by theorists of direct reference and theorists of singular propositions has called for a new, *relative* construal of the *a priori*. The mediation by way of a guise or mode of presentation *has put a proposition beyond the direct apprehension of the knower*. That means propositions cannot in general be regarded as knowable in a direct, absolute sense, as they can, and should, be in the orthodox account. A singular proposition, for instance, *A* can only be said to be *a priori* under some appropriate guise, say (the linguistic guise of) “Hesperus is Hesperus.” The same proposition can *at the same time* be said to be *a posteriori* under another guise, say, “Hesperus is Phosphorus.”

The idea of *relativizing* the epistemic status of a proposition to a guise or way-of-taking has been entertained by Kripke himself¹⁰ and was first suggested in publication, as far as I know, by Keith Donnellan in this passing remark:

If we distinguish a sentence from the proposition it expresses then the terms “truth” and “necessity” apply to the proposition expressed by a sentence, while the terms “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*” are sentence relative . . . looking at the proposition through the lens of the *sentence* “Cicero is Cicero” the proposition can be seen *a priori* to be true,

¹⁰ As reported by Salmon in his 1991 article.

but through “Cicero is Tully” one may need an *a posteriori* investigation. (1983, 88, n. 2)

The relative view has since been entertained by some other theorists.¹¹ The crucial point to have emerged in their discussions is that the theory of direct reference and the theory of singular propositions seem to call for *a new way of looking at the epistemic statuses of “a priori” and “a posteriori” when applying them to propositions*. This shift to a relative conception of *apriority* is both significant and urgent. But, I believe, it has not received the amount of attention it deserves.

True, if “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*” apply directly and non-relatively to propositions, it is difficult to see how one can reject (3). However, from the relative point of view, the construction “it can be known *a priori* that P” is *incomplete* at best. A complete construction requires relativization to the way in which access to the relevant proposition is given. So, rule (3) can be considered complete only if we read it as involving *implicit* relativization. That is, only if “it can be known *a priori* that P” is taken to mean “(the proposition) that P is known *a priori* with respect to the sentence ‘P’ (or any guise associated with the sentence).”¹² This reading, however, calls into serious question the validity of the rule and thus the “proposition-talk argument” against Kripke.

¹¹ C. f. Michael (1998), Geirsson (1994), Wong (1991 & 1996).

¹² The last occurrence of “P” is meant to be a name referring to the sentence that “P” stands for in “it can be known *a priori* that P.”

Salmon's Definitions of *Apriority*

Traditional ideas die hard. Salmon's rejection of relative *apriority* is a case in point. His view on whether the basic notion of *apriority* should go relative is particularly interesting in this context and deserves special attention.¹³ This is not only because Salmon has been a staunch proponent of singular propositions and has authored a most competent and vigorous defense of singular propositions.¹⁴ It is also because he was one of the earliest theorists who championed the "guise approach" to what has widely been considered the *bête noire* of the theory of direct reference and the theory of singular propositions: Frege's Puzzle. If one thinks my analysis above is on the right track, one may expect that Salmon would give up absolute *apriority* in favor of the relative one. However, notwithstanding his recognition of the need for a relativized notion of *apriority*, Salmon considered the suggestion that the notion should replace the traditional (absolute) one as the *basic* notion, only to reject it. That is, he believes that theorists of singular propositions should keep (3) as a valid rule. Such a position is not only interesting but also of great importance. If Salmon is right, the "proposition-talk argument" will be *inescapable*, whether "propositions" are understood as Fregean thoughts or as including non-intensional objects. I shall devote the rest of this paper to an examination of Salmon's position and argue that it is untenable.

The thrust of Salmon's argument is that the absolute

¹³ See Salmon 1991 & 1993.

