Gareth Evans: The Causal Theory of Names

I. Two related but distinguishable questions concerning proper names:

A. What the name denotes upon a particular occasion of its use when this is understood as being partly determinative of what the speaker strictly and literally said. ⇒ **what the speaker denotes (upon an occasion).**

B. What conditions have to be satisfied by an expression and an item for the expression to be the name or a name of the item. ⇒ **what the name denotes**

II. Two Kinds of Description Theories

(1) X is uniquely that which satisfies all or most of the descriptions ϕ such that S would assent to "N.N. is ϕ" (or "That N.N. is ϕ").

⇒ Crudely, the cluster of information S has associated with the name determines its denotation upon a particular occasion by *fit*. If the speaker has no individuating information he will denote nothing.

(2) Associated with each name as used by <u>a group of speakers</u> who believe and intend that they are using the name with the same denotation, **is a description or set of <u>descriptions cullable from their beliefs</u> which an item has to satisfy to be the bearer of the name.**

* Kripke's attack aims at the first theory — a unique "fit" relation between the name and its bearer.

III. THE TWO THESES OF THE DESCRIPTION THEORY

[The Strong Thesis of the Description Theory]:

___ Some descriptive conditions that the speaker has in mind is sufficient for the speaker to denote whoever or whatever that satisfies the conditions.

[The Weak Thesis of the Description Theory]:

___ Some descriptive identification is necessary for a speaker to denote something.

___ **The Weak Thesis can be seen as the fusion of two thoughts:**

(1) that in order to be saying something by uttering an expression <u>one must utter the sentence with certain intentions</u>; this is felt to require, in the case of sentences containing names, that <u>one be aiming at something</u> with one's use of the name.

(2) that to have an intention or belief concerning some item (which one is not in a position to demonstratively identify) <u>one must be in possession of a description uniquely true of it</u>.

Q: Do parrots say anything? Do we say anything? What is the difference if not that parrots do not have intentions while we do? What does it mean to say that we have intention unless it is that we have some particular thing in mind?

* Evans' Criticisms of Description Theory:

(a) by uttering *p* we do intend to say something, but we are not necessarily able to identify *p* independently of our sentence.

(b) we often rely on others to give us the satisfaction conditions for general terms ('chlorine', 'nicotine', 'plaque', etc.)

(c) so the speakers often do not have enough description in mind to pin down the objects.

IV. RECAP OF PROBLEMS WITH THE DESCRIPTION THEORY

Description theory is the expression of two thoughts:

[a] the denotation of a name is determined by what speakers intend to refer to by using the name.

[b] The object of a speaker intends to refer to by his use of a name is that which satisfies or fits the majority of descriptions which make up the cluster of information which the speaker has associated with the name.

* Evans' Criticisms

___ (a) But consideration of the phenomenon of a name's getting a denotation, or changing it, suggests that *there being a community of speakers using the name with such and such as the intended referent* is likely to be a crucial constituent in these processes. With names, as with other expressions in the language, what they signify depends upon what *we* use them to signify – a truth whose recognition is compatible with denying the collapse of saying into meaning at the level of *the individual speaker*.

___ It is in (b) that the real weakness lies: the bad old Philosophy of Mind.   Not so much in the idea that the intended referent is determined in a more or less complicated way by the associated information, but the specific form the determination was supposed to take: *fit*. There is something absurd in supposing that the intended referent of some perfectly ordinary use of a name by a speaker could be some item utterly isolated (causally) from the user's community and culture simply in virtue of the fact that it ***fits*** better than anything else the cluster of descriptions he associates with the name.

V. THE CAUSAL THEORY

* Evans: [Contextual Information]

___ **For an object of yours to be the object of some psychological attitude of yours may be simply *for you to be placed in a context which relates you to that thing* [not some specific information you have in mind].**

Example: falling in love with one of the identical twins — even if God had looked into your mind, he would not have seen with whom you were in love.

[A]. Kripke's Causal Theory:

I.   A speaker, using a name "NN" on a particular occasion will denote some item x <u>if there is a causal chain of reference-preserving links leading back from his use on that occasion ultimately to the item x itself being involved in a name-acquiring transaction such as an explicit dubbing or the more gradual process whereby nick names stick</u>.

II. A speaker S's transmission of a name "NN" to a speaker S' constitutes a reference-preserving link <u>only if S intends to be using the name with the same denotation as [the one] from whom he in his turn learned the name</u>.

Example: hearing about a certain Louis in a pub…..

[B]. Problems with Kripke's Causal Theory: it fails to recognize the insight about contextual determination.

1.   **The problem of ambiguity** – we need contextual disambiguation
2.   **The problem of change of denotation** – a causal connection between my use of the name and use by others is simply not *necessary* for me to use the name to say something.

Examples:

___ "In the case of 'Madagascar' a hearsay of Malay or Arab sailors misunderstood by Marco Polo… has had the effect of transferring a corrupt form of the name of a portion of the African mainland to the great African Island."

___ The case of swapping babies (It will henceforth undeniably be the case that the man universally known as "Jack" is so called because a woman dubbed some other baby with the name.)

* Precisely because the causal theory ignores the way context can be determinative of what gets *said*, it has quite unacceptable consequences.

It may begin to appear that what gets said is going to be determined by
        (i)   what name is used,
        (ii)   what items bear the name, and
        (iii)   general principles of contextual disambiguation.

