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Back to the Golden Age: Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* and Twenty-First Century Philosophy

by

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Abstract: In this paper, I try to outline what I take to be *Naming and Necessity*'s fundamental legacy to my generation and those that follow, and the new perspectives it has opened up for twenty-first century philosophy. The discussion is subdivided into three sections, concerning respectively philosophy of language, metaphysics, and metaphilosophy. The general unifying theme is that *Naming and Necessity* is helping philosophy to recover a Golden Age, by freeing it from the strictures coming from the empiricist and Kantian traditions and reconnecting it to the world and the objects that populate it. Because of this, in the concluding paragraph I tentatively suggest that Kripke's philosophy may be seen as a *sui generis* form of naturalism.

Keywords: consumerist semantics, metaphilosophy, metaphysics, modality *de re*, *Naming and Necessity*, naturalism, Saul Kripke, semantics

1. Introduction

When Saul Kripke gave his three lectures at Princeton University in January 1970, I was not born yet. Thus, unlike most of the other contributors to this issue, I was not trained in philosophy in a pre-Kripkean era and unfortunately did not have the chance to take part in, or even only indirectly experience, the philosophical revolution originating from those lectures. I belong to another generation, so to speak. In fact, when I began to study philosophy, *Naming and Necessity* was already up there as a new classic. This gives me a perhaps somewhat different perspective. Near the beginning of his first lecture, Kripke said: "Some of the views that I have are views which may at first glance strike some as obviously wrong" (1972, p. 253 [1980, p. 23]). This may well have been true, at the time. But, twenty years or so later, most of the views he defended in his three lectures struck me as obviously right, and most of those he was opposing – just to give a (significant) example, what he called "the Frege-Russell view" of proper names and its variants – as blatantly wrong, and up to now I have not found any reason to change my mind about this. Because of this, I am not interested here in entering any of those disputes that so captured the attention of my predecessors; I take most of them to be definitively closed (*vade retro*, descriptivists!). Rather, my aim in this paper is to look ahead and try to outline what I take to be *Naming*

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and Necessity's fundamental legacy to my generation and those that follow, and the new perspectives it has opened up for twenty-first century philosophy.

I shall subdivide my discussion into three sections, concerning respectively philosophy of language, metaphysics, and metaphilosophy. As the title of the paper suggests, the general unifying theme will be that *Naming and Necessity* is helping philosophy to recover a Golden Age, by freeing it from the strictures coming from the empiricist and Kantian traditions and reconnecting it to the world and the, often quite ordinary, objects that populate it. Only by focusing on them can any sound philosophical theorizing move forward.

Probably none of the specific points I shall make in this paper will strike the reader as particularly original. Indeed, my aim is not to offer a new interpretation of *Naming and Necessity.* Rather, I would like to collect some well-known ideas and suggestions coming from it and organize them so as to display the particular way they impacted on me. Thus, the resulting perspective will be somewhat personal. Although it is the perspective I have gained from reading (and continuously rereading!) Kripke's work, I do not dare to claim it is his own perspective, for at least two reasons. First, I shall focus on some aspects of it and deliberately ignore others (notably among them, its clinging to the distinction between *a priori* and *a posteriori* justification), which seem to me to be less important or even remnants of the traditions I see him as surpassing. Second, Kripke was always extremely cautious in his claims: he almost never advanced one in favour of which he was not able to offer strong – often decisive – arguments. In contrast, since I am interested in articulating a general perspective rather than in arguing for any specific thesis, I shall be much less cautious, using and expanding on his ideas in ways he might not be ready to subscribe to. Having said this, however, let me repeat that I gained this perspective from reading and rereading *Naming and Necessity.* Therefore, if the perspective has some merit, all the credit goes to Kripke, of course. Any mistakes are, on the contrary, entirely due to myself.

2. Philosophy of Language

Although Rudolf Carnap is never mentioned in it, *Naming and Necessity* owes its title to his *Meaning and Necessity* (1947). Interestingly, the subtitle of Carnap's book was "A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic." As Carnap explains at the beginning of § 1, "[t]he chief task of this book will be to find a suitable method for the semantical analysis of meaning." Indeed, the so-called "method of extension and intension" is developed and applied to two *formal languages*: the non-modal symbolic system S_1 and the modal symbolic system S_2. As is witnessed by his earlier metatheoretical results on modal logic (see especially Kripke, 1963), Kripke was certainly very well versed in (modal and non-modal)