¹⁴ See Salmon 1986.

notion of the *a priori* is still the *basic* one in a framework that accommodates guise-relative *apriority*. The alleged availability of such a notion means that, in such a framework, rule (3) - taken as involving *complete* constructions of “it can be known *a priori* that . . . ,” rather than incomplete constructions with implicit relativization - remains valid. This allows us to infer the conclusion that (5). While in the “proposition-talk argument” (5) is drawn as a counter-intuitive conclusion aiming to set a problem for Kripke, Salmon embraces (5) as a truth inconsistent with Kripke’s claim about the necessary *a posteriori*. He then draws the conclusion that “Hesperus and Phosphorus” and “Hesperus and Hesperus” express the *same* (necessary and *a priori*) proposition. My objection to Salmon, as we shall see, is that for the sort of account of propositions that he holds, it *hardly* makes sense to speak of absolute *apriority*.

Let us look at some definitions of “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*” proposed by Salmon. The notion of a guise or way of taking, as we have seen, makes it possible for Salmon to claim that since the same proposition expressed by “Hesperus is Hesperus” and “Hesperus is Phosphorus” can be taken by us in different ways, we may believe it when we grasp it by way of the former sentence and not believe it when we grasp it by way of the latter. He concedes that “these way-of-taking relative notions are arguably the basic ones on my view” (Salmon 1993, 91), only to add immediately that it does not mean we cannot speak sensibly of absolute *apriority*. Salmon’s reasoning involves the following definition of “a way-of-taking relative notion of sentential *apriority*”: we may say that *a true sentence S is a priori with respect to a way x of taking a proposition* if something like the following condition obtains:

(D1) x is a way of taking the proposition content of S and that proposition is knowable [by the agent of the context] by reflection while taking the proposition in way x , without recourse to experience and without taking the proposition in some alternative way. (Salmon 1993, 90)

Accordingly,

(D1') S would be *a posteriori* with respect to x if the sentence's proposition content is knowable and x is a way of taking that proposition, but the sentence itself is not *a priori* with respect to x .

These relative notions do not support, Salmon says, the claim that "Cicero is Tully" is *a posteriori simpliciter*. Although "Cicero is Tully" is *a posteriori* relative to some ways of taking its content, the content is liable to be taken in a way with respect to which the sentence is *a priori*. This fact is, Salmon argues, "sufficient for the sentence to be *a priori (simpliciter)*", for "*a posteriori*" is supposed to mean "knowable *only* with recourse to experience." That is, Salmon believes that he has at his disposal, in addition to the relative notion of sentential *apriority*, an *absolute* notion of *apriority*, which he defines in terms of *quantification* over ways-of-taking in the following way:

(D2) A true sentence S is *a priori (simpliciter)* =_{def.} S is [could be] *a priori* with respect to *some* way of taking a proposition.

In terms of (D2), he defines *absolute sentential aposteriority* thus:

(D2') A true sentence *S* is *a posteriori (simpliciter)* = def. the proposition content of *S* is knowable but *S* is not *a priori (simpliciter)*. (Salmon 1993, 91)

The “quantificational character” of (D2), I shall argue, *gives rise to an unresolvable problem for Salmon’s position*. Before I explain this, we had better dispose of a distraction.

We have seen that Salmon has chosen to focus on the relative notion of *sentential*, rather than *propositional, apriority*. This has put the focus on the wrong place. The very idea of relativizing *apriority* is motivated by the idea of a guise under which a *proposition* is apprehended. Moreover, *sentences* themselves may plausibly be thought of as guises. Therefore, a relative notion of *apriority* should be, in the first instance, a notion of an *a priori proposition* rather than *sentence*. So in the discussion to follow I shall focus on *propositional apriority*.

Accordingly let us start by producing the *propositional* counterparts of Salmon’s definitions. Corresponding to (D1), the following defines a *relative* notion of *propositional apriority*:

(D3) A proposition *p* is *a priori* with respect to a way *x* of grasping *p* if and only if *p* is knowable [by the agent in the context] by reflection while taking *p* in way *x*, without recourse to experience and without taking *p* in some alternative way.

The following is a *propositional* version of *absolute apriority* corresponding to (D2).

(D4) A true (singular) proposition *p* is *a priori (simpliciter)* if and only if there is *at least one* way *x* of taking *p* such that *p* is *a priori* with respect to *x*,

where “*p* is *a priori* with respect to *x*” is understood as defined by (D3). The *propositional* version of (D2’) is thus:

(D5) A true proposition *p* is *a posteriori (simpliciter)* if and only if *p* is knowable but not *a priori (simpliciter)*.

