

The Gradation Semantics for Divine and Secular Rebaptism

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Abstract: Rebaptism occurs when an individual is renamed. Divine rebaptism takes place when this action is performed or is supposed to have been performed by a God, e.g., *Yhwh* who rebaptized “Abram” into “Abraham” in the *Genesis*. Secular rebaptism is one performed by a person, e.g., someone who self-rebaptizes oneself after a sex change. There is a vast literature on the semantics of proper names. However, no one has provided a semantics that accounts for divine and secular rebaptism. This essay aims to do so while spelling out that John Stuart Mill’s and Gottlob Frege’s views on the semantics of proper names were consistent with one another and pointed to a gradation semantics. Among other claims discussed in the essay, this semantics is characterized by the claim that meaning (in the sense of propositional content, e.g., a definite description) is a gradation property: one that a proper name *n* has in a hardly precisely determinable degree that varies in distinct possible states of the world and even in distinct contexts within the same state from a low or practically null degree that does not individuate *n* to a high degree that does so in attaching to *n* a unique propositional content. The essay also shows skepticism vis-à-vis the claim that a semantics of proper names can accord with intuition while proposing and seeking to satisfy an alternative criterion (accordance with what is interesting) and drawing connections between semantics, philosophy of religion, political and social philosophy.

Keywords: Semantics; Proper Names; Rebaptism; *Genesis*; *Yhwh*; Sex-Change.

Introduction

Rebaptism occurs when an individual (e.g., a person, city or street) that was first baptized with a proper name *n* is later renamed with a distinct proper name *n**.¹ Let us call divine the rebaptism that is performed or is supposed to have been performed by a God. Divine rebaptism is illustrated by the *Pentateuch*’s book of *Genesis* where it is stated that a God, that is, *Yhwh*² rebaptized “אַבְרָם” into “אַבְרָהָם”, and “שָׂרַי” into “שָׂרָה” (Genesis 17: 5 and 15). Hereafter, these four Hebrew proper names will be called biblical names. Traditionally, these names have been transliterated and translated to English as: “Abram”; “Abraham”; “Sarai” and “Sarah”, respectively. Respectively, alternative, plausible and more literal translations of these names are:

¹ Due to space constraints, rebaptisms of cities (e.g., the 1961 of “Stalingrad” into “Volgograd” in Russia) or streets (e.g., the 2017 of Madrid’s street “Calle del General Romero Basart” into “Calle de Blas Cabrera”) will not be addressed here.

² Whether this is the true and only proper name of the God of the *Genesis* or the *Pentateuch* as whole is another issue that cannot be addressed here. For a take on this matter, see Jan Assmann (2018: 11), and Thomas Römer (2019: 24).

“*The Exalted Father*”; “*The Father of the Multitude*”; “*The Princess of Mine*” and “*The Princess*”. By secular rebaptism, let us understand one that is performed by a person. Imagine two newborn infants: one describable by biology as a female (hereafter, female), and the other describable by biology as a male (hereafter, male) who are baptized by their parents “Mara” and “Quentin”, respectively. Suppose yet that as these infants grow, they do not take themselves to belong to their respective sexes and gender norms associated at their contexts with such sexes, e.g., that females, but not males are to want to wear pink dresses.³ Starting in their teen years, these female and male also change their biological features by taking hormones and even going through some sort of gene therapy in turning or at least seeking to turn themselves into a male and female, respectively.⁴ Eventually, they secularly rebaptize themselves; “Mara” is rebaptized “Charles”, and “Quentin” is rebaptized “Kimberly”. Henceforth, let us call these four proper names, queer names.

Over the last fifty years or so, a quite vast literature on the semantics of proper names has been articulated. This has been done by authors who may be subdivided into: Millians mainly influenced by John Stuart Mill (1974), e.g., Saul Kripke (1980, 2019), David Kaplan (1989) and Scott Soames (2002); Fregeans mainly influenced by Gottlob Frege (1892 / 1960), e.g., Bart Geurts (1997), Paul D. Elbourne (2005) and Delia Graff Fara (2015); and those who articulate hybrid views that combine elements from Mill and Frege, e.g., Anders J. Schoubye (2017, 2020) and Manuel García-Carpintero (2018). However, no one — at least not as far as I know — has provided a semantics for divine and secular rebaptism. It is about time to change that. This is, accordingly, what this essay proposes to do. It does so while offering an alternative approach vis-à-vis those of the aforementioned authors who more or less explicitly proceed under two assumptions.

³ For a more detailed take on such norms, see Julia Serano (2016).

⁴ For more detailed discussions on the possibility and ethics of genetic enhancement, see the essays gathered at Steve Clarke *et al* (2016).

Assumption 1 is that the views on the semantics of proper names of Mill and Frege are inconsistent with one another.⁵ Mill, it is often suggested, pointed to Millianism: the thesis that a proper name *n* fully lacks the non-gradation property of being meaningful, that is, having a “connotation”, to put in Mill’s terms, or a “*Sinn*”, to put it in Frege’s (Mill 1974: 40 / Frege 1892: 25 / Frege 1960: 57). A non-gradation property of *x* is one that *x* either fully has or fully lacks. To be meaningful is to have a propositional content (e.g., a definite description) objectively acknowledged by a community of competent speakers. Frege, in contrast, would have pointed to Fregeanism (or descriptivism). This is the thesis that *n* fully has the non-gradation property of being meaningful in having an individuating propositional content. Assumption 2 is that while mainly or even practically exclusively dialoguing with authors interested in the semantics of proper names (e.g., the named ones), one can and should seek to articulate a semantics of proper names that accords with intuition — a criterion that is met if and only if a semantics accounts for actual or possible states of the world⁶ in which proper names are used in an ordinary, pre-theoretical or common sensical way that promotes consensus with all persons independently of their political views, social class, nationality, gender, race, etc.⁷ The semantics for divine and secular rebaptism defended here is called gradation semantics. Three claims characterize it:

(G-i) Three *de re* contingent properties of a proper name *n* are those of: being associated with a subjectivity, that is, an idiosyncratic psychological “idea” or “*Vorstellung*”, to use Frege’s term

⁵ For a defense of this thesis, see Kripke (1980: 26-31) and John Burgess (2013: 11-19). For an objection to it, consider John Justice (2002).