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formal languages. Notwithstanding this, it is truly impressive how different Kripke's approach and interests in *Naming and Necessity* are from Carnap's. Kripke's main focus in the first two lectures is the reference of proper names. Now, no formal language includes proper names among its expressions.[1] Moreover, if the "picture" offered by Kripke is on the right track (as I shall be assuming throughout the paper), the relation proper names bear to their referents is a relation that no expression of a formal language can bear to anything. Proper name reference requires speakers, and uses linked in a certain way. For there to be proper name reference, then, there have to be some *worldly goings on*. Since on the one hand proper names seem to be paradigmatic referential expressions, and on the other hand similar considerations hold at least for the reference of natural kind terms, it is reasonable to assume that this is true for reference in general.[2] Now, there should be little doubt that in Kripke's understanding reference is a (or even *the*) basic *semantic* relation. If all this is true, then we have to conclude that Kripke's conception of semantics is profoundly different from Carnap's. First, the object of study – its subject matter – is different. Formal languages are nonstarters: there is linguistic meaning, hence a place for semantic investigation, only when linguistic expressions are used by people around us.[3] The focus cannot but be natural languages, construed not as abstract entities living in a Platonic heaven but as mundane ones, which came to exist at a certain time in history and require users for their existence and development. Second, and as a consequence, the type of investigation – its method – is different. Some years ago, Barbara Hall Partee (1979) usefully contrasted "two kinds of views of what semantics is," semantics as *mathematics* and semantics as *psychology*. Now, Carnap's work on meaning was deeply influenced by Alfred Tarski's on the definition of (what he

1 In fact, contrary to what is often assumed, individual constants are not like proper names. Unlike proper names, they start out as uninterpreted symbols and can receive different interpretations in different models.

2 I have written "at least" because it is arguable that if these considerations hold for the reference of natural kind terms, they hold for the reference of any other common nouns as well (on this, see Almog, 1984, pp. 54–58 and Bianchi, 2021). I should perhaps add here that in a couple of passages Kripke also calls "reference" the relation that definite descriptions bear to their *denotatum*: "[m]y use of 'refer' is such as to satisfy the schema, 'The referent of '*X*' is *X*', where '*X*' is replaceable by any name or description" (1972, p. 343 n. 3 [1980, p. 25*n*]); "in these lectures, 'referent' is used in the technical sense of the thing named by a name (or uniquely satisfying a description)" (1972, p. 348 n. 36 [1980, p. 86*n*]). This seems to me misleading. The relation of denotation (i.e., unique satisfaction) is quite different from the one proper names and natural kind terms bear to their referents, if Kripke is right concerning the latter. In fact, if the approach to definite descriptions is Russellian, denotation is not even a *semantic* relation. In any case, *my* use of "refer" will not be meant to cover denotation.

3 Of course, one can start to use a formal language to state things, as for example Giuseppe Peano did. In doing so, one uses a formal language just as we use a natural language. In this case, however, the semantic properties of the expressions used cannot be explained in model-theoretical terms.

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called) *truth* for certain formal languages, and by the ensuing *model theory*, a mathematical (set-theoretic) way of studying some of their properties. If my earlier considerations are on the right track, however, we have to conclude that semantics has nothing to do with model theory, or, in Hall Partee's terms, that semantics is not a branch of mathematics (which does not mean, of course, that model theory, or other branches of mathematics, cannot provide the semanticist with useful tools, e.g., for investigating an important property of natural languages, *compositionality*). Rather, it is an *empirical* science dealing with complex phenomena in the world surrounding us. Should we then see it as a branch of psychology, as Hall Partee's contrast may suggest? I think not, for reasons that I hope will become clear in a moment.

Of course, I am not claiming that all of this was new at the time when Kripke gave his lectures. Earlier in the century, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophers had strongly opposed formal approaches to language.[4] But I believe that *Naming and Necessity*'s contribute to the re-orientation of semantic investigation should not be underestimated. First of all, it came from someone who, as we have already noted, began by studying formal languages and, even later, did not refrain from applying formal techniques to the study of natural languages when he deemed this appropriate. Thus, there was nothing especially ideological in what he did: he just realized that the study of natural languages requires a substantially different approach, focusing on how speakers use linguistic expressions. Second, in distancing himself from Carnap's approach, Kripke did not abandon one of its main tenets, according to which one of the fundamental aims of semantics is to characterize the *truth-conditions* of sentences, although of course the project has to take a different form once the focus is shifted from formal to natural languages and by "sentences" one means sentences used (or at least usable) by speakers to state something about the world surrounding them. To state something about the world, we do need expressions *referring* to entities in it, be they objects, kinds, substances, properties, or whatever, and this leads us back to a reference-based semantics. And once again, if reference is what Kripke told us it is, a reference-based semantics is not a mathematical theory at all.

What I want to highlight, however, is that Kripke's work on reference is to be considered a radical departure even from those traditions that did not conceive

4 It should be noted here that neither Gottlob Frege nor Bertrand Russell, although certainly not hostile to formal approaches to language, conceived of semantics as a branch of mathematics. Rather, insofar as, as we shall see below, their semantics was subjectivistic, they conceived of semantics as a branch of psychology.