Given these definitions, Salmon could now argue that “Hesperus is Phosphorus” does not express an *a posteriori* proposition, in the following way. Consider the way *M* of taking the proposition *A* (<identity, Venus, Venus>) when it is presented to us through the sentence “Hesperus is Hesperus.” Clearly, *A* is *a priori* with respect to *M* in the sense of (D3). So there is *at least* one way-of-taking *A* such that *A* is *a priori* relative to that way-of-taking. Hence, given the quantificational character of (D4), which involves quantifying over ways-of-taking, *A* is *a priori simpliciter* in the sense of (D4).

The Unavailability of Absolute *Apriority* in a Relative Framework

I reject Salmon’s argument on the grounds that (D4) is *not* an acceptable definition. Consider the following (true) sentence “Peter is at location *l* at time *t*.” If one is to attach an epistemic status to this sentence in an absolute sense, one will certainly say that it expresses an *a posteriori* truth *simpliciter*. The proposition expressed by “Peter is at *l* at *t*,” call it *B*, is a singular proposition *par excellence* that can also be expressed by “I am here now” in some appropriate context. Consider the way *N* in which Peter himself would take *B* were it presented to him through the sentence “I am here now.” Since “I am here now” is true in any context, it is clear that Peter can know *B*

were it presented to him through N without recourse to experience. So there is *at least one* way of taking B with respect to which B is *a priori*. The quantificational definition of “*a priori simpliciter*” above then allows one to say that the proposition expressed by “Peter is at l at t ” is *a priori* in an absolute sense. (D4) therefore *trivializes* the notion of the *a priori simpliciter* by counting such sentences as “Peter is at l at t ” as *a priori*. This shows that (D4) is an unacceptable definition.

The root of the problem is that Salmon is trying to salvage an absolute notion of *apriority* in a framework (the guise-relative one) where there is no room for a sensible notion of that kind. From the relative perspective, we can sensibly claim that the proposition B is *a priori* with respect to “I am here now” without thereby committing ourselves to the claim that it is *also a priori* with respect to “Peter is at l at t .” But we will run right into trouble if within a relative framework we try to talk, as Salmon does, as though a basic, absolute notion were still available. His definitions, which try to keep as basic notions the traditional, absolute uses of “*a priori*” and “*a posteriori*” in a relative scheme of things, allow one to say that such sentences as “Peter is at l at t ” are not *a posteriori* but *a priori simpliciter*. This I think borders on the absurd. One way to deal with this problem is to deny that “I am here now” (in virtue of being true in any context) is logically true, thereby undermining a common reason for holding that the sentence is *a priori*. Though this suggestion would probably strike those who have read Kaplan’s seminal works on demonstratives as highly implausible, Salmon seems to think it worth considering. He says that he has “become convinced that the particular sentence “I am here now,” in its normal use, is not logically true,

and that this is demonstrated by Gerald Vision's example of the standard telephone answering-machine message: "I am not here now."¹⁵ Salmon believes that "this example is best thought of as a genuine case of *assertion in absentia*, in which the agent of the context is (just as he or she says) not present at the context of his or her speech act."¹⁶

I am not convinced that Vision's example is a good one for demonstrating the "normal use" of "I am (not) here now," though it is quite true that it demonstrates perhaps the only common, non-trivial use of the sentences. Salmon might argue that since no one would normally utter the trivially false sentence "I am not here now," *assertion in absentia* constitutes a (perhaps the only) genuinely normal use of the sentence. But it is not difficult to find fault with this argument. First, if it were sound, similar arguments could be made to show that such sentences as "Hesperus is Hesperus" are not logically true because they are not so in their non-trivial (and therefore "normal") use. Second, alternative treatments of Vision's example seem available. One plausible and neat candidate involves the use of the pragmatic/semantic distinction. We can say that "I am not here now" is informative in some particular context (as in Vision's example) precisely because the hearer can pragmatically exploit the fact that in its *normal* use the sentence is patently a logically false one. So we need not regard the "logical truth" reading as abnormal in order to make sense of the non-triviality of the recorded message. At any rate,

¹⁵ For the debate on this sort of alleged counterexamples to the logical validity of "I am here now" see Colterjohn and MacIntosh (1987), Simpson (1987), and Vision (1985 & 1987).

