

The Gradation Semantics for Divine and Secular Rebaptism

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Abstract: Divine rebaptism takes place when an individual is renamed or is supposed to have been renamed by a Deity, e.g., *Genesis* 17:5 and 17:15 report that *Elohim* performed the divine rebaptism of “Abram” into “Abraham” and that of “Sarai” into “Sarah”, respectively. There is a vast literature on the *Genesis*’ portraits of Abram-Abraham and Sarai-Sarah as well as on the semantics of proper names. However, no one has dialogued with both of these apparently unrelated bodies of works while providing a semantics of proper names that accounts for divine and secular rebaptism, a rebaptism performed by a non-Deity, e.g., a person. This essay bridges this gap. It argues that in describing the stated divine rebaptisms, the *Genesis*’ use of proper names counter exemplifies Millianism, the view that proper names have the properties of being meaningless, directly referential, rigid, fixed and lexically ambiguous. The essay also claims that though this factor may pose a minor problem to Millianism, the same is not the case with secular rebaptism. It is supported then that Millianism provides a less appealing account of divine and secular rebaptism than a gradation semantics, the view that depending on the context of application, proper names have the stated properties in distinct degrees. *Keywords:* *Genesis*; Rebaptism; Semantics; Proper Names.

Introduction

Genesis 17:3 mentions a Deity, *Elohim* (אֱלֹהִים).¹ Later, this Deity is portrayed as having addressed a man called “Abram” (אַבְרָם) as follows: “no longer shall your name be Abram, but your name shall be Abraham (אַבְרָהָם) for I have made you the ancestor of a multitude of nations” (*Genesis* 17:5).² “As for Sarai (שָׂרַי) your wife”, *Elohim* continues a few passages below in addressing the man now called “Abraham”, “you shall not call her Sarai, but Sarah (שָׂרָה) shall be her name” (*Genesis* 17:15). For “I will bless her, and moreover I will give you a son by her” (*Genesis* 17:16). These excerpts describe rebaptisms, a phenomenon that occurs when a person who was first baptized with a proper name “N” is later renamed with a distinct proper name “N*”. More precisely, the quoted passages portray divine rebaptisms. For the time being, let us take these to be rebaptisms performed or at least supposedly performed by a Deity. Secular rebaptism, in contrast, occurs when a rebaptism is performed by a non-Deity, e.g., a person or an institution.

¹ The relation between the Deity’s proper names “*Elohim*”, “*Yhwh*” and others cannot be addressed in this essay.

² The translation of the *Genesis* adopted is that of the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

Rebaptism is a point of intersection of two apparently unrelated bodies of works. On the one hand, the one articulated by specialists on the *Pentateuch*, especially those who focus on the *Genesis*' portraits of Abram-Abraham and Sarai-Sarah.³ On the other hand, the body of works developed by philosophers of language on the semantics of proper names.⁴ Among these philosophers, one of the most (if not the most) widely shared view is one that has been articulated under the influence of John Stuart Mill's (1974) works: Millianism. As Anders J. Schoubye (2016:716) indicates, this view may be identified with the claim that proper names have five properties. First, that of being meaningless in only contributing to propositional content with a reference but not with meaning. As Gottlob Frege (1960: 58) suggests or at least was interpreted to suggest by Saul Kripke (1980: 30), a proper name has meaning if and only if a text or a community of speakers socially associates with it a definite description of the form: "a x such that x" (hereafter, abbreviated as Φ) followed by a predication, e.g., "was a believer".

Second, proper names would be directly referential in referring without the mediation of meaning. Third, they would have the property of being rigid. As Joseph LaPorte (2016) indicates, it has been traditionally held (e.g., by Kripke (1980, 2019)) that a proper name is rigid if and only if it fulfills the identity condition of designating the same individual in all possible states of the world in which this individual exists and never designating anything else. Whether a possible state of the world concretely exists, as David Lewis (1986) claims, or is merely a representation (e.g., linguistic or pictorial) of some sort is an issue regarding which this essay suspends judgment. This

³ For readings that focus on Abram / Abraham, see, for instance, Ronald Hendel (2005), Jon D. Levenson (2012) and Thomas Römer (2009, 2010). For readings that focus on Sarai / Sarah, see Savina J. Teubal (1984) and the essays in Phyllis Tribble and Letty M. Russell (2006).

⁴ These philosophers may be subdivided into: Millians mainly influenced by John Stuart Mill (1974), e.g., Saul Kripke (1980, 2019), Nathan U. Salmon (1986), 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).

essay is also neutral on whether, as the identity condition suggests, an individual can exist and be exactly the same person at distinct possible states of the world, e.g., that the Donald Trump who won the 2020 presidential election at a distinct possible state of the world is still “*he himself*”, as Lewis puts it (Lewis 1986: 196). Accordingly, an alternative view on rigidity is assumed here: that a proper name is rigid if and only if it fulfills either the identity condition or the representation condition. The latter condition is to designate an individual, all concrete, linguistic or pictorial simulacra that stand for this individual at distinct states of the world (hereafter, simulacra) and never designating anything else. Fourth, proper names would be fixed, that is, they would not shift reference when placed within the scope of a logical operator, e.g., a modal or temporal one. Fifth, proper names would also be lexically ambiguous. This occurs when a proper name “N” shares a phonological string (e.g., “Paul”) with another proper name “N*”, but “N” refers to an individual distinct from that referred by “N*”, e.g., “N” refers to Paul Celan, “N*”, to Paul McCartney.

It seems then motivated to dialogue with those interested in Millianism (especially, in Kripke’s (1980) defense of it) and with the stated *Pentateuch*’ specialists by pursuing the not yet explored aim of providing a semantics of proper names that accounts for rebaptism. To this extent, three claims are defended here. To begin with, that in depicting the stated divine rebaptisms, the *Genesis*’ use of proper names counter exemplifies Millianism. Moreover, that though this factor may pose a minor problem to Millianism, the same is not the case with secular rebaptism. Third, that Millianism provides then a less appealing account of divine and secular rebaptism than a gradation semantics characterized by the claim that depending on the context of application, proper names can be more or less meaningful, directly referential, rigid, fixed and lexically ambiguous.

1. Divine Rebaptism

The reason the divine rebaptisms depicted by the *Genesis* counter exemplify Millianism is simple; in this text, “Abram”, “Abraham”, “Sarai” and “Sarah” (hereafter, biblical names) are not used in a meaningless, directly referential, rigid, fixed and lexically ambiguous way.