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of semantics as a branch of mathematics and focused on natural rather than formal languages. The fact that in those traditions descriptivism about proper names was almost unanimously accepted should suffice to bring the point home. But here I want to put my finger on something more general (and to me much more important). Before Kripke, most of those who tried to account for the semantic properties of the expressions of natural languages took them to depend in one way or another on the *mental state* of the speaker who uses them. Or, in other words, they adopted what I have called elsewhere a "*psychological model* of the functioning of language" (2012, p. 81). In short, they embraced the second horn of Hall Partee's dilemma and took semantics to be a branch of psychology.[5] Take proper names, for example: it was (and, unfortunately, notwithstanding Kripke still is) widely held that by using a proper name we do refer to whatever we *intend* to refer to. This was mostly upheld within a descriptivist framework (e.g., a person's use of "Aristotle" was believed to refer to Aristotle because the person intended to refer to the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great, and Aristotle was in fact the pupil of Plato and teacher of Alexander the Great).[6] But one does not need to be a descriptivist to subscribe to the above "psychological" principle about the semantics of proper names. In fact, even many of those who find Kripke's arguments against the Frege-Russell view of proper names and its variants decisive and locate themselves within the anti-descriptivist camp subscribe to it, although they do, of course, characterize the relevant intention in a different way.[7] In doing so, I surmise, they miss something very important in Kripke's contribution to philosophy of language.

That Kripke did not subscribe to the above principle is already shown by the fact that he makes the distinction between *speaker's reference* and *semantic reference*, which is based precisely on the simple observation that sometimes we intend to refer to something to which we do not actually refer.[8] But, even ignoring this, it

5 I should note here, however, that I am not interpreting the dilemma, and especially its second horn, exactly in the same way as Hall Partee did. Hall Partee was mainly interested in the contrast between a Montagovian and a broadly speaking Chomskyan approach to semantics and focused on the problem of propositional attitude reports.

6 For a recent defence of descriptivism appealing to intentions in this way, see, for example, Kipper and Soysal, 2021.

7 By the way, let me add here that even Keith Donnellan, who together with Kripke contributed to demolish description theories of proper names and offered an account of reference of the latter, the *historical explanation theory*, which is often conflated with Kripke's, subscribed to the principle, although he formulated it in terms of *having in mind* rather than *intentions*. For discussion, see Bianchi and Bonanini, 2014.

8 See Kripke, 1972, p. 343 n. 3 (1980, p. 25*n*), and, for a development, 1977, pp. 262–264. In my opinion, Kripke's distinction has often been misunderstood. See Bianchi, 2019, for an extensive discussion of this.

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should be clear that Kripke's chain of communication picture points toward a completely different understanding of the relation between language and thought.

Immediately before introducing his picture, Kripke says:

> So what *does* make my use of 'Cicero' into a name of *him*? The picture which leads to the cluster-of-descriptions theory is something like this: One is isolated in a room; the entire community of other speakers, everything else, could disappear; and one determines the reference for himself by saying – 'By "Gödel" I shall mean the man, whoever he is, who proved the incompleteness of arithmetic'. Now you can do this if you want to. There's nothing really preventing it. You can just stick to that determination. If that's what you do, then if Schmidt discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic you *do* refer to him when you say 'Gödel did such and such'. (1972, p. 298 [1980, p. 91])

But, Kripke continues, "that's not what most of us do." His simple observation (and I think it is important to keep in mind that it is just an *observation*) is that natural languages, for example *our* language, the language we *use*, do not work this way.[9] A "better" picture, as we now all know, is the following:

> 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. A speaker who is on the far end of this chain, who has heard about, say Richard Feynman, in the market place or elsewhere, may be referring to Richard Feynman even though he can't remember from whom he first heard of Feynman or from whom he ever heard of Feynman. He knows that Feynman is a famous physicist. A certain passage of communication reaching ultimately to the man himself does reach the speaker. He then is referring to Feynman even though he can't identify him uniquely. He doesn't know what a Feynman diagram is, he doesn't know what the Feynman theory of pair production and annihilation is. Not only that: he'd have trouble distinguishing between Gell-Mann and Feynman. So he doesn't have to know these things, but, instead, a chain of communication going back to Feynman himself has been established, by virtue of his membership in a community which passed the name on from link to link, not by a ceremony that he makes in private in his study: 'By "Feynman" I shall mean the man who did such and such and such and such'. (1972, pp. 298–299 [1980, pp. 91–92])

Of course, Kripke's main target here are the Frege-Russell view of proper names and its variants. However, it seems to me that his point is much more general. He himself summarizes it in the following way: "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" (1972, p. 301 [1980, p. 95]).