⁶ “As Kripke somewhat ruefully admits”, John Burgess argues (2013), in *Naming and Necessity*, “the jargon of possible worlds may have had the effect of making some of his doctrines seem more controversial than they ought. A usage safer from misconstrual, Kripke now recognizes, would be to speak of possible states of the world” (Burgess 2013: 48). So, the terminology of possible worlds was dropped here in favor of that of possible states of the world.

⁷ For objections to Kripke’s use of this criterion, see Gary Gutting (2009: 31) and Herman Cappelen (2012: 71-75). For more recent uses of this criterion, consider Anders J. Schoubye’s (2017: 717, 718, 721, 722, 723, 731, 733, etc) constant resort to intuition-talk. Another criterion often endorsed by Millians, Fregeans and supporters of hybrid views that yet cannot be discussed here is maximization of theoretical virtues, e.g., simplicity and explanatory power.

(Frege 1892: 29 / Frege 1960: 59); being meaningful; and having a reference, that is, a “denotation” as Mill puts it, or a “*Bedeutung*”, as Frege claims (M 1974: 40 / Frege 1892: 25 / Frege 1960: 57). A *de re* contingent property is one that *x* has in at least one possible state of the world in which *x* exists. A *de re* necessary property is one that *x* or a counterpart of *x* has in all of these states.⁸

- (G-ii) If *n* has the property of having a reference, *n* has a non-gradation property. On the other hand, if *n* has the properties of being meaningful and being associated with a subjectivity, *n* has two gradation properties. A gradation property is one that *n* has in a hardly precisely determinable degree. This degree varies in distinct possible states of the world and even in distinct contexts within the same state from a low or practically null degree that does not individuate *n* to a high degree that does so in attaching to *n* a unique propositional content (if *n* is meaningful) and/or a unique psychological content (if *n* is associated with a subjectivity).
- (G-iii) If *n* has the properties of being meaningful and being associated with a subjectivity at a context in a possible state of the world, competent speakers who yet have experienced a challenging psychological struggle related to *n* may be unable to precisely distinguish these two properties.

Let us now problematize Assumption 1 in section 1. Then, the gradation semantics’ accounts of divine and secular rebaptism are presented in sections 2 and 3, respectively. In section 4, reasons for suspending judgment on Assumption 2 are provided. It is also shown that there seem to be advantages in endorsing and the gradation semantics satisfies an alternative criterion, while seeking to dialogue, not only with the aforementioned authors but with a larger group of persons, e.g., those who are interested in divine rebaptism, secular rebaptism, the *Genesis*, the struggles of those who through sex-change, etc. Let us call this alternative criterion accordance with what is interesting. Suppose that this criterion is met if and only if a semantics addresses actual or possible states of the world in which proper names are used in a way that may be of interest in being backed up by a communitarian as well as an individualistic reason. A communitarian reason is a sort of justification by authority; one that in seeking to provoke consensus, appeals to works (e.g., those

⁸ This essay is neutral on whether individuals at distinct possible states of the world can be identical to one another or merely, as David Lewis (1986) notoriously indicates, counterparts of each other, that is, distinct individuals that resemble but do not have all properties in common. Given this essay’s neutrality on such issue, judgment on whether proper names are rigid designators is likewise suspended. Note that as Kripke (2019) underlines in a talk from May 30th of 2019 held at the University of London’s School of Advanced Study, “a designator is rigid iff there is an object *a* that it designates with respect to every possible world in which *a* exists, and never designates another object with respect to any world”. At Youtube where this talk can be found, Kripke utters so at approximately 7 minutes and 27 seconds. Consider, though, that if there is no object that exists in more than one possible state of the world but only objects that have countless counterparts in distinct states, no proper name can be a rigid designator.

of Mill and Frege) known by a community as a justificatory resource, even if pointing to alternative readings of such works. An individualistic reason is a justification by (so to speak) “uniqueness”. This a justificatory resource that in addressing new issues (e.g., divine and secular rebaptism), articulates an account (e.g., in connecting semantics with philosophy of religion, political philosophy and social philosophy) in a way that is to provoke persons in causing dissensus.

1. The Consistency of Mill’s and Frege’s Semantics

Assumption 1 is false. Mill and Frege themselves point to (G-i) and (G-ii), and, though they do not defend (G-iii), this claim is consistent with their works. This is so despite of what is suggested by the aforementioned literature on the semantics of proper names as well as by passages by Mill that suggest Millianism and passages by Frege that point to Fregeanism. Respectively, examples of such passages are: “the only names of objects which connote nothing”, Mill argues, “are proper names; and these have, strictly speaking, no signification” (Mill 1974: 34); and “the sense of a proper name”, Frege claims, “is grasped by everybody who is sufficiently familiar with the language or totality of designations to which it belongs” (Frege 1960: 57-58). Indeed, when considered in their contexts, these passages are not evidence that Mill supported Millianism and Frege defended Fregeanism. Rather, the passage by Mill is more plausibly read as an indication that Mill supported Millianism^{Ordinary Use}: the empirical thesis never contradicted by Frege that, in ordinary life, proper names of persons are often applied with no meaning or at least with no individuating meaning. Moreover, the passage by Frege is more plausibly read as an indication that Frege supported Fregeanism^{Scientific Use}. This a normative thesis never discussed by Mill: that, in scientific contexts (e.g., that of an essay on astrology), scientists should apply proper names with an individuating meaning as long as they aim to spell out or explain why identity claims of the form “n = n” (e.g., “Hesperus is Hesperus”) are less cognitive valuable than those of the form

“ $n = n^*$ ” (e.g., “Hesperus is Phosphorus”). This is to state that Mill’s and Frege’s views are consistent with one another, albeit they focus on distinct phenomena related to proper names.