(i) *Meaningful*

The biblical names are, rather, meaningful; they contribute to propositional content in two ways. First, they contribute with their respective actual or possible references. An actual reference is one that existed in a past or exists in a present actual state of the world. A possible reference is one that is conceivable and, assuming along the lines of David Chalmers (2010) that conceivability is a guide to possibility, could have existed. In the *Genesis*, the biblical names also contribute to propositional content with the respective definite descriptions this text attaches to them. In fact, such names illustrate a claim attributed by Kripke (1980) to Bertrand Russell as well as to Frege: that proper names are “abbreviated or disguised” definite descriptions (Kripke 1980: 27).

As the entry on “Abraham” of the *Harper Collins Bible Dictionary* edited by Mark Allan Powell (2011) indicates, “Abram” seems to disguise a definite description: “ Φ is an exalted father”. So, instead of being transliterated to English as “Abram”, the Hebrew word “אַבְרָם” may also be plausibly translated to “*ExaltedFather*”. In the *Genesis* yet “Abram” does not merely mean “exalted father”. Rather, this proper name has within the context of this text a much more complex meaning. This is so in that “Abram” is an abbreviation for the complex conjunction of all definite descriptions associated with this name throughout the *Genesis*, say, Abram_{Series}. This series includes, not only “ Φ is an exalted father”, but several others definite descriptions, e.g., “ Φ was called by the ‘Lord’, *Yhwh* (יהוה), to leave one’s ‘country’, ‘kindred’ and ‘father’s house” (*Genesis*

12:1);⁵ “ Φ immigrated to ‘the land of Canaan’” (*Genesis* 12:5); etc. In spelling Abram_{Series} out, the *Genesis* provides a definition of the proper name “Abram”. This definition points to the modes of presentation or, to put it metaphorically, to the distinct “faces” of an actual or possible individual, say, insofar as someone who hears and follows a Deity’s command “blindly”; insofar as an immigrant; etc. This individual is then analogous to Venus, a star that, as Frege (1960: 56) notoriously discusses, appears in one way in the evening (e.g., as “Hesperus”) but in a distinct way in the morning (e.g., as “Phosphorus”). Similar points can be made about the other biblical names.

“Abraham” also seems to disguise a definite description: “ Φ is a father of a multitude”. So, the Hebrew word, “אַבְרָהָם”, usually transliterated to English as “Abraham”, may also be translated to “*FatherofaMultitude*”. “Abraham” yet does not mean “father of a multitude” in the *Genesis*. Instead, this name is an abbreviation and means a complex conjunction of definite descriptions associated with “Abraham”, say, Abraham_{Series}. This series contains “ Φ is a father of a multitude” and the other definite descriptions associated with “Abraham” in the *Genesis*.⁶ This text also defines this proper name in pointing to the distinct “faces” of an actual or possible individual and spelling out Abraham_{Series}. This series is distinct from Abram_{Series}, e.g., the latter does not include a definite description contained in Abraham_{Series}: “ Φ has a distinct ‘covenant’ (*Genesis* 17:3) with *Elohim* who promised and made one ‘the ancestor of a multitude of nations’” (*Genesis* 17:5).

As the *Harper Collins Dictionary*’s entry on “Sarah” also indicates, “Sarai” and “Sarah” seem to be distinct spellings of the same name; they seem to disguise the same definite description: “ Φ is princess”. *Elohim* yet rebaptizes “Sarai” into “Sarah” (*Genesis* 17:15). So, it does not seem

⁵ For a detailed take on this call, see W. Randall Garr (2013).

⁶ This series can be read as being even more complex if it is assumed that the *Genesis* is part of a longer text that attaches other definite descriptions to “Abraham”: the Jewish or the Christian Bible. For the sake of space, this assumption will not be explored in this essay. Let us highlight, though, that these bibles do not describe “Abraham” in the exact same terms and may not be consistent with one another. For a detailed take on how Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources have distinctively represented “Abraham”, see Jon D. Levenson (2012).

plausible to take these names to have the exact same meaning in the *Genesis*. Rather, it seems that “Sarai” and “Sarah” disguise distinct definite descriptions: respectively, “ Φ is a princess of kind B”, and “ Φ is a princess of kind F” —assuming that the former princess is less valuable or blessed than the latter, e.g., insofar as the former princess is “barren”, whereas the latter one is fertile (*Genesis* 11:30). Let us highlight that as Joel S. Baden argues, “it need hardly be said that fertility was a highly desired state in ancient Israel” (Baden 2011: 16).⁷ Therefore, the Hebrew word “סָרַי”, usually transliterated to “Sarai”, can be plausibly translated to “*PrincessofKindB*”. Moreover, “סָרָה” can be plausibly translated to “*PrincessofKindF*” as opposed to “Sarah”, like it is usually done. “Sarai” and “Sarah” may also be interpreted as abbreviations for the complex conjunction of definite descriptions associated with these names throughout the *Genesis*, say, Sarai_{Series} and Sarah_{Series}, respectively. Like Abram_{Series} and Abraham_{Series}, these series are distinct from one another, that is, they spell out distinct modes of presentations or “faces” of their actual or possible bearers in providing distinct definitions of “Sarai” and “Sarah”. Sarai_{Series}, for example, contains “ Φ is a princess of kind B” but lacks “ Φ was promised by *Elohim* to ‘give rise to nations’ (*Genesis* 17:16)” and eventually, indeed, gave birth to a son called ‘Isaac’” (*Genesis* 21:2). In contrast, this definite description and “ Φ is a princess of kind F” are included in Sarah_{Series} among several others, such as: “ Φ ‘laughed to herself’ in thinking that she would never give birth” (*Genesis* 18:12).

(ii) *Indirectly Referential*

Given that the biblical names are meaningful, they are indirectly referential, that is, they refer through the mediation of the respective series they abbreviate: Abram_{Series}, Abraham_{Series},

⁷ For a defense of the claim that “Sarai” and “Sarah” do not respectively mean “my princess” and “princess”, see Römer (2009). His recorded lecture from February 26th of 2009 at the *Collège de France* is accessible (as of August 2021) at: <https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/thomas-romer/course-2009-02-26-14h00.htm>. The relevant moment can be found around 1 hour. Furthermore, for detailed takes on what exactly is meant by “barren” in the *Genesis*, see Teubal (1984:65) and Joel S. Baden (2021).