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9 Robert Stalnaker once noted that "[t]he positive case for the theses that Kripke defends is not novel philosophical insight and argument, but naive common sense" (1997, p. 168). I wholeheartedly agree, as my talk of *simple observations* should suggest. But, of course, it is often not at all simple for a philosopher to make a simple observation. Thus, Stalnaker's passage continues: "The philosophical work is done by diagnosing equivocations in the philosophical arguments for theses that conflict with naive common sense, by making the distinctions that remove the obstacles to believing what it seems intuitively most natural to believe." We all know what a master Kripke is in this kind of work.

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If Kripke is right, then there is something deeply wrong in *any* semantic account adopting a psychological model of the functioning of language. When we use a proper name, at least if it is not a name we are introducing into the language, what makes our use refer to a specific thing – to return to Kripke's example and formulation, what makes his use of "Cicero" into a name of *him* – is not the state of our (Kripke's) mind – our (Kripke's) beliefs or intentions or thoughts or whatever.[10] Rather, it is the chain of communication that brought that particular name to us (Kripke) – the history of the name, a history that, most often, does not involve us (Kripke) if not in its final segment. And similar considerations seem to hold for uses of natural kind terms and, arguably (see n. 2), of any other common nouns.

Where does all this lead us? Reflecting on similar issues, David Kaplan once noted that "in reading Russell on logically proper names, and even more so in reading Frege" one has the feeling that "like Humpty Dumpty, everyone runs their own language," because, like Humpty Dumpty, Frege and Russell seem to believe that "[w]hen we speak, we *assign* meanings to our words; the words themselves do not *have* meanings" (1989, p. 600). Kaplan terms this view *subjectivist semantics*. He characterizes it as follows:

> Although the *entities* which serve as possible meanings may be regarded as objective, in the sense that the same possible meanings are accessible to more than one person, the *assignment* of meanings is subjective, and thus the *semantics* is subjective. Since each individual user must *assign* meanings rather than receiving them with the words, each user's semantics is autonomous. What the language community does make available to each of its members is a syntax, an *empty* syntax to which each user must add his own semantics. (1989, pp. 600–601)

Here, Kaplan seems to me to put his finger on something profound, which does not depend on the details of Frege's and Russell's views, or even on the specifics of a descriptivist account of reference – indeed, a descriptivist but non-subjectivist semantics is at least conceivable[11] –, but concerns any approach that subscribes to a version of the psychological principle formulated above.[12] In fact, I believe that, before the revolution originating from Kripke's lectures, almost any

10 To be fair, I should note (as I noted in Bianchi, 2012, pp. 86–88) that Kripke did in fact appeal to intentions when he offered a "rough statement of a theory" built on his picture: "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 same reference as the man from whom he heard it" (1972, p. 302 [1980, p. 96], italics mine). However, as I argued in Bianchi (2015), this appeal to intentions is dispensable: to develop the chain of communication picture into a theory, one can use David Kaplan's (1990) notion of *repetition* instead.

11 See Bianchi, 2012, p. 84.

12 Contrary to what Kaplan (1989, p. 602 n. 86) claims, it concerns Donnellan's historical explanation theory as well. On this, see Bianchi and Bonanini, 2014.

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approach to semantics that did not take semantics to be a branch of mathematics was subjectivist in spirit: it took semantics to be a branch of psychology.

Now, according to Kaplan, subjectivist semantics "is incompatible with one of the most important contributions of contemporary theory of reference: the historical chain picture of the reference of names" (1989, p. 602). In fact, this picture, the picture outlined in the second lecture of *Naming and Necessity*, suggests that "we are, for the most part, language *consumers*," given that "[w]ords come to us prepackaged with a semantic value": "[i]f we are to use *those words*, the words we have received, the words of our linguistic community, then we must defer to *their* meaning" (*ibid*.). Kaplan terms the resulting view *consumerist semantics*.

According to consumerist semantics, semantics is *not* a branch of psychology. At least from a semantic point of view, the language we speak is far more autonomous, independent of the minds of us current users, than it was supposed to be in the pre-Kripkean era. It is a tool we may use to communicate, thanks to its design. But its design is not due to us – the tool was already there before we started to use it. We found it and have learned to use it; but in using it, we do not change it if not very rarely, and minimally (as Kaplan jokingly wrote, "[i]n our culture, the role of language creators is largely reserved to parents, scientists, and headline writers for *Variety*; it is by no means the typical use of language as the subjectivist semanticists believe" [1989, p. 602]). Although it exists only because human beings have behaved, and keep behaving, in a certain way, to study it is not to study the mind of any single human being.[13]

Let me take stock. With *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke gave many specific important contributions to the philosophy of language. They concern proper names, natural kind terms, identity sentences, modal talk, and many other issues. Since they are all well known and widely accepted, I have not discussed most of them, and my discussion of the others has been cursory and somewhat instrumental. What I want to claim, however, is that on top of these contributions, with *Naming and Necessity* Kripke gave to philosophy of language something even more important. In a sense, he gave it a new *object* (*subject matter*). This object is no less than … *language* (or, perhaps better, *languages*). Of course, in another sense language has always been the object of the philosophy of language. But now, thanks to Kripke, this object should be seen neither as an abstract, formal, mathematical, nor as a psychological, entity. Rather, languages are something "out there" in the world surrounding us, complex *social* entities, which came to exist and have a history thanks to

13 Let me note here that Michael Devitt (2006) argued at length in favour of a similar view against Chomskyan orthodoxy. For a recap, see Devitt, 2020, pp. 372–383. However, as far as proper name reference is concerned, I argued in Bianchi (2020) that Devitt's stance is not that clear.

