Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*: Lecture I

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1. The Frege-Russell picture of names (26-32)

As we've seen, despite the fact that Russell did and Frege did not recognize the possibility of a class of non-descriptive, directly referential logically proper names, both had substantially similar pictures of how ordinary proper names work.

In particular, both thought that there was no fundamental difference between ordinary proper names and definite descriptions. Russell explicitly claimed that the meanings of proper names were equivalent to the meanings of descriptions associated with those names by speakers, and Frege consistently uses definite descriptions in explaining the sense of proper names, which indicates that he thought that there was some very close relationship between the sense of names and the sense of descriptions.

So, to understand how the classical picture of proper names worked, we have to understand how Frege and Russell thought of descriptions. And about this we can say the following: though Russell and Frege had different views of definite descriptions, with Russell but not Frege thinking of them as quantifier phrases, both thought that definite descriptions referred by having as their meaning some definite condition which is such that anything satisfying that condition would be the meaning of the description.

As we have seen, and as Kripke notes on pp. 28-29, there are powerful arguments in favor of this classical view of names. In particular, he mentions three.

1. We have been talking throughout this class about the reference of proper names. We have been assuming that 'Jeff Speaks' refers to me, that the name 'Aristotle' refers to Aristotle, that the name 'Hesperus' refers to the planet Venus, and so on. And this is certainly correct: these names do refer to these things. But this can seem kind of amazing. Think about the name 'Hesperus'. It refers to an enormous object out in space that we can occasionally see. How did this series of sounds, or this bunch of marks on the board, get linked up with this object? No one flew out there and put a label on the planet. And just think: people can learn this name, and use it to refer to this far away object, even if they have never seen it, and know hardly anything about it. So even for these people, who seemingly have no contact with the planet itself, there is some important connection between this word and the planet. This is deeply puzzling; how did this link get set up? Or, as Kripke puts it, how does the reference of a name get fixed? As Kripke points out, it is an important strength for the classical picture of naming that it has a story to tell about this. According to the classical view, we associate descriptions with names, and the references of names are fixed by those descriptions. In the case of 'Hesperus', we associate with it the description 'the second planet from the sun', or 'the brightest star in the evening sky', or something like that. It's not so puzzling how we can associate these descriptions with names; we just stipulate that we are going to use 'Hesperus' as a name for the second planet from the sun, for example. And this is enough to make this description the meaning of the name, and enough to fix the referent via the description. So the classical picture seems to successfully dissolve this puzzle about reference.

2. The second motivation behind the classical view mentioned by Kripke echoes Frege's concern with identity statements. It seems clear that, when one says 'Hesperus is Phosphorus', one is not just, trivially, asserting the identity of an object with itself. Rather, one is saying something substantive, saying something which could be the result of a discovery. The description theory again has a natural and elegant solution: in such cases, we associate different descriptions with the two names, and it is often a substantive discovery that the same object satisfies the two descriptions.

3. The last motivation for the description theory is related to Russell's problem of negative existentials. Kripke asks how we are to analyze a question like, 'Did Aristotle exist?' It seems clear that the analysis cannot be that we are asking of some individual whether that individual exists — as Kripke says, "once we've got the thing, we know that it existed." Again, the classical theory is ready with a natural answer. What we are really asking, says the classical theory, is whether an someone existed who was the last great philosopher of antiquity, who wrote such and such books, who was the teacher of Alexander the Great, and so on.

Despite these strengths of the view, Kripke says, "I think it's pretty certain that the view of Frege and Russell is false."

Kripke notes that there is an obvious problem with the classical theory of names, and one that other people, including Frege and Russell, have noticed. And this is that it does not seem that there is just *one* description associated with most names. Different people might associate different descriptions with the same name; some people might think of Aristotle as 'the last great philosopher of antiquity', others might think of him as 'the author of the *Metaphysics*', others as 'the most famous student of Plato.' There seems no way to decide which of these descriptions provides *the* meaning of the name, 'Aristotle.'