Sarai_{Series} and Sarah_{Series}. These series then implicitly establish reference conditions for the biblical names. More precisely, “Abram”, “Abraham”, “Sarai” and “Sarah” refer to actual or possible individuals if and only if these individuals satisfy Abram_{Condition}, Abraham_{Condition}, Sarai_{Condition} and Sarah_{Condition}, respectively. These conditions are that of being Φ meets all definite descriptions contained: in Abram_{Series}; Abraham_{Series}; Sarai_{Series} and Sarah_{Series}, respectively.

(iii) Non-Rigid

Given that biblical names are meaningful and indirectly referential, they are not rigid. To illustrate this, let Believers_{State} be a possible state of the world that Jews and Christians have often taken to be actual. This state is one in which the four stated conditions are satisfied by four distinct individuals, say, Abram_{oftheBelievers}, Abraham_{oftheBelievers}, Sarai_{oftheBelievers} and Sarah_{oftheBelievers}, respectively. At this state, suppose, the *Genesis* was dictated by a Deity to Moses who, by his turn, transcribed them.⁸ Let us also presuppose that at Believers_{State} what is suggested by *Genesis* 17:5 and 15 is the case: that *Elohim*'s divine rebaptisms of “Abram” into “Abraham” and of “Sarai” into “Sarah” were concomitantly and justified by two radical metaphysical transformations. This transformation occurs if and only if the end of the existence of an individual *I* occurs at the exact same time and space in which the beginning of the existence of a distinct individual *I** takes place. The latter individual has some properties in common but not the same essence of *I*. An essence of *I*, let us suppose along the lines suggested by Kit Fine (1994), is a necessary property that “materially” defines *I*. Arguably, an essence can only be linguistically described in an inaccurate way, e.g., by a conjunction of definite descriptions, such as the stated series. A more informal and

⁸ See E.A Speiser (1964: xix) for an explanation for why the authorship of the *Pentateuch* was attributed to Moses due to a quite problematic reading of a passage of Deuteronomy 31:9: “Moses wrote down this law”.

looser way to depict a radical metaphysical transformation is by stating that this takes place when an individual, not only changes “face”, but, instead, is “reborn” as someone else.

Genesis 17:5 suggests that *Elohim* caused a “rebirth” while rebaptizing “Abram” into “Abraham”. As Ronald Hendel puts it, there is a “transformation of identity implied in [this] name change” (Hendel 2005: 131). Such change, then, is not analogous to the Hesperus/Phosphorus case. In the latter, though a single star appears differently at distinct moments, an identity claim holds: “Hesperus = Phosphorus”. On the other hand, $Abram_{Condition}$ and $Abraham_{Condition}$ are satisfied by individuals who share some properties but whose essences are distinct: $Abram_{oftheBelievers}$ and $Abraham_{oftheBelievers}$, respectively. Hence, what *Genesis 17:5* suggests is that: “ $Abram_{oftheBelievers} \neq Abraham_{oftheBelievers}$ ”. If this is so, divine rebaptism may be more precisely defined in terms distinct from the aforementioned ones, that is, as a phenomenon that occurs when a Deity metaphysically transforms an individual I who was first baptized with a proper name “ N ” into a distinct individual I^* who receives a distinct proper name “ N^* ”. Hereafter, let us refer to this phenomenon as properly divine rebaptism. *Genesis 17:15* suggests that *Elohim* also performed this kind of rebaptism in turning “Sarai” into “Sarah”. Suppose, then, that at the $Believers_{State}$, $Sarai_{oftheBelievers}$ was metaphysically transformed by a Deity into $Sarah_{oftheBelievers}$ and that, hence, “ $Sarai_{oftheBelievers} \neq Sarah_{oftheBelievers}$ ” insofar as these two individuals have distinct essences.

By $Non-Believers_{State}$, in contrast, let us understand a possible state of the world that non-believers are more likely to take, to put it in Harold Bloom’s terms, to be “a less irrational fiction” than the one suggested by $Believers_{State}$ (Bloom 1990: 11). This is a state in which the *Genesis* was written throughout a number of years by all sorts of authors with all sorts of purposes.⁹ These authors would be among the first ones to have believed or created the concept of “*Yhwh*”.¹⁰ The

⁹ For distinct accounts of the relation between these authors, see Speiser (1964) and John Van Seters (1999).

¹⁰ In this sense, consider Jan Assmann (2018).

latter, it is conceivable, “is a warrior god and a storm god”, as Thomas Römer indicates (Römer 2019: 48). “So”, as Römer also argues, “it is understandable [and, more importantly, for our purposes, conceivable] that such a god would be worshipped by [Ancient Jewish] groups living in arid regions and finding themselves frequently in military conflict with other groups or with the power of Egypt” (Römer 2019: 48). It is then also conceivable that one of the purposes of the authors of the *Genesis* was to propagate and enforce among an Ancient Jewish community a reproduction policy: that to sustain existence in an arid region while struggling with rival communities, the members of this Ancient Jewish community should conserve a common identity of their own by reproducing themselves; that to do so is, indeed, the most valuable accomplishment. Regardless of whether $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$ is more likely identical to an actual state than $\text{Believers}_{\text{State}}$, it is plausible to read that the author or some of the authors of *Genesis* 17:5 and 15 pointed to the reproduction policy. A reason for that is that the definite description, “ Φ presupposes that it is very valuable to reproduce oneself”, seems to belong to $\text{Abram}_{\text{Series}}$, $\text{Abraham}_{\text{Series}}$, $\text{Sarai}_{\text{Series}}$ as well as $\text{Sarah}_{\text{Series}}$.

Suppose then that at $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$, neither a Deity exists, nor a properly divine rebaptism ever occurred. In such a state, there was, instead, merely a man, $\text{Abram}_{\text{oftheNon-Believers}}$, who was married to a woman, $\text{Sarai}_{\text{oftheNon-Believers}}$. These individuals inspired some of the content described in the *Genesis* but did not satisfy $\text{Abram}_{\text{Condition}}$ and $\text{Sarai}_{\text{Condition}}$, respectively. For instance, imagine that at $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$, a secular rebaptism of these individuals was performed, not by *Elohim*, but by an eminent figure of their community, e.g., a political or religious leader of some sort. These kinds of rebaptisms will be addressed in more detail in what follows. For the time being, suppose that they took place after $\text{Abram}_{\text{oftheNon-Believers}}$ and $\text{Sarai}_{\text{oftheNon-Believers}}$ gave birth to a child, say, not when they were passed their nineties as *Genesis* 17: 17 and 21:5

suggest, but at their late thirties; an event that would still be unusual in an Ancient context. Let us call these rebaptized individuals, $Abram_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$ and $Sarah_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$, regardless of whether they are identical to $Abram_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$ and $Sarai_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$, respectively.