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the behaviour of human beings, but many of whose properties do not depend on the properties of the person who uses them to communicate, in the same way as many of the properties of, say, telephones do not depend on those of the person who uses them to talk to other people. Since these complex social entities are used by people to communicate and can be so used because the expressions that constitute them have semantic properties (among which the referential ones of some of them), as philosophers we are especially interested in characterizing and explaining the latter. To characterize and explain these semantic properties, however, we may need radically new tools, since neither model theory nor looking into the speaker's mind can be of much help, given what languages have turned out to be. If *Naming and Necessity* is on the right track, then there is still a lot of interesting work for twenty-first century philosophers of language to do.

A final word on the tools to be used. Concerning *Naming and Necessity*, in its 1980 preface Kripke writes that "the work grew out of earlier formal work in the model theory of modal logic" (1980, p. 3). Moreover, here and there, especially in the first lecture, he uses notions coming from that theory, most notably that of *possible world* (and the related one of *designation at a world*, by which that of *rigid designation* is defined). Doesn't this contradict most of what I have claimed in this section and show that Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* is still located well within one of the traditions from which I take it to depart?[14] I think not. It is important to realize that in the first lecture Kripke is not adopting a possible world semantics for natural languages. Rather, he is using some of the notions used by possible world semanticists to produce an argument against a thesis – descriptivism about proper names – widely held by them. More specifically, to use Robert Stalnaker's nice formulation (see n. 9), he is using them to make some "distinctions that remove the obstacles to believing what it seems intuitively most natural to believe" about the semantics of proper names. But note, first, that the same argument – the so-called *modal argument* – can be produced without using them; second, that in the other arguments he offers against descriptivism, the *epistemic* one and those *from ignorance* and *from error*, he does not use them[15]; and, third and most important, that when in the second lecture he comes to outline his own picture of how proper names work, he again never uses them. If that

14 Joseph Almog (2014, chap. 1) argued that this is indeed the case: he finds in *Naming and Necessity* a "designation semantics," that is, a "designation model theory for natural language" (p. 3), or a "philosophical possible-worlds semantics for natural language expressions" (p. 6). As I explain in the text, I disagree.

15 Just for the record, let me note here that elsewhere Kripke wrote that the argument from ignorance is "the clearest objection" to "any description or cluster-of-descriptions theory of names" (1979, p. 246). Given this, whoever is for whatever reason uncomfortable with the modal argument may safely ignore it.

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picture is on the right track, we do not need the notion of possible world to understand how proper names refer, and neither does there seem to be any reason to believe we should need it to develop a reference-based semantics inspired by the picture. Thus, if you want to understand how natural languages work, forget possible worlds and look instead at how linguistic expressions are used by speakers.[16]

3. Metaphysics

Of course, *Naming and Necessity*'s contribution to philosophy extends way beyond philosophy of language. As is well known, outside the rather specialized and technical field of philosophy of language – a field, however, which Kripke's work helped to make less technical and, in a sense, more "natural" – *Naming and Necessity* had a formidable impact on the discipline that once was taken to be the very core of philosophy: *metaphysics*. The three lectures, in fact, advance and defend various important specific metaphysical theses (e.g., that concerning the necessity of origin). Here, however, I do not want to discuss any of them in detail. What is more important from the point of view of this paper is that in defending these theses, Kripke succeeded in rehabilitating the philosophical discipline focusing on the most general, "structural," traits of *reality*, which had fallen into disrepute because of the attacks coming from both the empiricist and the Kantian traditions – attacks culminating in Carnap's (him again!) notorious claim that "[i]n the domain of *metaphysics*, … logical analysis yields the negative result *that the alleged statements in this domain are entirely meaningless*" (1931, pp. 60–61).

How did *Naming and Necessity* succeed in this rehabilitation, and how should we conceive of metaphysics in the light of it?