¹⁶ See Salmon, 1991, p. 171.

whatever one thinks about Salmon's view on the normal use of "I am here now," the fact remains that there is a use of the sentence, be it normal or not, such that Peter knows *B* *a priori* when *B* is presented to him as "I am here now."

It is not difficult to multiply the example. I am as tall as a certain measuring rod of the length *S*, but I need not know that I am of the length (or height) *S*. Suppose, putting my hand right on top of my head indicating my height while standing upright as much as I can, I utter "I am of this height." I know *a priori* that what I have said is true. If we accept Salmon's definition, "I am of the height *S*" would become *a priori* just like "Peter is at *l* at *t*." For "I am of this height" and "I am of the height *S*" express the same proposition.

It may be said that these examples need not show that Salmon's definitions trivialize the notion of *apriority*. They demonstrate nothing more than that Salmon's definitions are in need of some technical refinements. In fact, Salmon himself has remarked:

If it ["I am here now"] is *a priori*, then so is "Peter is at *l* at *t*" (provided the latter is true). But then if "I am here now" is *a priori*, it is not at all obvious that the resulting *apriority* of "Peter is at *l* at *t*" would trivialize the notion of *apriority*. Such sentences as "Peter is 5'9" tall," "Mary was born in Seattle," "Water runs downhill" etc. would remain *a posteriori*. (Salmon 1991, 72)

I do not think, however, that a definition of *apriority* must treat *all or most* true declarative sentences as *a priori* in order to "trivialize" the notion. Perhaps all this is only a trivial quibble about the "normal use" of "trivialize." But surely the following

point is not a quibble: whether one calls it “trivialization” or not, a definition that attributes *apriority* to “Armstrong is on the moon at time *t*,” or “Quine is of the height *S*” is seriously flawed.

It is worth pointing out that the issue here has a wider scope. As Michaelis Michael (1998) has recently shown, any true proposition can be expressed by a sentence whose truth is known *a priori*. Consider the contingent matter (to use one of Salmon’s examples of *a posteriori* statements) whether Mary was born in Seattle. Following Michael, let us now introduce a new sentence, “##.” The semantics of “##” is as follows: “##” expresses the same proposition as “Mary was born in Seattle” if Mary was born in Seattle; “##” expresses the same proposition as “It is not the case that Mary was born in Seattle” otherwise. Now let me assert that ##. I know what I have asserted is true, a contingent truth, and I know that *a priori*.

This is clearly a trick, but a trick that works. One common reaction to it is that we know that “##” expresses a truth without knowing which truth that is. This involves the very complex issue of what it takes to grasp the meaning of a sentence. And Michael has argued forcefully that “the claim that I do not know which proposition is expressed by ‘##’ cannot be spelt out in a manner that has a principled ground” (Michael 1998, 122). I cannot take up that issue here. What I want to point out here is this. From the relative point of view, there is nothing particularly strange about the claim that the trick works and so it is, ultimately, not a trick. The semantics of “##” is contrived in such a way that it expresses the same truth as “Mary was born in Seattle” (suppose that it in fact is true) but differs from the latter in being true *in any context of*

use. That is, we have here a contrast analogous to that between “Peter is at *l* at *t*” and “I am here now” as uttered by Peter in some appropriate context. Like “I am here now,” what “##” expresses is in a sense *a priori*: the proposition expressed by “##” is *a priori* relative to the way we take it through the sentence “##.” But the same proposition, presented through “Mary was born in Seattle,” remains *a posteriori* relative to that presentation. So, the prickly reaction to the claim that we know *a priori* that ## can be assuaged if one is brought to look at it from a relative point of view. The relative perspective, therefore, can make good sense of the initial strangeness of the example while the absolute account either cannot do so or otherwise trivializes the notion of *apriority*. We should see better now how futile it would be to try to retain *apriority* in the absolute sense as the basic notion of the *a priori* in a relative framework.