There are two ways of describing the relation of the individuals mentioned in the last sentence vis-à-vis $Abram_{\text{of the Believers}}$, $Sarah_{\text{of the Believers}}$, $Abram_{\text{of the Believers}}$ and $Sarai_{\text{of the Believers}}$, respectively. The first, the identity way, takes that the individuals mentioned in the last sentence and those named in the second to last sentence have an identity relation, that is, they are the same individuals at distinct possible states of the world. The second way is the representational one. According to this way, $Abram_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$, $Abram_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$, $Sarai_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$ and $Sarah_{\text{of the Non-Believers}}$ are: respectively, simulacra of $Abram_{\text{of the Believers}}$, $Abram_{\text{of the Believers}}$, $Sarai_{\text{of the Believers}}$ and $Sarah_{\text{of the Believers}}$ (or vice-versa). Regardless of whether the identity or the representational way is the most persuasive, what is crucial here is that the biblical names are not rigid. In other words, they do not have references at the $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$ where no one meets the four stated conditions, but only at the $\text{Believers}_{\text{State}}$ where these conditions are satisfied by $Abram_{\text{of the Believers}}$, $Abram_{\text{of the Believers}}$, $Sarai_{\text{of the Believers}}$ and $Sarah_{\text{of the Believers}}$, respectively.

(iv) Non-Fixed

Following the line of reasoning outlined in the above subsections, when placed within the scope of a logical operator, biblical names shift their references. In other words, they are not fixed. To spell this out, let “_____” stand for any predication and consider:

- (1) At $\text{Believers}_{\text{State}}$, $Abram$ _____.
- (2) At $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$, $Abram$ _____.

In (1) “Abram” refers to $Abram_{oftheBelievers}$. However, in (2), “Abram” does not have an actual reference regarding $Non-Believers_{State}$, for at this state no individual satisfies this name’s conditions for reference. To further spell out that biblical names are not fixed, let T be a temporal operator that stands for the exact moment when at $Believers_{State}$ the radical metaphysical transformation of $Sarai_{oftheBelievers}$ into $Sarah_{oftheBelievers}$ occurred. Consider:

(3) Before T, Sarai_____.

(4) After T, Sarai_____.

In (3), “Sarai” refers to $Sarai_{oftheBelievers}$. However, in (4), this name lacks an actual reference vis-à-vis $Believers_{State}$ insofar as its previous bearer, $Sarai_{oftheBelievers}$, ceased to exist after T.

(v) *Lexically Unambiguous*

In the *Genesis*, the biblical names are also lexically unambiguous, that is, these names’ phonological strings (“Abram”, “Abraham”, “Sarai” and “Sarah”) are unique in this text. This is not to state that they are lexically unambiguous, regardless of context. For instance, conceive that at $Non-Believers_{State}$, $Abram_{oftheNon-Believers}$, $Abraham_{oftheNon-Believers}$, $Sarai_{oftheNon-Believers}$ and $Sarah_{oftheNon-Believers}$ were called with the phonological strings, “Abram”, “Abraham”, “Sarai” and “Sarah”, respectively. In this case, these proper names would be lexically ambiguous vis-à-vis the *Genesis*’ biblical names whose conditions for reference, as indicated, are only met in $Believers_{State}$.

2. Secular Rebaptism

The upshot of the last section is that the *Genesis*’ account of divine or properly divine rebaptism uses the biblical names in a meaningful, indirectly referential, non-rigid, non-fixed and lexically unambiguous way. This is a counterexample to Millianism. It could be argued, though,

that this poses merely a minor problem to this view. After all, it is not charitable to identify Millianism with a *de re* modal claim, say, Millianism_{Modal}: the claim that all proper names are necessarily meaningless; directly referential; rigid; fixed and lexically ambiguous. Instead, Millianism is to be more precisely stated and charitably read as being identical to a weaker descriptive claim indicated by Kripke (1980:77). Let us call it Millianism_{Descriptive}, the claim that proper names usually have the aforementioned five properties, at least when employed in more standard contexts as opposed to, say, a text, such as the *Genesis*, that has a quite unique use of language as well as suggests the existence of a Deity and of radical metaphysical transformations. Granted this reply, secular rebaptism poses yet a pressing problem to Millianism_{Descriptive} that resists a similar rebuttal. To spell this out, consider a distinction between two kinds of justifications for rebaptism: a psychological and a social justification.

A psychological justification is connected with a relational property of proper names. This property, highlighted by Frege, is that of causing persons to have distinct idiosyncratic and sometimes hardly communicable psychological “ideas” or, to use Frege’s original German term, “*Vorstellungen*” about such names. (Frege 1892: 29 / Frege 1960: 59). “A painter, a horseman, and a zoologist”, Frege states, “will probably connect different ideas with the name ‘Bucephalus’” (Frege 1960: 59). A psychological justification for a rebaptism is one then that resorts to an idea. For instance, conceive an individual first baptized “Kimberly” who attaches a painful idea to this name: that of being Φ has a name of someone who draws something more “girly”, that is, “something more appropriate for the refrigerator door” than I ever did as a child, to put it on the terms of Stacey Waite’s poem, “Kimberly” (Waite 2013: 49). This idea could serve as a psychological justification for a rebaptism, say, that of “Kimberly” into “Kirk” who, say, aims to have one’s gender and/or sex reassigned —assuming along the lines of Sally Haslanger (2012)

that an individual I 's "gender" refers to a social role played by I (e.g., to wear pink dresses or suits), whereas I 's "sex" refers to I biological features, e.g, to have a female or a male genetic code. In contrast, a social justification for a rebaptism is one that resorts to a proper name' meaning. Examples will be given in what follows. For now, note that secular rebaptism poses a problem for Millianism_{Descriptive} because of what may be called the Rebaptism Argument:

P.1 If proper names are usually meaningless, as Millianism_{Descriptive} argues, there are usually only psychological justifications for rebaptism but not social ones.

P.2 However, there usually are social justifications for rebaptism, besides psychological ones.

C: Thus, by *modus tollens*, it is not the case that proper names are usually meaningless.

This argument is valid and P.1 does not seem to demand an extended defense. It suffices to highlight that Millianism_{Descriptive} takes proper names to be usually meaningless. If this is so, there would not usually be social justifications for rebaptism, only psychological ones. P.2. yet requires further support. Let us provide so by considering cases of socially justified secular rebaptisms.