Here, again, I see Kripke as proceeding by making simple observations, in line with what Stalnaker calls "naive common sense," and using his stupefying technical skills to diagnose "equivocations in the philosophical arguments for theses that conflict with" them and to make "the distinctions that remove the obstacles to believing what it seems intuitively most natural to believe." In particular, the simple observation that opens the doors to the rehabilitation of metaphysics

16 In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke himself writes that "[t]he apparatus of possible worlds has … been very useful as far as the set-theoretic model-theory of quantified modal logic is concerned, but has encouraged philosophical pseudo-problems and misleading pictures" (1972, p. 345 n. 15 [1980, p. 48*n*]). Note that the point in the text concerns the usefulness of the notion of possible world for characterizing and explaining the semantic properties of natural language expressions, not the actual existence of possible worlds. For some considerations on Kripke's metaphysics of possible worlds, see Bianchi, 2010. Although I cannot discuss the issue here, let me add that another widely used notion in the traditions from which I take *Naming and Necessity* to depart, that of *proposition*, is put in a bad light by Kripke's work. See Kripke, 1979, p. 269 and Kripke, 1980, p. 21.

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concerns *de re* modal talk. The fact is that we *do* talk of *things* (*objects*), and, at least implicitly, we *do* make a distinction between *necessary* and *contingent* properties of them: "When you ask whether it is necessary or contingent that *Nixon* won the election, you are asking the intuitive question whether in some counterfactual situation, *this man* would in fact have lost the election" (1972, p. 265 [1980, p. 41]). Therefore, "it is very far from being true that [the] 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" (*ibid*.). To this, I would only add that, certainly, the ordinary man is much less interested in the modal properties of any alleged *dictum* than in those of the actual objects that surround him. In *Naming and Necessity*, the point is stressed again and again. For example:

> There may be a problem about what intuitions about possibility come to. But, if we have such an intuition about the possibility of *that* (*this man's* electoral loss), then it is about the possibility of *that*. It need not be identified with the possibility of a man looking like such and such, or holding such and such political views, or otherwise qualitatively described, having lost. We can point to the *man*, and ask what might have happened to *him*, had events been different. (1972, p. 268 [1980, p. 46])

Of course, from the fact that the ordinary man is used to making a distinction between contingent (accidental) and necessary (essential) properties of objects it does not follow that objects have necessary (essential) properties. After all, the ordinary man could just be wrong, as he certainly was and still is concerning various other things. Indeed, Kripke is well aware that "some philosophers think that something's having intuitive content is very inconclusive evidence in favor of it" (1972, pp. 265–266 [1980, p. 42]). To them, however, he replies: "I think it is very heavy evidence in favor of anything, myself. I really don't know, in a way, what more conclusive evidence one can have about anything, ultimately speaking" (1972, p. 266 [1980, p. 42]). Note, also, that we are not talking here about some simple belief (e.g., that the Earth is flat), which we can quite easily live without. As Kripke shows, the distinction between contingent and necessary properties of objects is pervasive in everyday modal talk and extremely well entrenched in the ordinary ways of thinking. Abandoning it would require radical alterations in our worldview, alterations that we can scarcely imagine. Perhaps, even the ordinary notion of an object would have to go, since it is arguable that it brings the distinction with it; certainly, we do not think of objects such as the computer on which I am writing now as either bare particulars or bundles of properties. Are we ready for this? Perhaps, the evidence Kripke mentions cannot be qualified as really *conclusive*, but it seems to me that very strong arguments are needed to overcome it. And with his brilliant philosophical work Kripke has

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shown us that the arguments commonly used to this end are on the contrary quite weak.

To sum up, we seem to be entitled to assume that objects have necessary, that is, essential, properties.[17] Or, in other words, that they have a *nature*. Also, there seems to be no reason to believe that we cannot investigate their nature. In spite of what Carnap claimed, metaphysical statements are far from being meaningless, then. On the contrary, in order to better understand the world we live in – our reality – we *must* do metaphysics.

As I said, after rehabilitating metaphysics, in *Naming and Necessity* Kripke also advances and defends various important specific metaphysical theses. Rather than commenting on them, however, I shall conclude this section by briefly pointing out three general aspects of his metaphysical views. They are all well known, but I want to mention them nevertheless because they may indicate the path for future investigation.

The first aspect is one we have already touched upon. In Kripke's metaphysics, ordinary objects (e.g., Nixon) are *central*. It is their nature, and the nature of the *kinds* they are members of, that we are first and foremost interested in investigating. And it is from them that our investigation must start. Here is a passage from the first lecture insisting on this:

> We can refer to the object and ask what might have happened to *it*. So, we do not begin with worlds (which are supposed somehow to be real, and whose qualities, but not whose objects, are perceptible to us), and then ask about criteria of transworld identification; on the contrary, we begin with the objects, which we *have*, and can identify, in the actual world. We can then ask whether certain things might have been true of the objects. (1972, p. 273 [1980, p. 53])

This does not mean, of course, that reality is inhabited only by ordinary objects. To better understand it, we may have to countenance "extraordinary" entities as well (e.g., numbers). An interesting case in point are possible worlds. In the 1980 preface to *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke explains:

> I do not wish to leave any exaggerated impression that I repudiate possible worlds altogether, or even that I regard them as a mere formal device. My own use of them should have been extensive enough to preclude any such misunderstanding. In fact, there are some conceptions of 'possible worlds' that I repudiate and some I do not. (1980, p. 16)

17 I am here equating necessary properties and essential ones, as Kripke seems to do in *Naming and Necessity* (but see Kit Fine's contribution to this very issue). However, as both Almog (1991 and 1996) and Fine (1994) sensibly argued, not all necessary properties of something should be considered part of the essence of it. One might rather claim, as I did in Bianchi, 2010, that essences are what explain necessities. Be that as it may, nothing of what follows in this section depends on the stance taken on this specific issue.

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Thus, we may say that reality includes possible worlds as well. Given this, we may be interested in investigating *their* nature, which is what Kripke does in the subsequent pages discussing the dice example. What seems to emerge from that discussion, however, is that possible worlds are not fundamental constituents of reality. In fact, with respect to them, the objects in the actual world, with their natures, are explanatorily basic.[18] In the light of this, we should say that the description, quite widespread especially among non-professional philosophers, of Kripke as the philosopher of possible worlds is quite misleading. He is rather the philosopher of the objects that populate the world we live in (to which, by the way, we keep referring by using proper names and other referential devices of natural languages) and of the many (natural and non-natural) kinds these objects are members of.

The second aspect of Kripke's metaphysical views that I want to mention is that, to investigate the nature of the objects surrounding us, we may have to focus on the world's *history*: what objects are depends at least in part on their *origin*, hence on the vicissitudes of other objects. This, of course, makes Kripke's notion of nature or essence quite different from the traditional one: metaphysical inquiries are *not* explorations in some Platonic, a-historic, realm of entities.

This brings us directly to the third aspect, which concerns the *epistemology* of metaphysics. Metaphysics has standardly been conceived of as an *a priori* discipline: a discipline whose statements, to use Carnap's word, do not require *empirical* justification. But both the empiricist and the Kantian traditions in philosophy have convincingly argued that by *a priori* methods, whatever they are, we cannot go that far. So much the worse for metaphysics, they concluded. By disentangling in *Naming and Necessity* the metaphysical notions of necessity and possibility from the epistemological ones of *a priori* and *a posteriori*, Kripke has even more convincingly shown that, even granting their premise concerning the limits of *a priori* knowledge, their conclusion is unwarranted. We can come to know the necessary properties of things (objects or kinds) – their natures –, although to come to know them we may need empirical, even scientific, investigation, as the illuminating discussion of natural kinds in the third lecture suggests: "such statements representing scientific discoveries about what this stuff *is* are not contingent truths but necessary truths in the strictest possible sense" (1972, p. 320 [1980, p. 125]).[19] But, one might retort, how can any scientific discovery be of any philosophical interest? It can be, given that philosophers have always been interested in the nature of things, and some scientific discoveries tell us exactly about the nature of certain things. Those who think otherwise – who think

18 This interpretation of the dice passage is developed at length in Bianchi (2010).

19 As is well known, similar conclusions were reached independently by Hilary Putnam (1975).

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that these discoveries are philosophically irrelevant because scientific – are probably driven by misconceptions about the relationships between philosophy and science due, again, to the empiricist and Kantian traditions. But this is a topic for the next section, which will focus on what *Naming and Necessity* teaches us about philosophy as such.

4. Metaphilosophy: Kripke's *Sui Generis* Naturalism

The guiding thought of this paper – a thought not at all original, I hasten to add – is that *Naming and Necessity* is a work that brings about a general reshaping of philosophy. It does so, first, by offering many specific important contributions in various philosophical fields, which I could not discuss in any detail here; and second, as I have suggested, by giving a substantially new object to the discipline that occupied center stage in twentieth-century philosophical reflection – philosophy of language – and by rehabilitating and profoundly renovating metaphysics – the discipline that once was taken to be the very core of philosophy and then fell into disrepute because of the attacks coming from both the empiricist and the Kantian traditions. But it also does so, and this will be the topic of this section, by pointing toward a conception of philosophy that is, again, deeply at odds with the empiricist and the Kantian traditions (as well as with the post-modern one).

As a matter of fact, neither in *Naming and Necessity* nor, as far as I know, elsewhere, does Kripke focus on the metaphilosophical question concerning the nature of philosophy itself. Even worse, there is a passage in *Naming and Necessity* that appears to be more or less in line with the empiricist and Kantian traditions in that it explicitly connects *philosophical analysis* and *a priority*:

> Certain statements – and the identity statement is a paradigm of such a statement on my view – if true at all must be necessarily true. One does know *a priori*, by philosophical analysis, that *if* such an identity statement is true it is necessarily true. (1972, p. 311 [1980, p. 109])

However, I believe that one should not give too much importance to this passage.[20] In fact, I take it that all the *actual* philosophical work Kripke does in *Naming and Necessity* goes in the opposite direction.