Consider that Frege states: “a painter, a horseman, and a zoologist *will probably* [as opposed to *inevitably*] connect different [subjectivities] with the name ‘Bucephalus’” (Frege 1960:59, *our emphasis*). This is textual evidence that Frege takes the property of being associated with a subjectivity to be a *de re* contingent property (as opposed to a *de re* necessary property) of a proper name. Mill likewise suggests so, even though he does not explicitly address subjectivities. “A man”, Mill argues, “*may* [as opposed to *inevitably*] have been named John, because that was the name of his father” (Mill 1974: 33). This is to indicate that “to have been the name of one’s father” is a subjectivity contingently (as opposed to *inevitably*) associated with a proper name (e.g., “John”) often adopted in ordinary life, which is focused on by Mill, but not by Frege.

Textual evidence shows that Frege and Mill also take the property of having a meaning to be a *de re* contingent properties of a proper name. “To every expression belonging to a complete totality of sign”, Frege claims, “there *should certainly* [that is, normatively speaking] correspond a definite [meaning]” (Frege 1960: 58, *our emphasis*). Yet, this condition can only be met by a “perfect language” (Frege 1960: 58). This condition, Frege underlines, is to be met if one aims to use language for an extremely particular purpose focused by Frege, but not by Mill: that of articulating what Frege calls “the theoretical structure of a demonstrative science” as opposed to, say, speak with friends (Frege 1960: 58). Frege, therefore, acknowledges what is explicit: that “natural languages often do not satisfy this condition” (Frege 1960: 58). This is because such languages often have meaningless proper names or at least proper names whose meanings are highly vague. “In the case of an actual proper name such as ‘Aristotle’”, Frege notoriously emphasizes in pointing to this direction, “opinions as to the sense may differ” (Frege 1960: 58).

By his turn, Mill claims that: “though we may give to an individual a [proper] name utterly unmeaning [e.g., in using it in ordinary life], a name peculiar to an individual is *not necessarily* of this description”, e.g., when applied more precisely in a scientific paper or, as it will be spelled out in what follows, in the *Genesis* (Mill 1974: 33, *our emphasis*). Indeed, Mill emphasizes (in a perhaps surprisingly Fregean vein) that a proper name “*may* [as opposed to necessarily] be significant of some attribute, or some union of attributes” (Mill 1974: 33, *our emphasis*). In other words, for Mill, proper names *could* have a meaning. This is not to state that proper names *inevitably* have so, e.g., when applied by ordinary speakers who may merely wish to fix a reference when using in an everyday life context a popular proper name, such as “John”.

For Frege and Mill, the property of having a reference is likewise a *de re* contingent property of a proper name. Frege asks his readers to suppose that: “every grammatically well-formed expression representing a proper name always has a sense” (Frege 1960: 58). Even if this were so, Frege underlines, “this is not to say that to sense also corresponds a reference” (Frege 1960: 58). In other words, a proper name *could* have a meaning (even a very precise individuating one) but lack a reference. To have a reference, then, is likewise to be taken, as (G-i) indicates, to be a *de re* contingent property of a proper name. Mill points to the very same direction. In acknowledging the impreciseness of ordinary language which ““is not made, but grows””, Mill argues that a name in general (such as a proper name) sometimes “denotes a confused huddle of objects, having nothing whatever in common” (Mill 1974: 152).

That, as (G-ii) indicates, if a proper name has the property of having a reference, it has a non-gradation property is not a particularly controversial claim. Mill, Frege and those influenced by either one or both of them take this for granted. What is more controversial is another point made in (G-ii): that if *n* has the property of being meaningful, *n* has a gradation property. Though

not usually acknowledged, Mill also points to this direction. “In some cases”, he argues, “it is not easy to decide precisely *how much* a particular word does or does not connote” (Mill 1974: 36-37, *our emphasis*). Frege does not explicitly state so, but his quoted comments on the ordinary use of “Aristotle” vis-à-vis a “perfect language” suggest a similar point: that some communities (e.g., ordinary communities) attach less meaning to a proper name than others, e.g., a scientific community that relies on the stated “perfect language” in a possible state of the world.

Furthermore, Frege’s quoted comments on “Bucephalus” also insinuate another point indicated in (G-ii): that if *n* has the property of being associated with a subjectivity, it has another gradation property. This occurs because just like distinct persons (e.g., “a painter, a horseman, and a zoologist”) do with “Bucephalus”, they may also attach a more or less idiosyncratic or hardly objectively understandable psychological content to any proper name. It is also plausible, given his quoted comments on “John”, that Mill would concur that a man whose father has this name attaches more subjectivity to it than someone else who does not personally know or sentimentally care about anyone with this name. As indicated by the above passages, Mill and Frege both acknowledge the impressiveness of ordinary uses of language. Given so, they both could embrace consistently vis-à-vis their other views (G-iii) as an at least partial explanation for that. Consider a competent speaker whose father (or any beloved person) died in accident with a horse named “Bucephalus”, or was murdered by a male named “John”. It is imaginable a possible state of the world in which this speaker fails to precisely distinguish these proper names’ subjectivities (e.g., that they are evil) attached in an idiosyncratic way by the speaker from these names’ meanings.

2. Divine Rebaptism

The gradation semantics allows an account of divine rebaptism to be developed. Imagine a possible state of the world. Let us call it original state.⁹ This is a state in which there are original authors; those who articulated the *Genesis* where the stated divine rebaptisms are depicted and the entire *Pentateuch*. Such authors are political leaders and talented poets who live in an arid region, e.g., a desert. They are also heirs or at least aimed to make others believe that they were heirs of a Jewish minority once enslaved by an Egyptian majority. A majority, suppose, is a group of persons who at a given context seeks to satisfy certain norms (e.g., that one is to enslave prisoners of wars), and numerically has more members and/or power than a minority that does otherwise. Imagine that original authors aimed to enlarge the number of members of their community so that it became more powerful vis-à-vis imminent invaders, e.g., heirs of an Egyptian majority or any sort of other, that is, someone whose criteria to deal with disputes, values and beliefs are distinct from those of the community of heirs of the Jewish minority.¹⁰ This is why, while creating the concept of *Yhwh*, original authors articulated the *Pentateuch*, not as a work of fiction but, rather, as one of politics that: relies on problematic descriptive claims that distort facts or suggest miraculous events that never occurred as a way to justify over egalitarian normative claims.¹¹

⁹ How similar or dissimilar this state is to the actual past state in which the *Pentateuch* was articulated is an empirical issue that is not particularly relevant for this essay's purpose. However, see Assmann (2018) and Römer (2019) for readings that indicate that the original state resemblances what actually occurred.