(i) *Secular Rebaptism at the Non-Believers_{State}*

It is conceivable that at the Non-Believers_{State}, Abram_{oftheNon-Believers} was also called through the phonological string "Abram", even though this string did not have the complex meaning attached to it in the *Genesis* and indicated by Abram_{Series}. It is also conceivable that Abram_{oftheNon-Believers} associated an idea with his proper name, say, that of being Φ has a name of a man whose wife has no child. This idea can be very hurtful, especially in a context in which the reproduction policy is being enforced. Thus, such idea could provide a psychological justification for Abram_{oftheNon-Believers} to change his name or ask the aforementioned prominent religious or political leader to do so on his behalf. For instance, this leader could compel and let other members of an Ancient Jewish community know that they should from now on use a distinct name when referring

to Abram_{oftheNon-Believers}, for this man's wife gave birth. It is debatable whether the Sarai of the *Genesis* or an actual woman who may have inspired this text also associated a painful idea to the name, "Sarai". After all, as Savina J. Teubal (1984) indicates, due to an "identification with a goddess" and to "circumstances [...] encountered in exile", this woman may have chosen "to remain childless for decades" (Teubal 1984: 140). Moreover, barrenness may have been much more common back then than it is today when medicine has more advanced resources. So, barrenness may not have been regarded as an "abnormality", as Baden (2011) highlights (Baden 2011: 14). Regardless of that, what is crucial here is that it is conceivable that Sarai_{oftheNon-Believers} was called through the phonological string "Sarai", even though at her context this string did not stand for a proper name whose meaning is spelled out by Sarai_{Series}. It is also conceivable that in a context in which the reproduction policy is being enforced, Sarai_{oftheNon-Believers} associated a hurtful idea to her name, such as: that of being Φ has a name of a barren woman. This idea could likewise provide a psychological justification for her being rebaptized after she gave birth.

In contrast, it is not as easily conceivable that Abram_{oftheNon-Believers} and Sarai_{oftheNon-Believers} merely had psychological justifications for wanting to change their names, especially given the fact that, suppose, they were in a context in which the members of their community spoke Hebrew. So, though not familiar with all the events of the lives of Abram_{oftheNon-Believers} and Sarai_{oftheNon-Believers} or with the *Genesis*, competent speakers of this community would still understand that "Abram (אַבְרָם)", "Abraham (אַבְרָהָם)", "Sarai (שָׂרַי)" your wife", "Sarah (שָׂרָה)" had meanings: namely, those indicated by the respective definite descriptions they disguise as opposed to the more complex meanings indicated by Abram_{Series}, Abraham_{Series}, Sarai_{Series} and Sarah_{Series}. In other words, it is conceivable that Ancient Jews were aware that these names meant "*ExaltedFather*", "*FatherofaMultitude*", "*PrincessofKindB*" and "*PrincessofKindF*", respectively. Hence, it is also

conceivable that at Non-Believers_{State} there were social justifications for the secular rebaptism of “Abram” into “Abraham” and that of “Sarai” into “Sarah”; justifications that served to make the members of an Ancient Jewish community aware that Abraham_{oftheNon-Believers} and Sarah_{oftheNon-Believers} gave birth to a child while acting in accordance with the reproduction policy. This is a reason for endorsing P.2.

(ii) “Malcolm Little” / “Malcolm X”

It could be objected yet that the reason provided for P.2 is weak, for it is based on an account of a possible state of the world in which language is used in a still quite peculiar way, even if such way is more similar to ordinary ones than the *Genesis*’ use of language. Even if this were the case, this objection can be resisted by considering the actual past case of secular rebaptism of “Malcolm Little” into “Malcolm X”. As this man’s autobiography indicates, he sent an “application” and his rebaptism was performed by a religious organization, the *Nation of Islam* (X 1964: 203). This organization then gave him his “ “X” ” around 1952 (X 1964: 203). “The Muslim “X”, the stated autobiography highlights, “symbolized the true African family name that he [the black man] never could know” (X 1964: 203). “*For me*”, the man who became known as “Malcolm X” states, “my “X” replaced the white slavemaster name of ‘Little’ which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears” (X 1964: 203, our emphasis).

These excerpts and especially the expression “for me” may point to a merely psychological justification for a secular rebaptism: that the man once named “Malcolm Little” attached a hurtful idea to this name but a positive one to his new name, “Malcolm X”. Respectively, these negative and positive ideas are: that of being Φ has a name given by a white slavemaster; and that of being Φ has a name that symbolizes the true African family name one will never know. Detailed empirical research would be required to determine whether and, if so, exactly how many members

of the *Nation of the Islam* also attributed these definite descriptions to the proper names, “Malcolm Little” and “Malcolm X”. Given that no such research has ever been done, authors interested in the semantics of proper names cannot justify their views in appealing to its possible data. In fact, such authors have not usually appealed to empirical data but proceeded in an armchair way.¹¹ This essay follows this practice in seeking to represent actual states of the world in a plausible way.

Note that one of the political purposes of the *Nation of Islam* was to make black people more self-aware. Thus, it does not seem plausible to take that most of this organization’s members applied “Malcolm Little” and “Malcolm X” in a meaningless way. What seems more likely is that these members socially associated with these names the definite descriptions stated in the last paragraph or quite similar ones, that is, such descriptions were the meanings of these names in this community’s context. Thus, it is plausible to believe that in this context, there was a social justification for the secular rebaptism of “Malcolm Little” into “Malcolm X”, not merely a psychological justification. This is not to state that a much larger community, say, that of all competent English speakers in the USA, attached to “Malcolm Little” and “Malcolm X” the definite descriptions mentioned in the last paragraph. Evidence of that is provided by Kripke himself who somehow “jokes” as follows: “as far as I know, outside the militant black nationalist movement no one has ever been named ‘x’” (Kripke 1980: 107).

This passage indicates that Kripke was probably unaware of the aforementioned complex meaning attached to the term “X” within such movement or, more specifically, within the *Nation of Islam*. Nevertheless, it is also likely that most or at least some competent English speakers who have neither basic awareness of this organization nor about slavery in the USA have also applied

¹¹ They have done so while relying heavily on an intuition-talk that is not always very clear. In this sense, consider Gary Gutting’s (2009) and Helman Capellen’s (2012) reading of Kripke’s use of such talk. Also consider the recurrent adoption of such talk by Schoubye (2017: 717, 718, 721, 722, 731, 733, etc).

