

**Phil/Ling 375: Meaning and Mind**  
**[Handout #20]**

Saul Kripke: Naming and Necessity, Lecture II

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**KRIPKE'S CRITIQUE OF THE DESCRIPTION AND KRIPKE'S OWN THEORY OF NAMES**

**§ General Theses of the Description Theory:**

- (1) To every name or designating expression "X", there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of those properties  $j$  such that A believes " $jX$ ".**
- (2) One of the properties, or some conjointly, are believed by A to pick out some individual uniquely.**
- (3) If most, or a weighted most, of the  $j$ 's are satisfied by one unique object  $y$ , then  $y$  is the referent of "X."**
- (4) If the vote yields no unique object, "X" does not refer.**
- (5) The statement, "If X exists, then X has most of the  $j$ 's" is known *a priori* by the speaker.**
- (6) The statement, "If X exists, then X has most of the  $j$ 's" expresses a *necessary truth* (in the idiolect of the speaker.)**

**§ The Non-circularity Condition**

**(C) For any successful theory, the account must not be circular. The properties which are used in the vote must not themselves involve the notion of reference in such a way that it is ultimately impossible to eliminate.**

**§ Kneale's Description Theory**

**[Kneale's argument]:**

1. Although it is not trifling to be told that Socrates was the greatest philosopher of ancient Greece, it is trifling to be told that Socrates was called "Socrates."
2. Analytic statements are trifling.
3. Therefore, the name "Socrates" must simply mean "the individual called 'Socrates.'"

**\* Kripke's criticism**

**(1) past tense: Socrates was called 'Socrates.'**  
**\_\_\_ false though not trifling.**

As stated using the past tense, the condition wouldn't be circular, because one certainly could decide to use the term "Socrates" to refer to whoever was called "Socrates" by the Greeks. But, of course, in that sense it's not at all trifling to be told that Socrates was called "Socrates." If this

is any kind of fact it might be false. Perhaps we know that we call him “Socrates”; that hardly shows that the Greeks did so. If fact, of course, they may have pronounced the name differently.

**(2) present tense: Socrates is called ‘Socrates.’**  
**\_\_\_ trifling but commits a vicious circle.**

Suppose we amend the thesis so that it reads: it’s trifling to be told that Socrates is called “Socrates” by us, or at least, by me, the speaker. Then in some sense this is fairly trifling. I don’t think it is necessary or analytic.

**As a theory of reference of the name “Socrates” it will lead immediately to a vicious circle:**

\_\_\_ If one was determining the referent of a name like ‘Glunk’ to himself and made the following decision, “I shall use the term ‘Glunk’ to refer to the man that I call ‘Glunk,’ this would get one nowhere. One had better have some independent determination of the referent of “Glunk.”

Anyway this is a useful example of a violation of the noncircularity condition. The theory will satisfy all of these statements, perhaps, but it satisfies them only because there is some independent way of determining the reference independently of the particular condition: being the man called “Socrates.”

**§ Searle’s Description Theory**

- **Thesis (6): The statement, “If X exists, then X has most of the  $\varphi$ ’s” expresses a *necessary truth* (in the idiolect of the speaker.)**
- **Searle’s claim: It is a necessary fact that Aristotle has the logical sum, inclusive *disjunction* of properties commonly attributed to him.**

**\* Kripke’s criticism**

- (i) This is not the correct answer to this problem about necessity.
- (ii) It just is not, in any intuitive sense of necessity, a necessary truth that Aristotle had the properties commonly attributed to him.
- (iii) It would seem that it’s a contingent fact that Aristotle ever did any of the things commonly attributed to him today.

**§ Kripke on Rigid Designators**

1. When I say that a designator is rigid, and designates the same thing in all possible worlds, I mean that, **as used in our language**, it stands for that thing, when we talk about counterfactual situations.
2. I also don’t mean to imply that the thing designated exists in all possible worlds, just that the name refers rigidly to that thing.
3. If you say “suppose Hitler had never been born” then “Hitler” refers here, still rigidly to something that would not exist in the counterfactual situation described.

\* **Given these remarks, this means we must cross off thesis (6) as incorrect. [Why?]**

**§ How about a description theory where thesis (6) is eliminated?**

\_\_\_ Theses (2), (3), and (4) turn out to have a large class of counter instances. Even when theses (2) - (4) are true, thesis (5) is usually false; the truth of theses (3) and (4) is an empirical 'accident,' which the speaker hardly knows a priori.

\* **Against (2): One of the properties, or some conjointly, are believed by A to pick out some individual *uniquely*.**

**[Problem 1: No uniquely identifying descriptions] -- e.g. Richard Feynman**

Consider Richard Feynman, to whom many of us are able to refer. He is a leading contemporary theoretical physicist. Everyone here can state the contents of one of Feynman's theories so as to differentiate from Gell-Mann. However, the man in the street, not possessing these abilities, may still use the name "Feynman." When asked he will say: well he's a physicist or something. He may not think that this picks out anyone uniquely. I still think he uses the name "Feynman" as a name for Feynman.

**[Problem 2: Vicious Circle] -- e.g. Einstein and the Theory of Relativity**

But let's look at some of the cases where we do have a description to pick out someone uniquely:

\_\_\_ If we say Einstein was the man who discovered the theory of relativity, that certainly picks out someone uniquely. One can be sure that everyone here can make a compact and independent statement of this theory and so pick out Einstein uniquely; but many people actually don't know enough about this stuff, so when asked what the theory of relativity is, they will say: "Einstein's theory," and thus be led into the most straightforward sort of vicious circle.