One does not need to be a historian of philosophy to know that the emergence of natural sciences in the modern era profoundly changed the image that philosophers had of their work. Natural sciences were successful in

20 Note, moreover, that Kripke talks of *philosophical analysis* rather than *linguistic* or *conceptual analysis* (see the long quotation from Williamson's *The Philosophy of Philosophy* below). What philosophical analysis amounts to according to Kripke is not settled by this passage.

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understanding the natural world. Faced with this, philosophers slowly started to think that their business was different. One reaction was to locate philosophy above the sciences in the attempt to provide a *foundation* for them. Another reaction, much more common at the time when Kripke gave his three lectures, was, in Timothy Williamson's words, "to scale down the ambitions of philosophy":

> Holding fixed its *a priori* methodology, one asks what it could be good for. Not for answering ordinary factual questions, it is claimed: that is best left to the natural sciences with their *a posteriori* methodology. Nevertheless, what we already have in the armchair is the intellectual equipment we bring to *a posteriori* inquiry, our conceptual or linguistic competence. Perhaps philosophy can find some sort of legitimate employment by investigating, from within, what we bring to inquiry. Rather than trying to answer ordinary factual questions, it seeks to understand the very possibility of asking them. … The "linguistic turn" in twentieth-century philosophy comprises a variety of attempts in that general spirit. Since confinement to an armchair does not deprive one of one's linguistic competence, whatever can be achieved through exercise of that competence and reflection thereon will be a feasible goal for philosophy. If one regards thought as constituting a more fundamental level of analysis than language, one may generalize the linguistic turn to the "conceptual turn," and consider what can be achieved through exercise of our conceptual competence and reflection thereon, but the outcome will be broadly similar: philosophical questions turn out to be in some sense conceptual questions. (Williamson, 2007, p. 2)

As Williamson highlights, what all these approaches have in common is the "assumption of philosophical exceptionalism" (2007, p. 3): philosophy is thought to be radically different, both in object (subject matter) and in method, from natural sciences or any other cognitive activity. This amounts to retreating from the project of understanding the world around us, in its most general aspects, by which philosophy was led in its Golden Age. And, one might maliciously add, it condemns philosophy to irrelevance.

It should be clear from what we have seen in the preceding sections that the spirit of Kripke's three lectures is completely different. No assumption of philosophical exceptionalism is made in it. The focus is always on the world and the objects populating it (among which, *natural languages* and their expressions), not on concepts or linguistic meanings; in fact, in *Naming and Necessity* one can find powerful criticisms to the notion of linguistic competence to which many exceptionalistic approaches resort. And there is no single method by which the philosophical investigation is carried out: Kripke uses simple observations, logical insight, data provided by the natural sciences, mental experiments, and much more. With *Naming and Necessity*, philosophy regains a Golden Age, once again becoming part and parcel, together with natural sciences (but also with naive common sense), of the human project of understanding the world. It contributes to this project by focusing on the general aspects of it less amenable to specific sciences.

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A final note on this. In his rebuttal of philosophical exceptionalism, Kripke was preceded by a philosopher with whom he had many intellectual exchanges over the years, Willard Van Orman Quine. Already in his "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (interestingly, a criticism of Carnap's philosophy), the latter wrote that one effect of abandoning the dogmas is "a blurring of the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science" (1951, p. 20). The resulting perspective is known as *philosophical naturalism*.[21] Now, although he would almost certainly not agree, I am inclined to regard Kripke's philosophy as a form of naturalism. But, I hasten to add, it is a form of naturalism different from Quine's. Whereas "[c]entral to Quine's naturalism is his privileging of fundamental physics as our best theory of the world, and a reductionist attitude to everything else" (Williamson, 2011, p. 482), Kripke's naturalism is not reductionist at all, and it does not prioritize physics over any other discipline in the business of understanding the world. Kripke's *nature* (or, perhaps better, Kripke's *world*) is richer than Quine's nature (world). As a consequence, his naturalism is more liberal than Quine's.[22] And it is much less ideological: whereas Quine's naturalism is theorized naturalism, Kripke's naturalism is *practiced* naturalism. But it is, also, philosophy practiced at its best.[23]

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21 On anti-exceptionalism, philosophical naturalism, and Quine's views, see Bianchi, 2011.

22 Among other things, Kripke's naturalism is more liberal than Quine's in its allowing for *de re* modality, hence for essences (natures!). As we have seen, that objects have necessary as well as contingent properties is "naive common sense." Again, Kripke defended it by "diagnosing equivocations" in (Quine's) arguments against it, and "by making the distinctions that remove the obstacles to believing what it seems intuitively most natural to believe."

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