“Malcolm Little” and “Malcolm X” in a meaningful way. They probably have done so in attaching to them less complex definite descriptions than those considered in the last paragraph, e.g., respectively: Φ has a name that is usual in the USA; and Φ has a considerably unique name whose phonological string (“X”) has been often used in English as a variable and, hence, indicates that one aims to spell out a lack of knowledge about one’s own identity. Hence, there was also a social justification for the secular rebaptism of “Malcolm Little” into “Malcolm X” understandable by persons who were not part of the *Nation of Islam*. This is to state that though these persons may have been unable to grasp the core political purpose of this rebaptism, they grasped this rebaptism’s more superficial goal: that of spelling out one’s aim to dissociate oneself from American culture or at least from part of it. This is a second reason for P.2.

(iii) *Other Actual Cases of Secular Rebaptism*

It could yet be objected that the second reason provided for P.2 is also weak, say, because the secular rebaptism of “Malcolm Little” into “Malcolm X” was a unique event that Millianism_{Descriptive} does not need to consider. After all, though this man may not have gone through a divine or a properly divine rebaptism, he was somehow “reborn” in gaining or at least taking oneself to have gained a new awareness about oneself. The reply to this objection is that Millianism_{Descriptive} has the burden of providing an account of secular rebaptism because this phenomenon is not that unique, that is, most persons have not been rebaptized, but several of them have. Moreover, their way of doing so is similar to that used in the rebaptism of “Malcolm Little” into “Malcolm X” and indicates how proper names have been usually applied. So, let us consider other examples of secular rebaptism that are, not only psychologically, but also socially justified.

To begin with, another secular rebaptism occurred with the man who was rebaptized “Malcolm X”. This took place around 1964, after he left the *Nation of Islam*, made the pilgrimage

to Mecca called Hajj and converted to Sunni Islam. This second secular rebaptism was that of “Malcolm X” into “El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz” (X 1964: 349). As this man’s autobiography indicates, this man seems to have associated distinct ideas to such names, e.g., respectively: Φ is a minister and a militant of the *Nation of Islam*; and Φ is a “Sunni Muslim who wanted a name that represented his belief that Islam unites people instead of separating them”, as Cedric Dewayne Burrows points out (Burrows 2015: 41). There was then a psychological justification for the rebaptism of “Malcolm X” into “El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz”. There was also a social justification for doing so insofar as the former name has had the aforementioned meanings, whereas it is plausible that the latter has had distinct ones, say, a more specific meaning in the Arab-speaking community and a broader one outside of such community. The more specific meaning is that of being Φ made his hajj (as indicated by “El-Hajj”); is a sort of king (as indicated by “Malik”) and (as indicated by “El-Shabazz”) is a descendent of a “especially strong black tribe [...] from which America’s Negroes, so-called, descend” (X 1964: 1968). The broader meaning is that of being Φ has an Arab / Islamic name.¹² It appears that the latter meaning has also been attached by English-speaking communities to the proper name “Muhammed Ali”. Therefore, besides its psychological justifications, the secular rebaptism of “Cassius Clay” into “Muhammad Ali” apparently also had a social justification insofar as the former name has had a distinct meaning within English-speaking communities: that of being Φ has a common American name.

It also seems that a broad meaning similar to this was attached to the proper name, “Otto Adolf Eichmann”, by the Spanish-speaking communities of Argentina (or, more specifically,

¹² Around 1964, the “Nigerian Muslim Students’ Society” also gave to the man at stake here a “new name”, “Omowale”, which “means in the Yoruba language, ‘the son who has come home’” (X 1964: 357). Earlier in his life, this man was also known as “Detroit Red” and “Satan” (X 1964: 87 and 154). However, whether the names mentioned in this footnote are proper names or merely nicknames and how one is to distinguish the former from the latter are complex issues that cannot be addressed in this essay.

Buenos Aires) from the late 1940s to the 1960s: that of being Φ has a German name and, given the recent end of World War II, even a Nazi-like name. On the other hand, it is credible that these communities attached to “Ricardo Klement” a distinct meaning: that of being Φ has a name that is typical of Argentinians who descend from Germans. Thus, it seems that there was not only a psychological justification but also a social one for the former Nazi officer once called “Otto Adolf Eichmann” to rebaptize himself with the help of Nazi sympathizers, “Ricardo Klement”, while living in Buenos Aires and hiding his role in the holocaust.¹³ Note that this follows regardless of whether this man changed his essence or suffered a crisis of consciousness after World War II.

It also appears that there have been social justifications for secular rebaptisms related to gender or sex reassignment, not merely psychological justifications, such as the aforementioned one related to “Kimberly”. Consider, for instance, the secular rebaptism of “William Bruce Jenner” into “Caitlyn Marie Jenner”. Like several other popular proper names (e.g., “Kirk” or “Abraham”), it is credible that English-speaking communities have attached a meaning to “William Bruce Jenner”: that of being Φ has a name of a man —assuming that “man” refers to cisgendered persons whose gender and sex have been associated with masculinity. Moreover, it appears that “Caitlyn Marie Jenner” has had a distinct meaning in this community: that of being Φ has a name of a woman —assuming that this term refers to cisgendered persons whose gender and sex have been associated with femininity. This meaning seems to have also been attached to other traditional names, e.g., “Kimberly” or “Sarah”. So, the secular rebaptism of “William Bruce Jenner” into “Caitlyn Marie Jenner” had a social justification that spells out that this person changed from the masculine gender/sex into the feminine one. Another reason for believing that social justifications similar to this have often occurred is a hardly deniable fact: that those who have gone through

¹³ For a detailed reading of this role, see Hannah Arendt (2006).

similar changes have felt considerably offended and/or hurt when called by the names they had before such changes. All these cases of secular rebaptism provide then a third reason for P.2. If so, the rebaptism argument's conclusion follows: proper names are not usually meaningless. If so, *pace* Millianism_{Descriptive}, they may as well not be usually directly referential, rigid and fixed.