The causal origin of the speaker's familiarity with the name, save in certain specialized "mouthpiece cases," does not seem to have a critical role to play.

It looks as though **the intentions of the speakers** to use the name to refer to something must be allowed to count in determination of what it denotes.

* Kripke has mislocated the causal relation; the important causal relation lies between *that item's states and doings* and *the speaker's body of information* – not between the item's being dubbed with a name and the speaker's contemporary use of it.

[C]. Evans' Proposal: A Revised Causal Theory

___ An account of what makes an expression into a name for something that will allow names to change their denotations.

We must allow that:

[i]　the denotation of a name in the community will depend in a complicated way upon what those who use the term intend to refer to,

[ii]　typically a *necessary* (but not sufficient) condition for x's being the intended referent of S's use of a name is that *x should be the **source of causal origin** of the body of information that S has associated with the name*.

1.　[reference-preserving link]

___ The denotation of a name in a community is to be found by tracing a causal chain of reference-preserving links back to some item (between that item's states and doings and the speaker's body of information).

(Evans is deleting Kripke's requirement II.)

2.　[Speaker's Reference]

___ A speaker may have succeeded in getting it across or in communicating that p even though he uses a sentence which may not appropriately be used to say that p. Presumably this success consists in his audience's having formed a belief about him.

3. [*Source* and *Dominance*]

___ X is the *source* of the belief S expresses by uttering "Fa" if there was an episode which caused S's belief in which X and S were causally related in a type of situation apt for producing knowledge that something F-s ($\exists x(Fx)$) – a type of situation in which the belief that something F-s would be caused by something's F-ing. (e.g. Socrates is the source of my belief that some philosopher drank hemlock.)

___ A cluster or dossier of information can be ***dominantly of*** an item though it contains elements whose source is different. (e.g. the identical twin case) Dominance is not

simply a function of *amount* of information. … Detail in a particular area can be outweighed by spread. Also the believer's reasons for being interested in the item at all will weigh.

___ In general, a speaker intends to refer to the item that is the dominant source of his associated body of information.

Example:

___ Napoleon's impersonator: If it turns out that an impersonator had taken over Napoleon's role from 1814 onwards the cluster of the typical historian would still be dominantly of the man responsible for the earlier exploits and we would say that they had false beliefs about who fought at Waterloo. If however the switch had occurred much earlier, it being an unknown army officer being impersonated, then their information would be dominantly of the later man. They did not have false beliefs about who was the general Waterloo, but rather false beliefs about that general's early career.

1815
1814

1793

Napoleon   **Napoleon's impersonator**
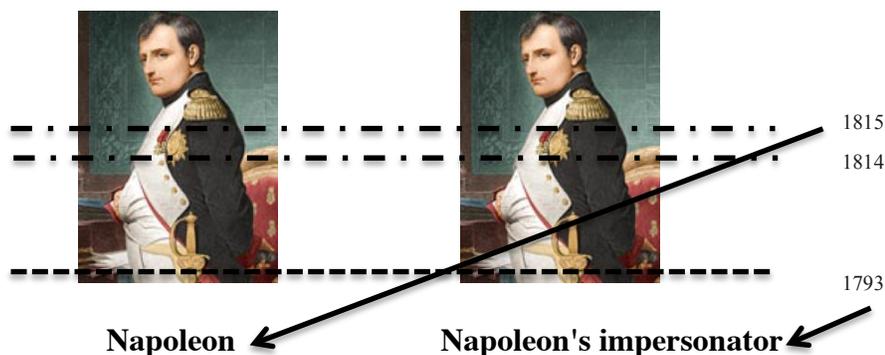
Note:
1. In the case of misidentification, the source of my belief may not really be the item believed.
2. In the case of legend and fancy, the belief could be "source-less," or the source could be the inventor of the legend.

VI. Conclusion: Evans' Theory of Names

"NN" is a name of x if there is a community *C* –

1. in which it is common knowledge that members of *C* have in their repertoire that procedure of using "NN" to refer to x (with the intention of referring to x);
2. the success in reference in any particular case being intended to rely on common knowledge between speaker and hearer that "NN" has been used to refer to x by members of *C* and not upon common knowledge of the satisfaction by x of some predicate embedded in "NN."

3. Intentions alone don't bring it about that a name gets a denotation; without the intentions being manifest there cannot be the common knowledge required for the practice.

* The difference between Kripke's and Evans' Causal Theories of Names

1. Evans' conditions are more stringent than Kripke's since for Kripke an expression becomes a name just so long as someone has dubbed something with it and thereby caused it to be in common usage. This seems little short of magical.

2. For Evans, there is a fairly standard way in which people get their names. If we use a name of a man we expect that it originated in the standard manner and this expectation may condition our use of it. But consider names for people which are obviously nicknames, or names for places or pieces of music. Since there is no standard way in which these names are bestowed, subsequent users will not in general use the name under any view as to its origin, and therefore when there is a divergence between the item involved in the name's origin and the speaker's intended referent there will be no *mis*apprehension, no latent motive for withdrawing the name, and thus no bar to the name's acquiring a new denotation even by the amended definition. So, for Evans, names can refer to items other than the one originally dubbed that name.

3. Unlike Kripke, Evans thinks that we do not use all names deferentially, least of all deferentially to the person from whom we picked them up.