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Quine-Kripke-Plantinga on Essence

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Abstract- Propositional attitudes are of two distinct kinds, de re and de dicto. As our given sensedata do not have any meaning of their own and dependent on some suitable description itself, so for Quine, neither de dicto nor de re essence is possible. Objects do not possess property necessarily, these features are not the intrinsic feature of the object itself, for them necessity was specific to a particular conceptual scheme, it is ultimately determined by the particular scheme of beliefs imposed on a barrage of sensory stimulations. Necessity resides in the way we talk about the thing not in the thing itself. In Kripke's theory de re essential properties are not required to be analytic, i.e., they do not require to be conceptually connected with each other. They are meaningful, not by virtue of their conceptual content; they are meaningful in so far as they underlie the varying properties of an object in different conceivable universes. The natural extension of the possible worlds interpretation to de re is known as 'identity across possible world' or 'trans-world identity'. For Kripke de re modality comprises essentialism by introducing the concept of trans-world identity.

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Quine-Kripke-Plantinga on Essence

Sagarika Datta

Abstract- Propositional attitudes are of two distinct kinds, *de re* and *de dicto*. As our given sensedata do not have any meaning of their own and dependent on some suitable description itself, so for Quine, neither *de dicto* nor *de re* essence is possible. Objects do not possess property necessarily, these features are not the intrinsic feature of the object itself, for them necessity was specific to a particular conceptual scheme, it is ultimately determined by the particular scheme of beliefs imposed on a barrage of sensory stimulations. Necessity resides in the way we talk about the thing not in the thing itself. In Kripke's theory *de re* essential properties are not required to be analytic, i.e., they do not require to be conceptually connected with each other. They are meaningful, not by virtue of their conceptual content; they are meaningful in so far as they underlie the varying properties of an object in different conceivable universes. The natural extension of the possible worlds interpretation to *de re* is known as 'identity across possible world' or 'trans-world identity'. For Kripke *de re* modality comprises essentialism by introducing the concept of trans-world identity. As already noted, Kripke holds that proper names refer rigidly and non-descriptively to the same object in all possible worlds; so proper names are 'rigid designators'. According to him, even if the object does not exist in the actual world, that particular object, if there be any, will designate the same object in all other possible world and not via any properties. Thus Kripke made a wide range of utilization of the idea of a possible world in defending the eloquence of modality - both *de re* and *de dicto*. The terms 'rigid designator' and 'non-rigid designator' and their corresponding notions as introduced by Kripke are markedly technical, and are sufficient to combat Frege-Russell model of semantics.

I. INTRODUCTION

The thing has properties – some of which are essential, we do not need to identify these properties in order to identify the object in other possible worlds. Nor do we need to identify the object in the actual world through essential properties. There might not be qualitative similarity across possible worlds. The object itself directly enters into our identification in the actual and possible world and not via properties. Moreover, whether a proposition is necessary or contingent, whether anything belongs to an object essentially or contingently - is a real issue, and not dependent on as to how the object is sought to be described. However, Kripke says that to claim the necessity and contingency, or essence and accidents are real issues. Kripke goes on to elaborate the second version of the description the theory of names, the theory that uses descriptions as a way of fixing

reference and not (like Frege and Russell) as a way of fixing meaning.

Quine's critique of essences chiefly rests on his claim that necessity pertains to a mode of conception what is necessary in one way of thought turns contingent in another. Quine's style of thinking is countered by the opposite approach that insists that one cannot activate different modes of thought-adventures to recast necessity into contingency or essences into accidents – without falling back on essences. In this chapter we present a brief overview of the theories of Kripke and Plantinga regarding essences—both of which roughly share the same track of reviving essences in this manner. In the course of our narrative we shall also have occasion to address their internal differences. Kripke's Account of Essence in Naming and Necessity seeks to open up a new connection between the nature and function of proper names and the issue of essence and necessity. He departs from both Frege and Russell, for whom proper names were reduced to definite descriptions (for different reasons) and from Quine for whom necessity (reduced to synonymy) was specific to a particular conceptual scheme—it did not have any space for a truth that is necessary in all possible worlds. Kripke by bringing back names to their original non- descriptonal status opens up a way of rehabilitating essence and necessity. Kripke thinks that Mill rightly pointed out proper names to be non- connotative- they are arbitrary labels of an individual, they do not describe any of its property.