In a famous passage in the *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein states a related motivation for abandoning the classical view in favor of a view of names as more closely related to groups of descriptions:

> "If one says 'Moses did not exist', this may mean various things. It may mean: the Israelites did not have a single leader when they withdrew from Egypt — or: their leader was not called Moses — or: there cannot have been anyone who accomplished all that the Bible relates of Moses — . . . But when I make a statement about Moses, — am I always ready to substitute some one of those descriptions for 'Moses'? ...Have I decided how much must be proved false for me to give up my proposition as false? Has the name 'Moses' got a fixed and unequivocal use for me in all possible cases?" (Investigations, §79)

This has led people, Kripke thinks, to abandon the details of the classical picture without abandoning its underlying motivations. What people do is to say that the meaning of a proper name is given, not by a single description, but by a *cluster*, or a bunch, of descriptions. So the meaning of 'Aristotle' might be given by the list of descriptions we gave above, plus a bunch more. The referent of the name would then be that object, if any, who satisfied most of these descriptions, or enough of these descriptions, or something like that. The details of the theory needn't detain us. The point is that there is this basic problem with the classical theory, but that it seems as though we can revise that theory, while still keeping to the spirit of the view that the meanings of names are given by the descriptions associated with them by speakers.

In what follows, I will largely ignore this complication, and discuss the view which takes the meaning of a name to be given by a single description. We will come back and see whether the success of any of Kripke's arguments turns on this.

2. The separation of the modalities (33-39)

We have seen that earlier authors like Ayer and Quine tend to run the categories of necessary truth and a priori knowable truth together. Kripke thinks that this is a mistake:

> "Philosophers have talked ...[about] various categories of truth, which are sometimes called 'a priori', 'analytic,' 'necessary' ...these terms are often used

> as if whether there are things answering to these concepts is an interesting question, but we might as well regard them all as meaning the same thing. ...
>
> ...First the notion of a prioricity is a concept of epistemology. I guess the traditional characterization from Kant goes something like: a priori truths are those which can be known independently of any experience. . . .
>
> . . . The second concept which is in question is that of necessity. . . . what I am concerned with here is a notion which is not a notion of epistemology but of metaphysics ...We ask whether something might have been true, or might have been false. Well, if something is false, it's obviously not necessarily true. If it is true, might it have been otherwise? Is it possible that, in this respect, the world should have been different than the way that it is? . . . 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. . . . at any rate they are dealing with two different domains, two different areas, the epistemological and the metaphysical." (33-35)

Kripke's point here is that the identification of the necessary with the a priori is a substantive one, and does not follow trivially from what we mean when we say 'necessary' or 'a priori.'

From the fact that these two categories are conceptually distinct, it does not follow that they are extensionally distinct; it does not follow, that is, that that there are any examples of truths which are necessary but not knowable a priori, or a priori but not necessary. Kripke will go on to argue both that there necessary truths which are a posteriori, and that there are a priori truths which are contingent.

3. Essentialism & rigid designation (39-53)

To do this, Kripke first needs to clarify the notion of necessity; and he approaches this by way of the distinction between accidental and essential properties.

Let's say that an essential property of an object o is a property such that o could not have existed without having that property; or, put another way, it is a property such that o could not have been o without having that property. Properties of an object which are not essential are accidental.

(This is not to say that every property which satisfies this characterization is an essential property; the essential properties of an object might be a subset of those which hold of the object necessarily. But every essential property of an object is one which is such that, necessarily, if the object exists then it has this property.)

Kripke considers two arguments against the idea that this distinction between essential and accidental properties makes sense.

3.1. Quine on de re modality

The first is due to Quine, and is familiar from our reading of his "Reference and Modality." You will recall that Quine argued against quantifying into modal contexts on the basis of his claim that 'necessarily' creates referentially opaque context; we saw that if we *cannot* quantify into modal contexts, this counts against the intelligibility of de re modality (the idea that an object can have properties either necessarily or contingently (essentially or accidentally)), independently of a specification of the way in which that object is referred to.

