KRIPKE AGAINST DESCRIPTIVISM

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Phil Language

"Do proper names have descriptive content?"

1. Classic views on names: Mill, Frege, Russell

Mill:

> Proper names are not connotative; they denote the individuals who are
> called by them, but they do not indicate or imply any attributes as belong-
> ing to those individuals. When we name a child by the name Paul or a
> dog by the name Caesar, these names are simply marks used to enable
> those individuals to be made subjects of discourse. It may be said, indeed,
> that we must have had some reason for giving them those names rather
> than any others, and this is true, but the name, once given, is independent
> of the reason. (p. 287)

But what about empty and co-referential proper names?

Russell:

> … when we ask whether Homer existed, we are using the word "Homer"
> as an abbreviated description: we may replace it by (say) "the author of
> the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*." The same considerations apply to almost all
> uses of what look like proper names. (p. 244)

2. Giving the meaning vs. Fixing the referent

3. Various notions

A priori A proposition that can be known independently of experience

Necessity A proposition that couldn't have been false—that is true in all
possible worlds

> The second concept which is in question is that of necessity…We ask
> whether something might have been true, or might have been false…If it
> is true, might it have been otherwise? Is it possible that, in this respect,

the world should have been different from the way it is? If the answer is "no," then this fact about the world is a necessary one. If the answer is "yes," then this fact about the world is a contingent one. *This in and of itself has nothing to do with anyone's knowledge of anything.* It's certainly a philosophical thesis, and not a matter of obvious definitional equivalence, either that everything a priori is necessary or that everything necessary is a priori. (Martinich p. 293)

4. Rigid designation

Rigid designator A term that designates the same object in all possible worlds

5. Statement of descriptivism

1. To every name or designating expression "X", there corresponds a cluster of properties, namely the family of those properties ψ such that A believes "ψX"

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 ψs 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 ψs" is known a priori by the speaker

6. The statement, "If X exists, then X has most of the ψs" expresses a necessary truth (in the idiolect of the speaker)

(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.

6. The modal argument

> It just is not, in any intuitive sense of necessity, a necessary truth that
> Aristotle had the properties commonly attributed to him. (p. 295)

(A) If Aristotle exists, then Aristotle has most of the following features: he
taught Alexander the Great, he was a student of Plato, he was a philoso-
pher, …

1. If thesis (6) of descriptivism is true, then a typical utterance of (A) ex-
presses a necessary truth

2. It's not the case that a typical utterance of (A) expresses a necessary truth

3. Therefore, thesis (6) of descriptivism is not true

6.1 The knowledge argument

Consider Joe Shmoe, who knows only that Feynman is some physicist. He
certainly doesn't believe that his descriptions pick out anyone uniquely. So (2)
is false. Similarly, (4) and (5) seem false also.

6.2 The semantic argument

> Suppose that Gödel was not in fact the author of this theorem. A man
> named 'Schmidt', whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious
> circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His
> friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and it was thereafter
> attributed to Gödel. On the view in question, then, when our ordinary
> man uses the name 'Gödel', he really means to refer to Schmidt, because
> Schmidt is the unique person satisfying the description, 'the man who
> discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'… So, since the man who
> discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when
> we talk about 'Gödel', are in fact always referring to Schmidt. But it seems
> to me that we are not. (p. 298)

1. If thesis (3) of Descriptivism is true, then if this story is true, we have all along been referring to Schmidt when we say 'Gödel'

2. If this story is true, we have all along been referring to Gödel, not Schmidt, when we say 'Gödel'

3. Therefore, thesis (3) of Descriptivism isn't true