But isn't it true that there is an almost universal *tendency* to say, in such cases as “##” or “Cicero is Cicero” that we know *a priori* that ## or that Cicero is Cicero and leave it at that without relativizing it to “##” or “Cicero is Cicero”? Will there not still be this tendency even when one comes to see things from the relative vantage point of view? Here, it is helpful to note that the relative view need not require that any assignment of *apriority* make *explicit* relativization. The absolute construction of “*a priori*” can *function relatively* when taken in a certain way. We may conveniently take “it is *a priori* that *p*” as assigning *apriority* to *the proposition that p relative to the very sentence “p”*¹⁷ (or to any way-of-taking-*p* associated

¹⁷ For simplicity, I ignore the “use/mention” convention when I use “*p*” here,

with “p”), except when indicated otherwise. (Indeed even Michael’s assertion that he knows *a priori* that ##, I think, can be fully appreciated *only* if it is taken as involving *implicit* relativization. For Michael seems to think that a moral of the example of “##” is precisely that *relative apriority* is called for under certain conception of propositions.¹⁸) That is, to the claim that I know *a priori* that ## or that I know *a posteriori* that Hesperus is Phosphorous, one need not react as if they entailed that I know *a priori* that Mary was born in Seattle or that I know (only) *a posteriori* that Hesperus is Hesperus. Taken as involving implicit relativization, the claim has no such entailment. For knowing *a priori* that Mary was born in Seattle *with respect to* “##” does not entail knowing *a priori* that Mary was born in Seattle *with respect to* “Mary was born in Seattle.”

Pure Semantics and Applied Semantics

Salmon may or may not agree that the “##”-trick works. But it would be very interesting to note that he has provided us, in effect, with a proof that the trick works. Salmon has rightly noticed that there is a subtle connection between *apriority* and *truth solely by virtue of meaning*. Drawing on this connection, he tries to prove that “Cicero is Tully” is *a priori* for very much the same reason that “Cicero is Cicero” is *a priori* on account of its being *true solely by virtue of meaning*. Ironically his proof, with necessary adjustment, turns out to work equally well for the claim that “##” is *a priori*.

where corner signs (quasi quotes) should be used.

¹⁸ See Michael, 1998, p. 124.

Salmon's proof rests on the distinction between *pure semantics* and *applied semantics*.¹⁹ It is a purely semantic fact about English that the description "the inventor of bifocals" refers to the inventor of bifocals. But it is a fact of applied semantics (about English) that "the inventor of bifocals" refers to Benjamin Franklin. For the latter fact obtains partly in virtue of some nonlinguistic, historical facts about what Benjamin Franklin did.

Salmon also notes that a fact that is a *logical consequence* of a purely semantic fact is itself a purely semantic fact. Accordingly, it is a purely semantic fact about English, for example, that "Cicero is Cicero" is true. "For this fact is a logical consequence of the purely semantic fact that 'Cicero is Cicero' is true if and only if Cicero is Cicero" (Salmon 1993, 94). On similar grounds, Salmon claims that it is also a fact of pure semantics that "Cicero is *Tully*" is true. The line of reasoning is as follows:

It is a purely semantic fact that "Cicero is Cicero" is true if and only if Cicero is Cicero. But the fact that Cicero is Tully is identical with the fact that Cicero is Cicero, for "[a]ccording to Millianism [the doctrine of singular propositions], that Cicero is Tully is nothing more than the logical truth about Cicero that he is him" (Salmon 1993, 95). Thus it is also a purely semantic fact that "Cicero is Tully" is true if and only if Cicero is Cicero. And a logical consequence of this latter fact is the fact that "Cicero is Tully" is true. Therefore, *it is a purely semantic fact that "Cicero is Tully" is true.*

Now we may argue in a similar fashion for the case of

¹⁹ See Salmon, 1993, pp. 93-95.