Kripke has this to say about Quine's argument:

> "Now, some people say: ...it's only a statement or state of affairs that can be either necessary or contingent! Whether a particular necessarily or contingently has a certain property depends on the way it's described. . . . What is Quine's famous example? If we consider the number 9, does it have the property of necessary oddness? ...Certainly it's true in all possible worlds, let's say, it couldn't have been otherwise, that nine is odd. Of course, 9 could also equally well be picked out as the number of planets. It is not necessary, not true in all possible worlds, that the number of planets is odd. For example if there had been eight planets, the number of planets would not have been odd. . . . whether an object has the same property in all possible worlds depends not just on the object itself, but on how it is described. So it's argued.
>
> It is even suggested in the literature, that though a notion of necessity may have some sort of intuition behind it ...this notion of a distinction between necessary and contingent properties is just a doctrine made up by some bad philosopher, who (I guess) didn't realize that there are different ways of referring to the same thing."

Kripke replies that we do have an intuitive distinction between essential and accidental properties of things:

> "I don't know if some philosophers have not realized this; but at any rate it is very far from being true that this idea [that a property can meaningfully be held to be essential or accidental to an object independently of its description] is a notion which has no intuitive content, which means nothing to the ordinary man. Suppose that someone said, pointing at Nixon, 'That's the guy who might have lost'. Someone else says, 'Oh no, if you describe him

> as "Nixon", then he might have lost; but, of course, describing him as the winner, then it is not true that he might have lost'. Now which one is being the philosopher here, the unintuitive man? It seems to me obviously to be the second."

Kripke's idea here is that in our pre-philosophical thought, we take it for granted that we can say things about which properties certain objects might have had or lacked.

It would be fair, at this point, to respond to Kripke as follows: granted, there is an intuitive distinction between essential and accidental properties. But Quine did not just say that the distinction was unintuitive; he suggested that, since we can easily generate cases in which there are two singular terms n and m, each of which refer to some object o, such that the two sentences

> Necessarily, n is F.
>
> Necessarily, m is F.

can differ in truth value, there is no sense to be made of the question whether o, independently of specification of some singular term which refers to *o*, necessarily or merely contingently has the property expressed by 'is F.' Surely this argument cannot be answered merely by citing our pre-philosophical intuition that this question does make sense. In fact, it's hard to see how our pre-philosophical intuitions could even be relevant.

It is in response to this challenge that Kripke introduces the notion of rigid designation on p. 48:

> "What's the difference between asking whether it's necessary that 9 is greater than 7 or whether it's necessary that the number of planets is greater than 7? Why does one show anything more about essence than the other? The answer to this question might be intuitively 'Well, look, the number of planets might have been different from what it in fact is. I doesn't make any sense, though, to say nine might have been different from what it in fact is.'"

Kripke here is drawing a distinction between 'the number of planets' and 'nine.' The distinction is that while the first of the following sentence seems plainly true, the second seems just as plainly false:

> The number of planets might have been different from what it actually is.
>
> Nine might have been different from what it actually is.

What explains this difference? Kripke thinks that if we consider some way the world might have been — i.e., some possible world — and we ask what the number of planets is in that world, we will get different answers depending on what that world is like. But if

we consider different possible worlds and ask what nine is in that world, we always get the same answer — the number nine.

Kripke captures this distinction using a new (and very influential) bit of terminology. He says: "Let's call something a *rigid designator* if in every possible world it designates the same object." (48) In these terms, "nine" is a rigid designator, whereas "the number of planets" is not.

Some examples to illustrate this: 'the first president of Canada', 'the tallest student in this class', 'the sum of 3 and 5.' Some descriptions, but not most, are rigid designators. Now consider a name like 'Aristotle.' Is this a rigid designator? Kripke thinks that ordinary proper names are rigid designators:

> "One of the intuitive theses I will maintain in these talks is that names are rigid designators. Certainly they seem to satisfy the intuitive test mentioned above: although someone other than the U. S. President in 1970 might have been the U. S. President in 1970 . . . no one other than Nixon might have been Nixon." (48)

Kripke is here, as elsewhere, relying on an intuitive test for the rigidity of a singular term:

> *Intuitive test for rigid designation*
>
> n is a rigid designator iff ⌜n could not have existed without being n, and nothing other than n could have been n⌝ is true.

The right hand side of this, the thought goes, will come out true iff n refers to the same object with respect to every possible world. An important clarificatory point: the distinction between the reference of a term with respect to a possible world w and the reference of a term as used in w. (See Kripke's discussion of this distinction at p. 77.)