¹⁰ As Römer (2019) underlines, *Yhwh* "is a warrior god and a storm god. So it is understandable that such a god would be worshipped by groups living in arid regions and finding themselves frequently in military conflict with other groups or with the power of Egypt" (Römer 2019: 48).

¹¹ As Baruch Spinoza 1670 *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* indicates, it is plausible to read that the actual Jewish Bible or the Christian Old Testament is a work of politics in the stated sense. For a more detailed reading on Spinoza's view on the bible, see Nancy K. Levene (2004, especially chapter 2).

An example of such descriptive claim suggested by the *Pentateuch*'s book of *Genesis* is that: there once were a one-hundred-year-old male (Genesis 21:5) and a female in her nineties (Genesis 17:17) who after been rebaptized by *Yhwh*, gave birth to “קַיִשׁ” —a name traditionally transliterated and translated to English as “Isaac” (Genesis 17:19).¹² An alternative, plausible and more literal translation of this name is: “*TheOneWhoLaughs*”. An example of an over egalitarian normative claim suggested or at least often read to have been made by the *Pentateuch* is *Yhwh*'s policy. Suppose that original authors embraced this policy according to which: one is to act in according with *Yhwh*'s will in, regardless of whether one understands such a will, (so to speak) “blindly” maximizing communitarian tendencies in detriment of individualistic tendencies, e.g., by only relying on communitarian reasons and rejecting any individualistic reason. To follow *Yhwh*'s policy, then, one is to respect, among others, two norms. Norm (i) is to, regardless if one has urges to do otherwise, to only have sexual encounters with someone from one's opposite sex. Norm (ii) is to only do so, not with the intent of having pleasure, but only with the intent of propagating one's own genetic features and, accordingly, enlarging one's community.¹³

Imagine that at the original state, original authors were the first to introduce the biblical names, that is, they invented such names. They did so because they attached all sorts of subjectivities to such names, e.g., that of sounding somehow holy. Given that original authors could have done otherwise, to be associated with a subjectivity is a *de re* contingent property of such names as opposed to a *de re* necessary one. Another *de re* contingent property of these names is that of being meaningful. This is because, suppose, original authors as well as their first readers (that is, other heirs of the aforementioned Jewish minority) who carefully read and mastered the

¹² “*Yhwh* of Israel was worshipped”, as Römer explains, also as a “a god of [...] fertility” (Römer 2019:106).

¹³ For more detailed takes on all kinds of actual applications of these or similar norms, see, for instance, Mark D. Jordan (1997); Kathryn Lofton (2008); Amy Hollywood (2016, especially Part 3); etc.

Pentateuch objectively applied these names with meanings: respectively, ^{Original} meaning-Abram; ^{Original} meaning-Abraham; ^{Original} meaning-Sarai; and ^{Original} meaning-Sarah —assuming that these meanings are shorts for all definite descriptions associated throughout the *Genesis* or the *Pentateuch* as a whole to “אַבְרָם” (“Abram” / “*TheExaltedFather*”); “אַבְרָהָם” (“Abraham” / “*TheFatheroftheMultitude*”); “שָׂרַי” (“Sarai” / “*ThePrincessofMine*”) and “שָׂרָה” (“Sarah” / “*Theprincess*”), respectively. This is to imagine a possible state of the world that counter exemplifies Millianism in leading to: a semantic, an epistemic as well as a metaphysical point.

The semantic point is that identity claims between the biblical names and definite descriptions that constituted their meanings were taken at the original state to be tautologies, that is, analytic, *a-priori* and *de dicto* necessary claims. By these, let us understand claims whose truth values are: established by exclusively considering these claims’ meanings; do not require any sort of empirical search to be determined; and are true in all possible states of the world in which the bearers of the biblical names or their counterparts exist. Four examples of such tautologies are:

- (T-i) אַבְרָם (Abram / *TheExaltedFather*) is an exalted father.
- (T-ii) אַבְרָהָם (Abraham / *TheFatheroftheMultitude*) is a father of the multitude.
- (T-iii) שָׂרַי (Sarai / *ThePrincessofMine*) is a princess of mine.
- (T-iv) שָׂרָה (“Sarah” / “*Theprincess*”) is a princess.

The epistemic point is that original authors and their first readers knew individuating properties of the possible bearers of the biblical names. This is because they knew that these four names meant (so to speak) “by definition”: ^{Original} meaning-Abram; ^{Original} meaning-Abraham; ^{Original} meaning-Sarai; and ^{Original} meaning-Sarah, respectively. The metaphysical point is that original authors and their first readers took such meanings to describe essences of their respective possible bearers — assuming along the lines of Kit Fine (1994) that an essence is a *de re* necessary property as well as an individuating property that (so to speak) “materially” or “truly” defines its bearer.

In proceeding in such manner, original authors suggested: either that the biblical names referred to persons who lived a couple of hundred years or so before original authors were born; or that it was at least imaginable a possible state of the world in which such names had references with the individuating features indicated by their respective meanings. This is to state that to have a reference is a *de re* contingent property of biblical names. Note that such a property is a non-gradation property of these names. The same cannot be stated about the property of being associated with a subjectivity and being meaningful. These properties are, instead, gradation properties. The reason is that distinct possible states of the world or even distinct contexts within the same state in which these names have more or less subjectivity and meaning can be imagined. The original state, for instance, is one in which the biblical names have a higher degree of subjectivity and meaning vis-à-vis a distinct state, say, the non-original state, a future state of the original state or a distinct possible state of the world. At the non-original state, suppose, there is a community that is somehow aware of the *Genesis* or the *Pentateuch*, but neither carefully reads nor masters such writings. So, this community does not attach any particular subjectivity or individuating meaning to the biblical names. In other words, this community at the non-original state, applies the biblical names with no meaning at all or with quite vague meanings that cannot be identified with: ^{Original} meaning-Abram; ^{Original} meaning-Abraham; ^{Original} meaning-Sarai; and ^{Original} meaning-Sarah. So, these communities' members do not interpret (T-i) to (T-iv) to be tautologies. Rather, they take these claims to be synthetic, *a-posteriori* and *de dicto* contingent claims, that is, claims whose truth values: cannot be determined only by considering their meanings; require some empirical inquiry to be established; and may be true in one, but not in all possible states of the world in which the bearers of the biblical names or their counterparts exist.