3. The Gradation Semantics

The Rebaptism Argument and the several cases of divine, properly divine and secular rebaptism discussed above also indicate that Millianism provides a less appealing account of such phenomena than a gradation semantics. As stated above, this is the view that depending on the context of application, proper names can be more or less meaningful, directly referential, rigid, fixed and lexically ambiguous. Consider the context of the *Genesis*' text. This is an example of a context in which proper names (that is, the biblical ones) have a high degree of meaning. Let us assume that a proper name "N" has this property at a context *c* if and only if a text or a community of speakers at *c* socially attaches to "N" an individuating or at least quite complex meaning, e.g., those indicated by the aforementioned series. In contrast, "N" has a null degree of meaning at *c* when neither a text nor a community of speakers associates with it at *c* any meaning. An issue regarding which this essay is neutral is on whether, as Mill (1974: 34) points out, it is possible for "N" to have a null degree of meaning or, rather, "N" inevitably has at least a low degree of meaning, e.g., in having the metalinguistic meaning of being Φ is named "N".¹⁴

More important here is to highlight that there are contexts in which proper names have been applied with lower degrees of meaning vis-à-vis those of the biblical names in the *Genesis*. This is the case with the context of the stated Ancient Jewish community at Non-Believers_{State}

¹⁴ For a more detailed take on this kind of meaning, see García-Carpintero (2018).

where “Abram”, “Abraham”, “Sarai” and “Sara” do not mean the stated series but only the definite descriptions they disguise. On the other hand, at $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$, the proper name, “Abraham” has a higher degree of meaning than at distinct contexts, say, a context in which a man called “Abraham” goes to a party (e.g., in Japan) in which the guests do not know him and hear this name for the very first time. In this context, “Abraham” seems to have a null or a low degree of meaning, e.g., the metalinguistic one of being Φ is named “Abraham”. The gradation semantic provides then a distinct assessment of a semantic argument attributable to Kripke (1980:30):

P.1_{Semantic} If “Abraham” has a meaning (e.g., “ Φ is a father of a multitude), it is a tautology that:

(5) Abraham is a father of a multitude.

P.2_{Semantic} It is not the case that (5) is a tautology.

So, C_{Semantic}: “Abraham” is meaningless.¹⁵ The aforementioned distinct assessment is one that grants P.1_{Semantic} but problematizes P.2_{Semantic} while highlighting that the truth-value of this premise depends on the context of application of (5). More precisely, P.2_{Semantic} is true only within contexts in which “Abraham” is used with a null or low degree of meaning. For instance, in the stated party, (5) is not a tautology because in this context, “Abraham” has the aforementioned low degree of meaning. However, this proper name has a higher degree of meaning in the aforementioned context at $\text{Non-Believers}_{\text{State}}$. In this context, then, it is conceivable that (5) would, indeed, be interpreted as a tautology equivalent to the following claim:

(6) *FatherofaMultitude* (אֲבִרְהָם) is a father of a multitude.

¹⁵ Kripke’s (1980: 30) original statement of this argument addresses the proper name, “Aristotle”. Yet, given that “Abraham” is more pertinent for this essay’s purposes, a distinct example was used. For similar reasons, examples distinct from Kripke’s were used in what follows while spelling the so-called epistemic and modal argument. Like the semantic one, several distinct articulations of these arguments have been proposed. It is not this essay’s aim to address this literature. For our purposes, it suffices that the proposed articulations be plausibly attributable to Kripke.

The semantic argument only seems to apply to contexts in which proper names have a low degree of meaning and, so, a high degree of direct referentiality. The latter property, according to the gradation semantics, is also one that proper names have in degrees that vary with context. Consider again the proper name, “Malcolm X”, and a meeting among members of the *Nation of Islam* in the 1960s. This context is one in which “Malcolm X” refers through the mediation of an aforementioned quite complex meaning: that of being Φ has a name that symbolizes the true African family name one will never know. This meaning establishes a quite restrict condition for “Malcolm X” to refer, morerestrictCondition: that one must have this name. Though not fully individualizing insofar as other individuals distinct from the actual Malcolm X could satisfy it, this condition is more restrict than others, e.g., lessrestrictCondition: one must have been assassinated — a condition that is also satisfied Martin Luther King who yet fails to satisfy the morerestrictCondition.

Another probable and plausible context is one in which “Malcolm X” is less meaningful and more directly referential, e.g., an academic context of an informal dialogue after an academic event (e.g., Kripke’s 1970 lectures themselves) among philosophers of language who practically do not know the *Nation of Islam* but discuss the name “Malcolm X”. In this context, it appears that this proper name refers quite directly, say, insofar as these philosophers are aware of a particular “historical chain” of reference, to use John Burgess’ expression (Burgess 2013: 28). This chain, as Kripke (1980) indicates, started with the “initial ‘baptism’” of the man at stake here with the proper name, “Malcolm X”, and was “‘passed from link to link’” up to these philosophers (Kripke 1980:96). It is also likely then that these philosophers referred to this man without the mediation of meaning or through a quite loose one that establishes a considerably broad condition for reference, e.g., lessrestrictCondition.

The gradation semantics also allows a new assessment of another argument attributable to Kripke (1980:83-84). This argument may be called the epistemic argument. It runs as follows:

P.1_{Epistemic} If “Malcolm X” indirectly refers through the mediation of meaning, this proper name only refers to whoever is known to satisfy the condition of application indicated by such meaning.

P.2_{Epistemic} This consequent yet does not follow, for this proper name would still refer to the actual Malcolm X, even if it were discovered, say, that someone else, but not him, satisfies this condition.

Thus, C_{Epistemic}: “Malcolm X” refers directly. The new assessment is one that grants P.1_{Epistemic} while highlighting that the condition mentioned in this premise varies with context. Moreover, like P.2_{Semantic}, the truth value of P.2_{Epistemic} depends on context or, more exactly, on the condition for the application of “Malcolm X” embraced within a context. This can be unpacked by considering that it seems that at the stated meeting among members of the *Nation of Islam* the morerestrictCondition was socially held.

Granted this move, to back up P.2_{Epistemic}, a supporter of the epistemic argument has to argue that either one of two scenarios is conceivable. First, that the actual Malcolm X “he himself”, to use Lewis’ expression again, was not rebaptized “Malcolm X”; somebody else was called so. Second, that a simulacrum of the actual Malcolm X was not rebaptized “Malcolm X” but someone else was. However, these scenarios are not easily conceivable. The reason is that one may argue that to satisfy the morerestrictCondition is part of what makes the actual Malcolm X be “he himself”, that is, to satisfy this condition in having a social justification for being called “Malcolm X” is a defining moment of this individual’s life that is ultimately part of his very essence. Thus, it may as well be more easily conceivable that there is no actual Malcolm X “he himself” who does not satisfy morerestrictCondition and that the stated simulacrum that does so does not truly represent him but someone else. It is not this essay’s aim to make a detailed case for this claim or to spell how an individual’s essence is to be determined.