What does this have to do with Quine's argument? The idea here is that when we are interested in whether some object o has a property, we can only test for this by looking at truth values of sentences of the form, ⌜Necessarily, n is F⌝ *if 'n' rigidly designates o.* For if 'n' does not rigidly designate o, then the truth value of the sentence in question depends on fact about whether objects other than o 'are F.' But if we are interested in the essential properties of o, it's irrelevant how things stand, or could have stood, with objects other than o.

A defender of Quine might reply as follows: skepticism about de re modality involves skepticism about talk about talk about objects in various possible worlds rather than talk about whatever satisfies some description in various possible worlds. But the definition of rigid designation — reference to *the same object* with respect to every possible world — presupposes that we can make sense of talk about objects in various possible worlds. So it is illegitimate to use rigid designation as a response to Quine's skepticism.

But it is at this stage that you might think that Kripke's remarks about our pre-philosophical intuitions are relevant. You might think that the following kind of position about skepticism is plausible: if we have some pre-philosophical belief, one should abandon it as the result of a skeptical argument only if the skeptic, using propositions that we already accept, can show us that the belief is false. Kripke here makes a strong case that Quine has not done this. Quine's arguments turn on their being no principled distinction between singular terms like 'nine' and 'the number of planets.' Kripke's distinction, if intelligible, between rigid and non-rigid designators shows that there is. If the Quinean skeptic about de re modality wishes to question the intelligibility of Kripke's distinction, we should need an argument for this. It is not enough for the skeptic simply to demand an explanation of some distinction in terms which the skeptic himself would accept; this is a demand which we can justifiably resist.

3.2. The problem of "transworld identity"

Another, related source of skepticism about the possibility of making sense of essentialist claims again has to do with the possibility of making sense of talking about the same object across all possible worlds. This has to do with questions about the metaphysics of modality, including questions about what sorts of things possible worlds are, and about whether we need 'criteria of transworld identity' in order to make sense of talk about objects in different possible worlds. Though this raises some very interesting issues, we will not have time to go into this here. If you are interested in this topic, an important statement of a view opposed to Kripke's is in David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds*.

4. Meaning vs. reference fixing (53)

The next distinction Kripke discusses is between two different versions of the descriptive theory: between that version where the description is taken to be synonymous with (to give the meaning of) the name, and that version where the description is not syonymous with the name, but does determine its reference.

Kripke's application of this distinction to the case of proper names:

> "Frege should be criticized for using the term 'sense' in two senses. For he takes the sense of a designator to be its meaning; and he also takes it to be the way its reference is determined. Identifying the two, he supposes that both are given by definite descriptions."

The distinction between two kinds of descriptivism: the view that the reference of a name is fixed by the reference of its associated description, and the view that the meaning of a name is the same as the meaning of its associated description. The falsity of the second kind of descriptivism would not entail the falsity of the first kind; descriptions might fix the reference of names without giving their meaning.

5. The contingent a priori (54-6)

So far Kripke has introduced a conceptual distinction between necessity and a prioricity; defined the notion of rigid designation; and introduced a distinction between fixing the reference of a term and giving its meaning. Kripke next puts these three pieces together in an argument that there are some contingent a priori propositions.

5.1. The example of the standard meter

The main example of the contingent a priori Kripke is discusses is the example of the standard meter. Kripke imagines using the length of a certain stick — 'Stick S' — to fix the reference of the expression 'one meter.' He then asks us to consider the status of the proposition expressed by the sentence

> The length of stick S at time t0 is one meter.

He first argues that this proposition expresses a contingent rather than a necessary truth:

> "...there is an intuitive difference between the phrase 'one meter' and the phrase 'the length of S at t0'. The first phrase is meant to designate rigidly a certain length in all possible worlds, which in the actual world happens to be the length of the stick S at t0. On the other hand, 'the length of S at t0' does not designate anything rigidly. In some counterfactual situations the stick might have been longer and in some shorter, if various stresses and strains had been applied to it. So we can say of this stick, the same way as we would of any other of the same substance and length, that if heat of a given quantity had been applied to it, it would have expanded to such and such a length. ...So [the fact that we have used stick S to fix the reference of 'one meter'] does not make it a necessary truth that S is one meter long at t0. The reason is that one designator ('one meter') is rigid and the other designator ('the length of S at t0') is not." (56-57)

The basic idea here is that this claim is contingent for just the same reason that any sentence of the form

> The F is n.

where 'the F ' is a non-rigid designator and 'n' is a rigid designator, is contingent. If one expression is a rigid designator and the other is not, then there is some object o such that in some world one of the expressions refers to it and the other does not. But then the sentence will be false with respect to that possible world, and hence not necessary.