It is also imaginable that at the non-original state or at any other state, there is a person who fails to precisely distinguish one's subjectivities attached in an idiosyncratic way to the biblical names from these names' meanings objectively understood by one's community. For instance, this may happen after someone is deeply hurt by a male named "Abraham" or by a female named "Sarah" and then associates some negative psychological content to these names. Let us also imagine that, in the original state, it was crucial for original authors to precisely distinguish: the subjectivities from the meanings they attached to biblical names. Failure to do so would make it very hard to explain the importance vis-à-vis *Yhwh's* policy of the aforementioned divine rebaptisms. Suppose that original authors successfully did so. This is because they conveyed to their immediate community of first readers as well as to future communities composed of billions of persons who embrace *Yhwh's* policy that these divine rebaptisms, indeed, took place after these names' possible bearers went through some sort of *transformative experience* by means of which they were somehow "reborn" in becoming new, distinct, better and even holier persons.¹⁴ This is to imagine that original authors conveyed that the following two identity claims are false:

- (I-i) אַבְרָם (Abram / *The Exalted Father*) is אַבְרָהָם (Abraham / *The Father of the Multitude*).
- (I-ii) שָׂרַי (Sarai / *The Princess of Mine*) is שָׂרָה ("Sarah" / *The princess*) is a princess.

This is to imagine that original authors convinced their first readers and billions of others that these claims are not analogous to "Hesperus is Phosphorus" — a true identity claim famously read by Kripke (1980:102) as an example of an *a dicto* necessary *a-posteriori* claim under two bases. First, that one has to do an empirical inquiry to establish this claim's truth value. Second, the thesis that identity is an "internal' relation" whose formula is: "(x) (y) (x = y \supset \square x = y)" (Kripke 1980: 3). The point of original authors, suppose, is that the two proper names used in (I-

¹⁴ The italicized expression was borrowed from L.A Paul (2014) who carefully addresses such experiences.

i) as well as the two proper names used in (I-ii) simply do not refer to the same individuals, that is, they are not a case of the antecedent of the internal relation formula. In other words, were one to do an empirical inquiry, one would discover that אַבְרָם (Abram / *The Exalted Father*) and שָׂרַי (Sarai / *The Princess of Mine*) have essences radically distinct from those of אַבְרָהָם (Abraham / *The Father of the Multitude*) and שָׂרָה (Sarah / *The princess*), respectively. This is insofar as the former did not follow *Yhwh's* policy as accurately as the latter. For instance, אַבְרָם (Abram / *The Exalted Father*) and שָׂרַי (Sarai / *The Princess of Mine*) laughed at *Yhwh* (Genesis 17:17 / 18:13) when this God pointed toward a possibility: that of a one hundred male (Genesis 21:5), and a female in her nineties (Genesis 17:17) giving birth. In contrast, אַבְרָהָם (Abraham / *The Father of the Multitude*) and שָׂרָה (Sarah / *The princess*) do not laugh at *Yhwh*. As parents of יִצְחָק (Isaac / *The One Who Laughs*), they know that *Yhwh* makes the apparently impossible possible, e.g., in making a once sterile female, fertile in her nineties. This is to imagine that original authors convinced others to follow *Yhwh's* policy in mirroring one's behavior in those of אַבְרָהָם (Abraham / *The Father of the Multitude*) and שָׂרָה (“Sarah” / “*The princess*”) in endorsing norms (i) and (ii).

3. Secular Rebaptism

The gradation semantics also allows an account of secular rebaptism to be articulated. Imagine another possible state of the world: the queer state.¹⁵ This is a state in which the aforementioned secular rebaptisms of “Mara” into “Charles” as well as that of “Quentin” into “Kimberly” take place. Suppose that throughout the course of the events that eventually led to these rebaptisms, the parents of these transgendered kids and these kids themselves significantly

¹⁵ Another empirical matter not particularly relevant for this essay's purpose is how similar the queer state is vis-à-vis actual states. As Serano (2016) and the collection of poems of Stacey White (2013) indicate, though, there are resemblances between the queer state and actual ones.

suffered, e.g., such kids were often bullied and nicknamed, say, Mara was often called “Macha”, whereas Quentin was often called “Queert”.¹⁶ This mainly occurred because, at the queer state, there was a straight majority. This majority — considerably similar to those of contemporary Western countries — aimed to satisfy *Yhwh*’s policy in a quite particular way. This way constantly ignored norm (ii), but not norm (i) and other norms quite similar to it, e.g., that (i) female kids are to wear Disney princess costumes in Halloween, whereas male kids are to dress out as superheroes, such as Superman; that (i) female kids are not to want or try to kiss other female kids in the mouth and male kids are likewise not to do so with other male kids; etc. Let us call females and males who satisfy gender norms, such as these, women and men, respectively.¹⁷

Suppose that the parents of the aforementioned transgendered kids were Jews or Christians who read the *Pentateuch* along the lines of the last section. At first, then, they were part of the straight majority that took the stated norms for granted. However, as their kids grew, they gradually were somehow forced to change these attitudes of theirs. What caused this change was an awareness: that their kids were part of a queer minority vis-à-vis the straight majority. This is insofar as, from a quite early age, such kids seemed to be unable to follow and often disrespected norms, such as (i) and (i). Gradually, then, such kids as well as their parents endorsed an alternative reading of the aforementioned divine rebaptisms. According to this reading, *Yhwh* rebaptized “אַבְרָם” (“Abram” / “*The Exalted Father*”) into “אַבְרָהָם” (“Abraham” / “*The Father of the Multitude*”) as well as “סָרַי” (“Sarai” / “*The Princess of Mine*”) into “שָׂרָה” (“Sarah” / “*The princess*”), not because such biblical characters went through a radical transformative experience by means of which they fulfilled *Yhwh*’s policy more accurately than

¹⁶ Whether the gradation semantics can also account for nicknames is a complex issue that cannot be discussed here.

