**Braun Defended**

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Zuzanna Gnatek (*The Reasoner* 5(5) pp.72-73) raises two problems for the Unfilled Proposition View (UPV) of the direct reference theorist David Braun (1993: ‘Empty names’, Noûs 27: 449–469).

The first problem according to Gnatek, is that, context-sensitivity aside, if two sentences express the same proposition, they are necessarily equivalent, expressing the same proposition at all worlds. But Gnatek claims that although

1. Vulcan does not exist

and

1. Ossian does not exist

do in fact express the same proposition according to UPV, namely the one represented in Braun’s notation by

1. <<{}, exists>, NEG>>

(1) and (2) express distinct propositions, and differ in truth value at worlds where only one of Vulcan and Ossian exist. For example, if Vulcan exists, (1) expresses (4), not (3)

1. <<{Vulcan}, exists>, NEG>>

This argument assumes, however, that Vulcan could have existed, an assumption many reject. Of course ‘Vulcan’ could have had its reference fixed by description, referring to a planet satisfying the descriptive material associated with ‘Vulcan’, but Braun can maintain that this planet would not have been Vulcan. (See Kripke (1980: *Naming and Necessity* pp. 23-24, 156-158) on unicorns and Sherlock Holmes).

Gnatek would do better to use something like the following sentences to avoid this problem:

1. Braun does not exist
2. Gnatek does not exist

If names are *obstinately* rigid, so that they denote the same thing in every possible world, whether or not it exists, then there are no unfilled propositions concerning contingent nonexistents: (5) and (6) will express the propositions

1. <<{Braun}, exists>, NEG>>

and

1. <<{Gnatek}, exists>, NEG>>

in all worlds. So the problem lapses, if names are obstinately rigid.

But what if names are *persistently* rigid, denoting the same object at any world at which it exists, but nothing otherwise? Well assuming

1. All a name contributes to a proposition is its referent, if any

(5) and (6) will express the same proposition at worlds where neither Braun nor Gnatek exist, but distinct, non-equivalent propositions at worlds where only one of Braun or Gnatek exist.. This would give Gnatek a pair of sentences which *possibly* express the same proposition, but are not necessarily equivalent, which is not quite what she claimed, but is good enough.

It seems as if Braun does want to accept (9) (“A proper name has no semantic function other than referring to an individual” (Braun 1993:449)). But it is consistent with direct reference, as least understood as the thesis that names are entirely non-descriptional (Salmon 2005: *Reference and Essence* (second edition). Prometheus Books: Amherst, New York, pp. 22-23.) that names contribute extra-referential features to propositions. On this picture, which denies (9), it does not follow that (5) and (6) express the same proposition at worlds at which neither Gnatek nor Braun exist. So even if names are persistently rigid, a theory of direct reference escapes Gnatek’s objection, if it rejects (9). Those, like Braun, however, who accept (9), are committed to the obstinate rigidity of names. But that it is not an implausible position, indeed it seems that we do use names to talk about individuals even in discourse about counterfactual circumstances in which they do not exist. And neither does obstinacy rob UPV of interest, since the names of necessary nonexistents, such as Vulcan, are empty, and so there is still work for UPV to do.

Gnatek illustrates the second alleged problem for UPV with the following pair

1. Holmes is a fictional character
2. Vulcan is a fictional character

Intuitively (10) is true and (11) false. But Gnatek thinks that (10) and (11) contain empty names, and so UPV is committed to them having the same truth value, since UPV endorses a negative free logic: sentences with a subject-predicate logical form are true iff the subject term refers to something which satisfies the predicate, and false otherwise.

What Gnatek needs to cause trouble for a negative free logic, however, is a pair of sentences which (i) differ in truth-value, (ii) contain empty names, and (iii) express the same atomic proposition (a negative free logic allows non-atomic sentences containing empty to differ in truth-value). But Braun could reasonably reply that she has only supplied (i). Regarding (ii), it is not clear that on the true reading of (10) ‘Holmes’ is an empty name (see Braun 2005). If ‘Holmes’ denotes the fictional character Holmes, and ‘Vulcan’ does not denote a fictional character, then we have a straightforward explanation of why (10) is true but (11) false. On the other hand, if there is a true reading of (10) where ‘Holmes’ is empty, then, plausibly, (10) does not express an atomic proposition. On such a reading, ‘fictional’ does not contribute to the complex predicate ‘is a fictional character’, but rather is a hyperintensional sentential operator. If so (10) and (11) will plausibly express different propositions and so can differ in truth-value.

Gnatek might respond to this last claim, that if ‘Holmes’ and ‘Vulcan’ are empty, and we accept (9) as Braun does, then the proposition within the scope of the fiction operator in (10) is the proposition within the scope of the fiction operator in (11). But then how can the propositions (10) and (11) differ and hence differ in truth-value. This objection, however, ignores the distinction between the proposition expressed by a sentence, its assertoric content, and what contribution a sentence makes to complex sentences of which it is a part, its ingredient sense. If we distinguish the two, then sentences which express the same proposition can embed within the same operator to produce distinct propositions. I cannot provide the details of such an operator account here, but Gnatek has not shown that the defender of UPV cannot provide one, or even that they need to.

Of course, my rejection of Gnatek’s objections does not constitute an endorsement of UPV.