Section #79 of the *Philosophical Investigations* contains, so far as I am aware, the later Wittgenstein’s only explicit pronouncements about ordinary proper names. It is commonly, though not universally, construed as giving an improved theory of their meaning squarely in the tradition of Frege and Russell. Kripke, and Dummett following him, interpret the passage this way; the interpretation is clearly stated in the following quote from Geach:

Wittgenstein, as you will see, was a disguised-descriptionist about proper names, like Russell and Frege and himself in his youth — he remained an unreconstructed disguised-descriptionist about proper names to the day of his death. There is something to be said against disguised-descriptionism, I think; but I think it is a lot better theory than the no-connotation line of Locke and Mill — a view for which Wittgenstein several times expressed quite strong disapproval. What is new to the disguised-descriptionist view in these sections is something of general import; namely, he rejects the idea that there have to be rigid criteria for the use of a word if it is to be used at all. So Wittgenstein is seen merely as offering a valuable modification to the theory of Frege and Russell and ‘himself in his youth’ — anticipating, in fact, the modification we now commonly associate with Searle, the so-called *cluster-concept theory*. Thus it is that Kripke, in ‘Naming and necessity’, can argue against Wittgenstein and Searle in the same breath, indeed beginning his argument against Searle with a quote from Wittgenstein. Taken by itself, #79 can easily be read so as to yield Searle’s solutions to such traditional problems in the theory of reference as those of singular negative existentials, the threat of irreducible subjectivity in Frege’s notion of sense, the analyticity of different sentences for different speakers, and so forth. I shall call this initially plausible reading the *cluster-concept attribution*, and shall henceforth assume familiarity with one of Searle’s numerous expositions of the theory being attributed to Wittgenstein.  

However plausible the attribution may look out of context, it makes the context something of a mystery. What, on this reading, does #79 have to do with the preceding 78 or the following 612 sections? Why, in the middle of a
sustained attack on the presuppositions which led Russell and the earlier Wittgenstein to demand a technical sense of 'name' so strict that only 'this', if even that, qualifies as a genuine name, does Wittgenstein expound a view of ordinary proper names which is explicitly built into Russell's logical atomism? (Of course, Wittgenstein is supposed to have modified Russell's view; but as Geach admits, 'disguised-descriptionism' was already present in 'The philosophy of logical atomism'.) What, in short, is this section supposed to be doing where it is? I shall not be able to answer these questions fully: but I hope at least to show that the answers yielded by the cluster-concept attribution are wrong.

Those answers seem overwhelmingly plausible at first sight: the cluster-concept theory is straightforwardly linked with the notion of family resemblance, which indeed appears in the environs of #79. The final sentence quoted from Geach above alludes to family resemblance, and we shall later see Kripke invoking the notion explicitly. In the first part of this paper, I wish to examine, and ultimately to reject, this suggestion.

Deprived of contextual justification, the cluster-concept attribution comes to look less compelling. In the second part of this paper, I propose to refute it. I assume, for reasons to be explained, that Kripke's counterexamples in 'Naming and necessity' are decisive against the cluster-concept theory. I argue that Wittgenstein is immune to the counterexamples. If I am right, it follows that Wittgenstein cannot be advancing the cluster-concept theory in #79. Indeed, I shall suggest that #79 contains no theory of the meaning of proper names whatever.

By this point it will have begun to emerge that #79 is really concerned with what Dummett has called the 'social character of meaning', a feature of meaning which Kripke has also stressed. (It is ironic that Dummett not only rightly credits Kripke with awareness of the social character of meaning, but reminds us that Wittgenstein was perhaps the first to call attention to it.) #79 itself does not provide us with enough evidence directly to support this claim, and so we must turn to other passages from the *Investigations* for indirect support. Such passages can be found, I believe, wherever Wittgenstein discusses such practical activities as reading, following a rule, continuing a series, pointing, interpreting facial expression, etc. In virtually all of these discussions Wittgenstein invokes the notion of the circumstances: in the concluding sections of the paper, I examine this notion, and extend it to the case of proper names, in the hope of illuminating the