¹⁷ Whether “woman” and “man” have or should be used in such senses is a complex issue that cannot be addressed here. For a take on such matter, see, for instance, Sally Haslanger (2012).

before in gaining the right to propagate their genetic features and to have “great” names (Genesis 12:2) remembered by billions. Rather, the reason these biblical characters received such great names was that, after going through radical transformative experiences, they became standards of behavior vis-à-vis a distinct policy. Let us call this policy *Yhwh’s* alternative policy.

According to this policy, *Yhwh* is a God of *the will of synthesis*.¹⁸ This is because to act in accordance with *Yhwh’s* will, one is to (so to speak) “see what one has always been” by pursuing a synthesis: one that maximizes or at least seeks to maximize one’s communitarian tendencies and individualistic tendencies at the same time in whatever imperfect way one may propose to oneself. This can be done, e.g., by seeking to balance communitarian and individualistic reasons or by aiming to follow norms that do not constrain but allow one to express one’s uniqueness. This is to read that distinct from אַבְרָם (Abram / *The Exalted Father*) and שָׂרַי (Sarai / *The Princess of Mine*), אַבְרָהָם (Abraham / *The Father of the Multitude*) as well as שָׂרָה (Sarah / *The princess*) did not feel that *Yhwh’s* demands (e.g., that one is to sacrifice יִצְחָק (Isaac or *The One Who Laughs*) (Genesis 22: 1-19)) were over egalitarian ones that sacrificed their individualist tendencies. Rather, such biblical characters felt that to follow *Yhwh’s* will in satisfying communitarian tendencies was to satisfy their individualistic tendencies, that is, they felt that these tendencies were not in conflict but, instead, reinforced one another so that to serve one’s community and to serve oneself were ultimately one and the very same thing.

Whether *Yhwh’s* alternative policy can be attributed to the *Genesis* is an issue regarding which this essay is neutral.¹⁹ Regardless of whether this is so, what is crucial here is to suppose

¹⁸ This italicized expression was borrowed from Felipe G. A. Moreira (2020).

¹⁹ As Moreira (2020) indicates, yet, this policy can be plausibly attributed to Plato’s *Republic* and is quite explicitly pursued by Richard Rorty (1999), regardless of Plato’s and Rorty’s lack of commitment to the existence of *Yhwh*. Given that Sigmund Freud (2010) suggests that mental disorders have been caused by persons’ failures to promote a synthesis between communitarian and individualistic tendencies, he might also have been sympathetic to this policy.

that, throughout the course of events that led to the stated secular rebaptisms, the aforementioned transgendered kids and their parents gradually embraced this policy. In doing so, they more or less unconsciously gradually followed, among others, two alternative norms. Alternative norm (i) is that one is to be allowed to have sexual encounters with someone from one's own sex if one has urges to do so. Alternative norm (ii) is that one is to be allowed to have sexual encounters for the sake of pleasure and without the intent of propagating one's genetic features and enlarging one's community. This is especially because billions were part of the community of the transgendered kids and their parents and there was no imminent threat from possible attackers. Let us call females and males who follow the alternative norms, ^Qwomen, and ^Qmen, respectively.

Imagine that the parents of the stated transgendered kids were not political leaders or poets. So, they did not introduce in a poetic writing the proper names "Mara" and "Quentin". In fact, billions of others have been called so before. Suppose that what motivated the parents of the stated female infant to baptize her "Mara" was a subjectivity that they at first attached to this name: that this is a name of an attractive female who is more likely to follow *Yhwh*'s policy in being a "Sarah-like" woman as opposed to a ^Qwoman. Let us also imagine that a similar attitude was held by the parents of the kid first baptized "Quentin" in that they also at first attached all kinds of subjectivities to this name, e.g., that of being a name of a strong male who is bounded to easily fulfill norms (i) and (ii) in being some sort of "Abraham-like" man as opposed to a ^Qman. Yet, as the kid first named "Mara" and the one first called "Quentin" grew, they gradually attached to their proper names: ^{Mara's High} subjectivities and ^{Quentin's High} subjectivities. The former is a long conjunction of idiosyncratic or hardly objectively understandable negative points about the name "Mara", e.g., that this name is not mine or could only refer to someone whose properties are not mine. By ^{Quentin's High} subjectivities, let us take a similar conjunction that attaches to the proper name

“Quentin” all kinds of idiosyncratic or hardly objectively understandable negative points, say, that of being an evil name. Suppose that distinct and more positive subjectivities (e.g., that of being a name of a ^Q man or that of being a name of a ^Q woman) were attached by those who were first named “Mara” and “Quentin” to the names they eventually chose for themselves: respectively, “Charles” and “Kimberly”. This is what motivated them to perform their secular rebaptisms.

This is to state that “Mara”, “Charles”, “Quentin” and “Kimberly”, the queer names, had at the queer state the property of being associated with all sorts of subjectivities. Given that it is imaginable a state in which this did not occur, or distinct subjectivities were attached to these names, such property was merely a *re de* contingent ones of the queer names. To be meaningful is also a *de re* contingent property that these names could have in a possible state of the world, say, the non-queer state. By the latter, let us take a possible state of the world distinct from the queer one in which these names: are not associated with any individuating subjectivity (e.g., ^{Mara’s High} subjectivities and ^{Quentin’s High}) but have individuating meanings, say, attached to the queer names in a religious *Pentateuch*-like writing that, suppose, became widely shared throughout the non-queer state. Let us suppose yet that at the queer state, like in most actual ones, the queer names lacked the property of being meaningful or merely had a quite low degree of meaning that did not individuate them, e.g., “Mara” and “Kimberly” both had the non-individuating meaning of being names of females, whereas “Quentin” and “Charles” had the likewise non-individuating meaning of being names of males. These four names likewise had the property of having references: respectively, the female kid first called “Mara”; the person now called “Kimberly”; the male kid called “Quentin”; and the person renamed “Charles”. This is to imagine that the queer state is a possible state of the world that counter exemplifies Fregeanism insofar as it leads to distinct semantic, epistemic and metaphysical points vis-à-vis those addressed in the last section.

