

VI NAMING & NECESSITY, LECTURE TWO

The Modal Argument

If the description *gives the meaning* of a name, then it will be a necessary truth that the bearer of the name fits the description. But it isn't. Aristotle might not have taught Alexander the Great. Moving to the cluster theory makes no difference: Aristotle might have had very few of the properties for which he is famous.

Perhaps the use of the description is to *fix the reference* of the name. And maybe there are some cases for which this is true ('Jack the Ripper'). But Kripke has a battery of arguments against the idea that this is normal case:

The Epistemic Argument

If the description fixes the reference of the name then whoever is competent with the name will know *a priori* that that the bearer of the name fits the description (or fits most of the description). But we don't know this *a priori*, since there is something that we could find out, *a posteriori*, that would make us deny that they fitted the description. So the knowledge that we have concerning the bearer of the name is held *a posteriori*.

The Semantic Argument

This broadens the point made above. Suppose it turned out that someone other than the Gödel, Schmidt, did the things standardly attributed to Gödel. By the description theory, 'Gödel' would then refer to Schmidt. But it wouldn't; 'Gödel' would still refer to Gödel (witness how we described the example). Similarly, if the description applied to no one, 'Gödel' would still refer to Gödel.

The Paucity of Information Argument

Very often we simply don't have enough beliefs to uniquely identify anyone as the bearer of the name (Feynman/Gell-Mann, p.81).

Some Possible Responses by the Description Theorist

(i) Be careful about which description you use: 'The person called "Aristotle"'; 'The person who actually taught Alexander, etc.'; 'The person who is widely believed to have taught Alexander, etc.'" Kripke has a variety of responses here (pp. 87–91).

(ii) Hold that names are descriptions that always take wide scope. Kripke objects that his claims apply equally to names in simple sentences (pp. 10–12).

The Causal 'Picture'

In contrast to the description theory Kripke offers an alternative picture: names refer to the object they refer to in virtue of an initial baptism, followed by a causal chain in which the name is 'passed from link to link'. Each person who learns the name intends to use it to refer to whoever the person they learn it from uses it to refer to. The account is fundamentally social, unlike the description theory (p. 91). Why does Kripke insist that this is a *picture* not a *theory*? Is it just to avoid refutation? Or to avoid making the description theory trivially true (see n. 38)? Or is there some deeper reason?