

Kripke: Naming and Necessity Lecture 2

The descriptive view of names relates to the second word in the title

Consider:

- (1) It is necessary that Robin Hood is Robin Hood
- (2) It is necessary that Robin Hood lived in Sherwood Forest, and...

And

- (3) It is necessary that Tony Blair is Tony Blair
- (4) It is necessary that Tony Blair is the prime minister of Great Britain

In both of these pairs, the first sentence is true, the second is false.

But 'Tony Blair' and 'the prime minister of Great Britain' supposed to be synonymous terms. How could the substitution of synonymous terms change a true sentence into a false one?

The different behaviour of proper names and descriptions in these modal contexts, according to Kripke, reveals a key difference.

Rigid Designation and Possible Worlds

Proper names are *rigid designators*. They pick out the very same individual in every 'possible world' in which that individual exists.

Roughly speaking, possible worlds are the various ways in which things might have been different from this world (the actual one). Some people are 'realists' about possible worlds, but most take them as convenient ways of expressing possibilities.

- A possible world is a description of the world where various things are held constant, and we consider whether is possible (and what is not) under those conditions.
- Possible worlds are 'further away' when the descriptions resemble less and less the actual world (A remote possible world is where e.g. there is just one item)
- They are stipulated not 'discovered'

- Note this is *metaphysical* possibility. There is a possible world in which I can fly, but this is not physically possible, given e.g. gravity, the shape of my body etc.

Instances of 'a=b', where 'a' and 'b' are rigid designators are necessary (the necessity of identity).

So

(3) It is necessary that Tony Blair is Tony Blair

is true

But what of

(4) It is necessary that Tony Blair is the prime minister of Great Britain

?

It is true that Tony Blair is prime minister, but it seems perfectly possible that that Tony failed to win the election. So (4) is false. Yet the terms 'Tony Blair' and 'the prime minister of Great Britain' are co-referential terms, and both (3) and (4) express identity statements

The identity statement in (4) involves a rigid designator of the left hand side, a non-rigid referring expression on the right. The non-rigid referring expression does not pick out the same object in every possible world

For there are worlds in which 'the prime minister of Great Britain' is satisfied by Gordon Brown.

So proper names and definite descriptions, though both referring expressions, cannot be equivalent.

A Response by the Descriptivist

There is no genuine difference between proper names and descriptions. Any modal differences can be captured by appeal to the scope of the modal operator.

Is the following sentence true or false?

(A) It is possible that the greatest batsman was not a batsman

It may seem *false*: since the whatever is picked out by ‘greatest batsman’ in any world is a batsman since the description must be satisfied by a *batsman*

But actually the sentence is ambiguous

Compare

(B) Of the greatest batsman, it is possible that he may not have been a batsman

In (B) we use a description to determine the reference, but then consider of *that individual*, what may happen in other possible worlds. So interpreted, (B) is *true*.

This ambiguity is a *scope* ambiguity. The modal operator ‘It is possible that...’ (∇) can either have *wide* or *narrow* scope.

$\nabla (\exists x(\forall y) Py \rightarrow x=y) \wedge \neg Px$ (A)

$(\exists x(\forall y) Py \rightarrow x=y) \wedge \nabla \neg Px$ (B)

This shows that modal intuitions can be handled by facts about the scope of operators on descriptions, and so we may resist the view that proper names are different from descriptions

Kripke: the following simple sentences contain no modal operators, and hence know room for a scope distinction (p.10ff).

(1) Aristotle was fond of dogs

(2) The last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs

The idea is that it is more intuitive to think that by (1) we mean the individual directly referred to by ‘Aristotle’, and this is a different claim from (2). It is unclear how successful this is

How do proper names refer?

A causal account (nb Kripke disavows the term ‘theory’)

1) Initial ‘baptism’ which connects the name with the individual

- 2) One's use of the name is causally connect to the individual via historical chains or chains of communication (see e.g. p.91ff)

Some Worries

Non-referring names

Father Christmas will bring me a new computer

- (1) Am I referring to the historical St Nicholas?
- (2) Worse still, it this sentence meaninglessness, since Father Christmas fails to refer?
- (3) Father Christmas does not exist

Shifted Causal Chains

Gareth Evans and Madagascar. Marco Polo mistakenly thought that this referred to the island, bur was actually part of the mainland. However the mistake 'caught on'. To what does 'Madagascar' refer? Kripke = use of a name is social and these factors can determine reference as well

Reading

Saul Kripke *Naming and Necessity*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1980 (*passim*, but especially preface and addenda)

(See also in Davidson and Harman (eds) *Semantics of Natural Language*, Dordrecht, pp.253-355, with Addenda, pp.763-9)