But is the proposition expressed by this sentence a priori? Kripke argues that it is:

> "What, then, is the epistemological status of the statement 'Stick S is one meter long at t0', for someone who has fixed the meter system by reference to

> stick S? It would seem that he knows it a priori. For if he used stick S to fix the reference of the term 'one meter', then as a result of this kind of 'definition' ...he knows automatically, without further investigation, that S is one meter long. ... So in this sense, there are contingent a priori truths." (56)

Kripke's idea here seems to be that, though it may not be a priori for later users, this claim is at least a priori knowable for the parties to the initial stipulation which fixes the reference of 'one meter.' The intuitive idea is that if we have stipulated that 'one meter' is to stand for that length, whatever it is, which is the current length of stick S, then we can know, just by knowing this stipulation, that stick S is one meter long. But this is surely enough to make the knowledge in question a priori.

5.2. An extension of Kripke's point: indexicals

Work by a number of people after the publication of *Naming and Necessity* extended the category of the contingent a priori beyond the cases which fit Kripke's description, to a number of cases involving indexicals, or expressions whose content, on a given occasion of use, depends systematically upon features of the context in which it is uttered. Indexicals include 'I', 'here', 'now', 'actually', 'you'.

Just as in Kripke's example the expression 'one meter' is associated with a description, so each of these indexicals is associated with a description:

I	the speaker of the context
here	the place of the context
now	the time of the context
actually	the world of the context
you	the audience of the context

In Kripke's example, 'one meter' did not mean the same thing as the descriptions associated with it; this description was, as he says, used to fix the reference of 'one meter', and not to give its meaning. The same is true of the above indexicals; they do not mean the same thing as their associated descriptions. Consider the following pair of sentences:

> If I decided to have class outside, I would have made the lawn be the place of the context.

> If I decided to have class outside, I would have made the lawn be here.

Do these say the same thing?

(The relations between these indexicals and their associated descriptions is not quite the same as the relation between Kripke's term 'one meter' and its associated description. In

Kripke's case, the description has a one-off use; it is used to introduce the expression, but then the expression can go on to be mastered by other speakers without their knowing anything about the description. This is not true of indexicals; the description fixes the reference on every occasion of use and, plausibly, understanding indexicals requires having some grasp of their associated description. But we can set that difference aside for now.) As with the standard meter, the relationship between indexicals and the associated descriptions generates seeming cases of the contingent a priori, like the following:

> I am the speaker of the context.
> I am here now.
> Grass is green if and only if actually, grass is green.

Each of these also, relative to our imagined contexts of utterance, expresses a contingent truth. So each seems to be an example of the contingent a priori.

5.3. Objections to the contingent a priori

5.3.1. The definition of 'a priori'

Suppose that everything in Kripke's description of the case goes as he says, and that the speaker comes to know the proposition that the length of stick S is one meter on the basis of only that experience required for him to understand the proposition. Is this enough for it to count as a priori?

Examples which seem to indicate that it is not; uses of demonstratives like "That exists."

5.3.2. Is every contingent fact knowable a priori?

One challenge to Kripke's claim that the proposition that stick S is one meter long is a priori is that the line of reasoning given in defense of that claim seems, given a few further assumptions, to lead to the absurd conclusion that virtually any agent could know almost any contingent fact a priori.

Let 'the F' be any description which uniquely designates some object or magnitude. Then if we allow speakers to, solely on the basis of understanding the description, introduce a name which rigidly designates the referent of the description, speakers could come to know a priori of the referent of that description that it is F. Example: knowing a priori how tall the tallest person in the world is.

Does this objection apply to the examples involving indexicals above?