

Plantinga's Theory of Proper Names

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In "The Boethian compromise," Alvin Plantinga proposes a theory of proper names. His theory, he argues, is superior to theories of proper names suggested by the work of Mill, Donnellan, Kripke, and Kaplan in its handling of at least three puzzles:

... those presented by empty (i.e., non-denoting) names, by negative existentials containing proper names, and by propositional identity in the context of propositional attitudes. ([7], p. 129)

Plantinga also argues that his theory avoids one criticism which he takes to be very damaging to theories of proper names held by Russell and Frege. I will argue that Plantinga's theory is unsatisfactory in its handling of the puzzle presented by propositional identity in the context of propositional attitudes.

In order to motivate Plantinga's theory, I will begin by giving a very brief statement of the criticism which Plantinga takes to be very damaging to Russell's and Frege's theories of naming. Then, I will state the puzzle as Plantinga renders it, presented by propositional identity in the context of propositional attitudes. Next, I will show how Plantinga's own theory avoids that criticism and at least appears to resolve the puzzle. Two objections to Plantinga's theory will then be presented. I will also consider some replies that Plantinga might reasonably make. In giving my objections, I have endeavored to present an "internal criticism" of Plantinga's view; that is, I have

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