**Conclusion: Thesis (2) is false.**

If we say Einstein was "the man who discovered relativity theory," that does pick someone out uniquely; but it may not pick him out in such a way as to satisfy the non-circularity condition, because the theory of relativity may in turn be picked out as "Einstein's theory". So thesis (2) seems to be false....

\* **Against (3): If most, or a weighted most, of the  $\varphi$ 's are satisfied by one unique object y, then y is the referent of "X."**

**[Problem 1: Someone else might have uniquely satisfied the descriptions.] -- Gödel is the one who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic.**

\* **Kripke's Argument:**

- 1 According to thesis (3), if most, or a weighted most, of the  $\varphi$ 's are satisfied by one unique object y, then y is the referent of "X."
- 2 Suppose the man who actually discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, it would be Schmidt who uniquely satisfies the description "the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic."
- 3 For many people, the only description they associate with the name "Gödel" is the description "the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic."

- 4 Therefore, for many people, the referent of the name “Gödel” would actually be Schmidt.
- 5 But when we use the name “Gödel”, we are certainly not referring to Schmidt.
- 6 Therefore, thesis (3) is false.

**[Problem 2: Some of our descriptions are based on misinformation. So the person actually satisfied the description is not the named person, but someone else.] -- e.g. Einstein was the inventor of atomic bomb.**

\_\_\_ Very often we use a name on the basis of considerable misinformation.

e.g. Columbus was the first man to realize that the earth was round. He was also the first European to land in the western hemisphere. Probably none of these things are true, and therefore, when people use the term “Columbus” they really refer to some Greek if they use the roundness of the earth,... But they don’t. So it does not seem that if most of the  $\varphi$ ’s are satisfied by a unique object  $\gamma$ , then  $\gamma$  is the referent of the name. This seems simply to be false.

**\* Against (4): If the vote yields no unique object, “X” does not refer.**

**[Problem 1]:**

\_\_\_ The vote may not yield a unique object, as in the case of Cicero or Feynman.

**[Problem 2]: e.g. Jonah**

\_\_\_ Suppose it yields no object, that nothing satisfies most, or even any substantial number, of the  $\varphi$ ’s. Does that mean the name does not refer? No.

**The case of Jonah**

\_\_\_ Biblical scholars think that Jonah really existed. It isn’t because they think that someone ever was swallowed by a big fish or even went to Nineveh to preach. These conditions may be true of no one whatsoever and yet the name “Jonah” really has a referent.

**\* Against thesis (5): The statement, “If X exists, then X has most of the  $\varphi$ ’s” is known *a priori* by the speaker.**

**Kripke’s Criticism:**

\_\_\_ Notice that even in the case where (3) and (4) happen to be true, a typical speaker hardly knows *a priori* that they are, as required by the theory. I think that my belief about Gödel is in fact correct that the “Schmidt” story is just a fantasy. But the belief hardly constitutes *a priori* knowledge.



## § Kripke’s Causal Chain Theory

\_\_\_ On our view, it is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain of communication, which is relevant. It seems to be wrong to think that we give ourselves some properties which somehow qualitatively uniquely pick out an object and determine our reference in that manner. **It’s in virtue of our connection with other speakers in the community, going back to the referent himself, that we refer to a certain man.**

**\*Kripke's Theses:**

**(1) An initial baptism takes place. Here the object may be (i) named by ostension, or (ii) the reference of the name may be fixed by a description.**

\_\_\_ (i) Fixed by ostension: Someone, let's say, a baby, is born; his parents call him by a certain name. They talk about him to their friends. Other people meet him. Through various sorts of talk the name is spread from link to link as if by a chain.

\_\_\_ (ii) Fixed by description: An example of determining the reference of a name by description, is the discovery of the planet Neptune. Neptune was hypothesized as the planet which caused such and such discrepancies in the orbits of certain other planets. If Leverrier indeed gave the name "Neptune" to the planet before it was ever seen, then he fixed the reference of "Neptune" by means of the description just mentioned. At that time he was unable to see the planet even through a telescope.

**(2) When the name is "passed from link to link," the receiver of the name must intend when he learns it to use it with the reference as the man from whom he heard it.**

**(3) It is not how the speaker thinks he got the reference, but the actual chain of communication, which is relevant.**

\* Notice the preceding outline hardly eliminates the notion of reference; on the contrary, it takes the notion of intending to use the same reference as a given.

**\* The Problem of "Santa Claus" → Q: How does Kripke's theory solve this and other names involving nonexistent objects?**

Kripke: But of course not every sort of causal chain reaching from me to a certain man will do for me to make a reference. There may be a causal chain from our use of the term "Santa Claus" to a certain historical saint, but still the children, when they use this, by this time probably do not refer to that saint.

\_\_\_ Kripke says: Perhaps it is some such failure to keep the reference fixed which accounts for the divergence of present uses of "Santa Claus" from the alleged original use.

## § Conclusion

**In general our reference depends not just on what we think ourselves, but on other people in the community, the history of how the name reached one, and things like that. It is by following such a history that one gets to the reference.**

**→ The causal chain theory of names or the historical chain theory of names**