The semantic point is that identity claims between the queer names and some definite descriptions that may have been eventually objectively attached to these names' bearers by such bearers' community at the queer state were not read as tautologies, such as (T-i) to (T-iv). Rather, these claims, which are exemplified by the following ones, were interpreted by this community to be synthetic, *a-posteriori* as well as *de dicto* contingent identity claims:

- (~T-i) Mara is not a woman.
- (~T-ii) Quentin is not a man.
- (~T-iii) Charles is a ^Q man.
- (~T-iv) Kimberly is a ^Q woman.

The epistemic point is that at the queer state, those who were not familiar with the respective bearers of the queer names may and, in fact, were likely to fail to know any individuating property of them. This is insofar as at this state, the queer names had no individuating meaning objectively attached to them. Thus, to know individuating properties of these names' bearers, one would have to make an empirical inquiry. The metaphysical point is that the properties of "not being a woman", "not being be a man", "being a ^Q man" and "being a ^Q woman" are not essences of those who were at the queer state called "Mara", "Quentin", "Charles" and "Kimberly", respectively. The reason is that such properties cannot individuate their respective bearers in also applying to others.

It is imaginable yet that at the queer state, persons referred to the bearers of the queer names even without knowing any individuating feature of such names or their bearers. Suppose that these persons did so by becoming aware of these names' respective historical chains of reference, as Kripke (1980: 91) and John Burgess (2013: 28) indicate. This is to imagine that persons at the queer state knew that the queer names had references because they followed a use that attached these proper names to their respective references. Note that the historical chains of reference of "Mara", "Quentin", "Charles" and "Kimberly" started after baptisms or rebaptisms by ostension took place, respectively, those performed by: the parents of the aforementioned female infant; the

parents of the aforementioned male infant; the one who rebaptized oneself “Charles”; and the one who rebaptized oneself “Kimberly”. This is to state that the queer names had a non-gradation property: that of having references at the queer state. On the other hand, the property of being associated with subjectivities at this state and that of having a meaning at the non-queer state were gradation properties of these names. As stated above, the reason is that distinct possible states of the world or even distinct contexts within the same state in which these names have more or less subjectivity and meaning can be imagined. For example, the queer state is one in which the queer names have a high degree of subjectivity and a low degree of meaning vis-à-vis the non-queer state. It is imaginable that at the latter, a community took ($\sim T$ -i) to ($\sim T$ -iv) to be tautologies first established by the stated *Pentateuch*-like writing that defined the queer names in terms identical or that at least included the respective definite descriptions associated with them in these claims.

Let us also imagine that the kids who were first baptized “Mara” and “Quentin” — arguably, like the kids who struggle with similar issues in actuality — had a hard time to distinguish ^{Mara’s High} subjectivities and ^{Quentin’s High} subjectivities that they respectively attached in an idiosyncratic way to their names from these names’ meanings. At the queer state, such meanings, as indicated above, were non-individuating ones and did not associate any particularly negative features to “Mara” and “Quentin”. Hence, the kids first baptized “Mara” and “Quentin” had a hard time to explain why it was crucial for them to rebaptize themselves “Charles” and “Kimberly”, respectively. Suppose yet that they managed to convey at least to their parents and close friends that they had to be rebaptized, say, insofar as, after taking hormones and going through genetic therapy, they had transformative experiences comparable to those of the biblical characters. In fact, like these characters, those first baptized “Mara” and “Quentin” but then respectively rebaptized “Charles” and “Kimberly” thought that they were “reborn”. In other words,

they believed that they became distinct persons, and, perhaps, also more satisfied ones who more or less unconsciously follow *Yhwh*'s alternative policy as opposed to kids who failed to satisfy *Yhwh*'s policy. So, these transgendered persons also took the following identity claims to be false:

(I-iii) Mara is Charles.

(I-iv) Quentin is Kimberly.

“Mara is simply not Charles”, suppose that the one once named “Mara”, but now rebaptized “Charles” thought so. The reason was that “Mara” and “Charles” refer to persons with distinct essences: respectively, a person who has an individuating genetic code of a female, and a person who took masculine hormones, went through genetic treatment and has a distinct individuating genetic code, e.g, that of a male or at least of someone who resists being labeled a male or a female. Let us also imagine that the one once named “Quentin”, but now rebaptized “Kimberly” had a similar line of reasoning: that “Quentin” referred to a person with an individuating genetic code of a male, whereas the reference of “Kimberly” is a person with a distinct individuating genetic code, say, that of a female or at least of someone who resists being labeled a male or a female. So, “Quentin is not Kimberly”, this person now rebaptized “Kimberly” thought. Let us underline that whether individuating genetic codes are *de re* necessary property or essences of persons, as Kripke (1980: 113) suggests, is an issue regarding which this essay remains neutral. For this essay's purposes, it suffices to acknowledge that there are or that it is plausible to imagine possible states of the world in which persons who go through a genetic treatment believe this to be the case. Such persons, it is also plausible to believe, take that they became others after going through such treatment. This is an explanation for why they take these secular rebaptisms of theirs to be justified.