For our purposes, it suffices to underline that similar contexts in which “Malcolm X” is applied with a restrict condition for reference pose similar problems for P.2_{Epistemic}. Conceive to this extent a context in which _{anothermorerestrict}Condition for this name to refer is endorsed: one must have the specific genetic code that the actual Malcolm X had. To back up P.2_{Epistemic}, one must argue that it is conceivable that the actual Malcolm X “he himself” or a simulacrum of him fails, whereas someone else satisfies this condition. Yet, it is not easy to conceive so, especially if one grants Kripke’s (1980:113) suggestion that to have a specific genetic code is essential to an individual.¹⁶ Like the semantic argument, then, the epistemic argument seems to have a narrow scope of application: contexts where proper names have a null or low degree of meaning and a high degree of direct referentiality. This can be spelled out by considering a context with these characteristics. For instance, the stated academic context where the _{lessrestrict}Condition is embraced. In this case, it is, as the epistemic argument suggests, quite easily conceivable that Malcolm X “he himself” or a simulacrum of him fails to satisfy this condition, say, in dying of natural causes, whereas another individual, e.g., Huey P. Newton, meets _{lessrestrict}Condition.

It follows that, according to the gradation semantics, rigidity is another gradation property that depending on context, a proper name has in a higher or lower degree. Consider the proper name “Sarah” within the *Genesis*’ context. Given that in this context, this name is highly meaningful and lowly directly referential, it is likewise lowly rigid. This is so insofar as it only refers to an actual or possible reference that satisfies Sarah_{Condition}. In this sense, conceive a possible woman who, with one exception, did all the deeds attributed to Sarah in the *Genesis*. The exception, suppose, is that she never gave birth. In this case, “Sarah” (insofar as a biblical name) would not refer to her. In contrast, consider a context in which “Sarah” has a null degree of

¹⁶ Given the current technology of genetic enhancement (indicated, e.g., by the essays in Steve Clark *et al* (2016)), this point may seem less persuasive today than it was in the 1970s. This essay yet cannot develop this line of reasoning.

meaning, say, at a meeting in a school in which parents discuss with teachers about their kids' behaviors. Suppose that in this context, the daughter of one of such parents (hereafter, Sarah's parents) is called "Sarah" and that the other parents do not know any religious literature connected with this name. Accordingly, when such parents use this proper name, it has a null degree of meaning. In this case, "Sarah" would also be highly directly referential as well as highly rigid in referring to the girl at stake or to her simulacra but not to anything else. The same would not be the case were "Sarah" applied in the school's meeting with a low but not null degree of meaning that established a quite low condition for reference, say, that one must be the daughter of Sarah's parents. In this case, "Sarah" would be less direct referential and less rigid in not applying, for instance, to the girl at stake "she herself" or to her simulacra in possible states of the world in which they do not meet this condition.

It follows that the gradation semantics also provides an alternative take on a third argument attributable to Kripke (1980:48-49); the following modal argument:

P.1_{Modal} If "Sarah" has a meaning ("Φ is a princess of kind F"), this name is not rigid.

P.2_{Modal} "Sarah", however, is rigid, as indicated by the fact that the following claims are *de dicto* necessary and *de dicto* contingent: respectively,

(7) Sarah is Sarah.

(8) Sarah is a princess of kind F.

Thus, C_{Modal}: "Sarah" is meaningless. The alternative take is one that grants P.1_{Modal} but casts doubt on P.2_{Modal}. This is done by emphasizing that there are contexts in which "Sarah" is not rigid; *Genesis*' context as well as that at the Non-Believers_{State} attest to this. In these contexts, then, (8) is not read as a *de dicto* contingent claim. Rather, this claim is taken to be a *de dicto* necessary one whose truth-value can be determined *a-priori* due to the very way the proper name, "Sarah (*PrincessofKindF*)", is defined in the *Genesis* or within the stated Ancient Jewish community.

Accordingly, like the semantic and the epistemic argument, the modal argument only applies to contexts in which proper names have a low degree of meaning but high degrees of direct referentiality and rigidity. There are, however, several contexts in which this is not the case. This is attested by the several aforementioned cases of secular rebaptisms that have social justifications.

These cases also back up the view that fixity is another property that depending on context, proper names have in distinct degrees. For instance, consider again the context of the parents' meeting in which "Sarah" is used with a null or low degree of meaning. In this case, "Sarah" would be quite fixed insofar as it would apply to this girl in all moments in which she existed. In contrast, when secular rebaptisms occur, the situation is different. To illustrate this, let T^* stand for the exact moment in which in an actual state of the world any of the following secular rebaptisms occurred: those of "Malcolm X" into "El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz"; "Cassius Clay" into "Muhammad Ali"; "Otto Adolf Eichmann" into "Ricardo Klement" and "William Bruce Jenner" into "Caitlyn Marie Jenner". When used in a highly meaningful way that establish quite individuating conditions for reference, these names' references shift if they are used within the scope of the temporal operators, "before T^* " and "after T^* ". In other words, before T^* , "Malcolm X", "Cassius Clay", "Otto Adolf Eichmann" and "William Bruce Jenner" have references; their respective bearers before they were rebaptized. After T^* , this is no longer the case in that these names fail to satisfy such conditions, even if it is assumed that their bearers did not go through a metaphysical transformation but were only "reborn" in a weaker and more metaphorical sense.

That proper names can also be more or less lexically ambiguous is another claim that characterizes the gradation semantics. This claim follows from the quite basic observation that some phonological strings are, indeed, more unique than others. For example, as the *Pentateuch's* scholars know, "Abram" seems to have been a quite common name within the context in which

this text was written. “Abraham”, on the other hand, was quite unique and may as well as have been introduced by this text.¹⁷ Moreover, “Bruce” and “Caitlyn” are likewise much more lexically ambiguous than a made-up name, such as “Q+” that, suppose, means Φ aims to spell out one’s impossibility of identifying oneself with the masculine gender/sex as well as with the feminine gender/sex. In sum, the gradation semantics seems to provide a more appealing take on divine, properly divine and secular rebaptism than Millianism. This is so, as argued above, in that secular rebaptism poses a quite pressing problem to Millianism, even if it is granted that the same is not the case vis-à-vis the *Genesis*’ quite unique take on divine and properly divine rebaptism.

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¹⁷ For a defense of this claim, see Römer’s (2010) recorded lecture from February 11th of 2010 at the *Collège de France* accessible (as of August 2021) at: <https://www.college-de-france.fr/site/thomas-romer/course-2010-02-11-14h00.htm>. The relevant moment can be found around 52 minutes.

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