“##.” Given our stipulation about what proposition “##” expresses, the fact that

- (6) “##” is true if and only if Mary was born in Seattle or
Mary was not born in Seattle

is a logical consequence of the (pure) semantics of “##.” So it is also a purely semantics fact that (6). And it is a logical consequence of (6) that “##” is true. Therefore *it is a purely semantic fact that “##” is true.*

Salmon is of the view that one way of explicating the notion of “*a priori*” is by linking it to the notion of “truth solely by virtue of meaning.” The latter notion is, he thinks, “roughly the notion of a sentence’s truth being a fact of pure rather than applied semantics” (Salmon 1993, 94). This is why he thinks his conclusion that it is a purely semantic fact that “Cicero is Tully” is true shows that “Cicero is Tully” is *a priori*. Since Salmon would have to say, as we have just seen, that it is a purely semantic fact that “##” is true, he would have to say the same of “##” as he says of “Cicero is Tully.” That is, “##” is “every bit as *a priori* as the theorem of mathematics” (Salmon 1993, 92).

Thanks to the general character of the “##”-example, I can now claim that Salmon’s definition (D4) is plagued by the problem of trivialization in a full-blooded sense of “trivialize.” For any factual sentence *S* that Salmon may want to call “*a posteriori*,” there is another sentence *S** such that the proposition expressed by *S* is *a priori* relative to the way that proposition is taken were it presented through *S**. So, according to (D4), *the proposition that S is a priori simpliciter.*

(Or according to the sentential version, (D2), the sentence S is *a priori simpliciter*.)

Concluding Remarks

I hope it is now clear that my objections against Salmon's definitions are not grounded on a few recalcitrant, clever examples that indicate only that they need further, technical refinements. The objection cuts much deeper. The examples show that *whether propositions are direct objects of the application of "a priori" depends on one's conception of propositions*. On the Fregean conception, there is no notion of how a proposition is presented or taken. Propositions are themselves abstract senses and are always apprehended in a *direct* manner. So the sameness of propositions guarantees the "*a priori equivalence*" of sentences. On the conception of singular propositions we have considered - a conception espoused by Salmon - the fact that a proposition can be expressed by different sentences provides no reason to think that the ways the proposition is taken when it is presented through these sentences must be "*a priori equivalent*." If the appellation "*a priori*" applies to singular propositions at all, it should primarily apply to them *indirectly, relative* (implicit or explicitly) to the way it is taken (in a context). This renders futile Salmon's attempt to try to salvage the traditional absolute notion of *apriority*.

To relate all this to the "proposition-talk argument": if our arguments above are sound, there is no reason to think that rule (3) can be invoked to allow one to construct the argument in objection to Kripke's claim about the necessary *a priori*. The

Kripkean or the direct theorist need not withhold proposition talk in order to hold the claim.²⁰

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²⁰ I am indebted to the advice provided by the anonymous referees for *EurAmerica*.

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命題與相對先驗性

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摘 要

美國當代著名哲學家克里普克(Saul Kripke)的名著《命名與必然性》引發了很多關於形上學、語言哲學和邏輯哲學的論爭，對英美分析哲學界於有關領域的研究影響深遠；其中《命名與必然性》裡有關後驗必然真理的觀點所帶出的論爭，迄今仍備受討論。本文旨在指出疏解此論爭的關鍵之乃在明瞭「先驗性」與「命題」兩者在理論上之相互關係，並透過對撒文(Nathan Salmon)於有關問題的觀點來闡明此論旨。撒文乃發揚克里普克所代表的「直接指涉論」的著名理論家，然而在近年一系列著作中，卻以其「單稱命題」的理論出發，否定了克里普克對後驗必然真理的觀點。撒文的論證要成立，他必須堅持其對「先驗性」的絕對觀；本文則指出，撒文的絕對觀是難以跟其命題理論溶合一致的。此外，作者亦希望藉本文的討論，闡明「命題」一概念與直接指涉論的核心觀念之關連。

關鍵詞： 指涉理論、命題、先驗、後驗必然性、克里普克