4. Accordance with Intuition vs. Accordance with what is Interesting

Assumption 2, as indicated above, is a conjunction: that one (a) can and (b) should seek to articulate a semantics of proper names that accords with intuition, while mainly or even practically exclusively dialoguing with authors interested in such semantics. It is not this essay's aim to fully problematize this assumption.²⁰ For our purposes, it suffices to indicate reasons for suspending judgment on (a) and (b). The first reason for doing so regarding (a) is that the authors who have presupposed accordance with intuition and articulated the aforementioned quite vast literature on the semantics of proper names have not reached consensus, not even among themselves, on which semantics satisfies this criterion vis-à-vis all sorts of uses of proper names — including not very recurrent ones, such as predicative uses, e.g., “Sarahs from Alaska are usually scary”, as Fara exemplifies (Fara 2015: 61), or bound uses, e.g., “if a child is christened ‘Bambi’, Disney will sue Bambi’s parents”, as Bart Geurts articulates (Geurts 1997: 321). What has happened is that in considering new data on proper names, authors (e.g., Anders J. Schoubye (2020) who addresses these two uses in detail) have often proposed new semantics that contradict those already present in the literature. There is a second reason for suspending judgment on (a): even if the aforementioned authors (who are all highly educated philosophers specialized in semantics) reached consensus among themselves, it is improbable that this consensus would be spread and achieved vis-à-vis each and every person, including non-philosophers. To put it more explicitly and in Kripke’s terms, it seems hard if not impossible to determine whether a Millian, a Fregean or a hybrid semantics that combines Mill’s and Frege’s views appeals to the “ordinary man” independently of this ordinary man’s political views (e.g., if he follows *Yhwh*’s policy or *Yhwh*’s

²⁰ For such a task, consider Cappelen (2012) and works by experimental philosophers, e.g., Jonathan M. Weinberg *et al*; Edouard Machery *et al* (2004); etc.

alternative policy), social class, the fact that he is (in a sense) a “man”, etc (Kripke 1980: 41). Thus, those who aim to accord with intuition are somehow comparable to those (e.g., transgendered kids) who seek to satisfy *Yhwh*’s policy in aiming to do what they cannot do.

It could be argued, though, that given that the last paragraph’s reasons do not bear on (b), one should still seek to articulate a semantics that accords with intuition. After all, if a semantics were to satisfy this criterion, one would, indeed, provide “very heavy evidence” for it (Kripke 1980: 42). So, one is to aim to do so, even if it is hard or even impossible to actually accomplish this task. There are, nonetheless, reasons for also suspending judgment on (b). First, given the two reasons for suspending judgment on (a), there is an epistemic reason for doing the same vis-à-vis (b): the one who endorses (b) is likely to fail to provide “very heavy evidence” for one’s semantics. Rather, what is likely to happen is that in seeking to accord with intuition, one acts as if others did not exist and merely proposes what one or one’s considerably narrow particular social group (e.g., that of philosophers interested in semantics) is already inclined to believe. Given the existence of billions of others vis-à-vis oneself and one’s social group, this attitude does not seem to count as “very heavy evidence” for one’s semantics or as a (so to speak) “shortcut to universality” in being a view that each and every person is to endorse. A second reason for suspending judgment on (b) is of a more ethical kind: the one who endorses this claim is likely to endorse a somehow deceiving attitude that shows lack of self-awareness concerning one’s own works. This attitude is that of suggesting to readers that one’s semantics of proper names actually accords with intuition and, accordingly, is to completely avoid dissensus while being consensually endorsed by all.

Given the reasons for suspending judgment on (a) and (b), it not argued here that the gradation semantics accords with intuition. After all, though, as stated above, no semantics that accounts for rebaptism has been provided, it is imaginable that one could do so in articulating a

semantics that contradicts the gradation one and is more appealing to some persons. What is supported is that at least insofar as divine and secular rebaptism are at stake, the gradation semantics accords with what is interesting in being backed up by a communitarian as well as an individualistic reason. There also seem to be advantages in endorsing this criterion vis-à-vis accordance with intuition. The first is that one seems to be able to actually satisfy it just like a transgender person can do vis-à-vis *Yhwh*'s alternative policy. This is, indeed, what has been indicated above. This is insofar as, in section 1, a communitarian reason for endorsing the gradation semantics was presented: that (G-i) and (G-ii) have already been indicated by Mill and Frege themselves and (G-iii) is consistent with these authors' views. This is so *pace* the widely shared suggestion that this philosophers' semantics are inconsistent with one another. Also note that an individualist reason for embracing the gradation semantics was also indicated in sections 2 and 3: that this semantics uniquely addresses the not yet discussed phenomena of divine and secular rebaptism (as opposed to, say, those of predicative or bounded uses of proper names which were already addressed) in an unexplored way that connects semantics with other matters related to philosophy of religion, political and social philosophy.

There also seems to be an epistemic advantage of endorsing accordance with what is interesting as opposed to accordance with intuition. The advantage is that to seek to satisfy the former criterion is to provide evidence for one's views (though not a "heavy" one which is, arguably, impossible in philosophy) by (so to speak) "walking the long and winding road to universality". By this, let us understand the justificatory resource of seeking to back up a semantics of proper names while addressing actual or possible states of the world in which such names are used in a way that aims to be of interest to a large and quite diverse group of persons, that is, not only those interested in semantics, but also those who care about divine rebaptism, secular

rebaptism, the *Genesis*, the struggles of transgender kids; etc. Another apparent advantage of endorsing accordance with what is interesting as opposed to accordance with intuition is of a more ethical kind. This advantage is that of showing self-awareness vis-à-vis one's own works in merely seeking and actually doing what apparently all philosophers have done: namely, to provoke consensus with some (e.g., those who find pertinence in the discussion of rebaptism articulated here) as well as dissensus with others, e.g., those who take that it is more urgent to address predicative or bound uses of proper names. Note that *pace* his commitment to accordance with intuition, Kripke (2019) himself (the most influential author over the last fifty years or so over the semantics of proper names) recently acknowledged the following in a talk from May 30th of 2019 held at the University of London's School of Advanced Study: "whatever I say in the book [that is, *Naming and Necessity*] has gotten a lot of opposition".²¹ This is a reason for believing that is about time philosophers endorse accordance with what is interesting as a criterion to deal with disputes while recognizing that to completely get rid of opposition may be impossible. This is, then, what this essay attempted to accomplish while proposing the gradation semantics for divine and secular rebaptism as well as illustrating how one can do a philosophy more in alliance with *Yhwh*'s alternative policy (as opposed to *Yhwh*'s policy), regardless of whether this God exists.

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²¹ At Youtube where this talk can be accessed, Kripke states so at approximately 23 minutes and 22 seconds.

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