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### **Are all proper names rigid designators?**

Rigid designators are terms that refer to the same object in all possible worlds. Proper names are typically thought to be rigid designators because they refer to a specific individual regardless of context or circumstance. While it is true that proper names and certain natural kind terms (such as “water and H<sub>2</sub>O”) are rigid designators as part of scientific essentialism (Kripke, 1980), it does not necessitate that all proper names are rigid designators due to the presence of outlier cases that proper names are not rigid designators.

Firstly, empty names are examples of proper names that are not rigid designators. An empty name is a proper name that does not refer to any existing individual, object or place. For example, the name “Zeus” refers to a Greek god, but there is no actual person who corresponds to the name it supposedly denotes, and hence it does not refer to anything in all possible worlds. Opponents of this view may rebut that empty names refer to a specific fictional or mythical character, which are an “abstract artefact” created in all possible worlds (Braun, 2005). However, I believe that this argument leverages the ambiguity of the criteria of the existence of the referents of names. It argues that Zeus exists as a mythical character in the real world, which makes it unclear if being in the mythical world also meets the criteria of existing, and would also need to deal with the age-old question – “Do gods exist?”

Secondly, proper names that have different referents in different contexts, or the “multiple bearers problem” (Baumann, 2010). For example, the name “John” might refer to different persons in varying context. Defenders of the view that proper names are rigid designators may argue that names like “John” are not rigid designators because their referents are determined by context. Names with different referents in different contexts can be argued to still qualify as rigid designators because the referent is fixed by a set of criteria that are independent of context. However, this can be refuted by maintaining that the referent of the proper name is highly dependent on what the receiver knows (or if they are familiar with the context). For example, when mentioning “football”, Americans may interpret it as a sport similar to rugby, while the British will favour using “football” instead of “soccer”.

It is necessary to reckon as to whether the conveyers’ intended message, or the receivers’ interpretation of the message matters more. For both parties, the cultural context that they are more familiar with also affects how they use or understand certain proper names. Hence, the set of contextual criteria associated to proper names should not be neglected, and is also dependent on what the conveyer or receiver knows (if they are familiar with the context).