a) *Kripke and Plantinga's Account of Essence in Naming and Necessity*

Kripke and Plantinga describe an abstract property or stands for a group of individuals. (We shall see that Mill and Kripke differ on the status of common names.) Kripke plays up the commonality between Frege and Russell, against which he pitches his own doctrine that (ordinary) proper names cannot be reduced to definite descriptions. For Kripke there is no extra-ordinary or logically proper name standing for bare individuals from which ordinary proper names can be set apart. In a nutshell he seeks to demonstrate that proper names refer even when all descriptions are falsified, which shows that they refer to a commonly repeatable and irreducible identity in all possible worlds, in all possible counterfactuals. In other words, proper names refer to a necessary trans-world identity or essence. Most definite descriptions do not enjoy this privilege of referring to a trans-world essence, and so

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Frege and Russell equating proper names with definite descriptions could not have explored the possibility of necessity and essence as connected with naming. Kripke uses the common term 'designator' to cover both proper names and definite descriptions. Kripke had to present a fullfledged critique of the descriptonal theory of naming-along with its possible versions—to be followed by his own non-descriptonal theory effectively leading to the required establishment of essences. Kripke points out instead of a single description-theory of naming many philosophers adopt a multiple descriptonal view. According to the latter the referent of the name is determined not by a single description but by a cluster or quorum of descriptions. He places Searle and later Wittgenstein under this category (though this ascription particularly to Wittgenstein is mistaken) There are two versions of this descriptonal theory of names (both of which Kripke is going to reject).

b) Names are to be Identified with a Single or a Cluster of Definite Descriptions

Names being meaningless or having no place in the dictionary are no part of language, they are not themselves definite descriptions but reach out to the referent via a cluster of descriptions. On the first version to say 'Moses does not exist' is to say there is no man who did such and such things or satisfies such and such descriptions. On the second version, since 'Moses' is not synonymous with any or all of these descriptions, the above statement cannot be reduced in the same manner. We can at best impute a relation of material equivalence between the two statements. This is obviously the difference between using the theory as the theory of meaning or as using it as a theory of reference. Kripke in order to establish his view (that proper names refer rigidly non- descriptonally to the same object in all possible worlds) needs to do another philosophical labor viz. to decouple a priority from necessity, a posteriority from contingency. A statement can belong to the general category of statements that can be known a priori but still may be known by a particular person a posteriori i.e. on the basis of particular experience. When a computing machine gives answer to the question whether a particular number is prime- a calculation which nobody has done before—my knowledge that this number is prime is based on the empirical laws pertaining to the machine's operations and not on the basis of the a priori rules. On the other hand when we fix the reference of 'Rabindranath' as the Bengali poet who won the Nobel Prize for Gitanjali knows it a priori—but the proposition is indeed not necessary. Kripke is concerned with the notion of necessity in the ontological sense—i.e., with essences de re. Whether something is there necessarily in all possible worlds is an ontological question – irrespective of whether it is known a priori or not. Kripke hits sharply on the exact reasons as to why we link necessity with

apriority, and contingency with aposteriority and thereby forge these pairs. If something is necessary, i.e. true in all possible worlds we do not need to look at the actual world, hence its knowledge is considered to be a priori. On the other hand if it is a priori i.e., not dependent on any experience relating to the actual world it cannot be falsified by anything in the actual world. In other words, it will be necessary. Kripke sharply disagrees with philosophers for whom modality is only de dicto i.e. only accrues to the proposition or to the subject's way of describing the object. The necessity of 'All bachelors are unmarried' amounts to the way of interpreting the experience of a bachelor in a particular scheme. Now if we prefer to describe or fix the meaning of '9' as the 'number of planets' or of M. Gandhi, as 'the man who launched the Satyagraha in 1943' they will be necessary truths, and the relevant properties will be essential properties - otherwise not. This obviously renders the notion of necessity and that of essence de re; - does not bring with it the philosophical obligation to specify the exact identity- conditions of the concerned object across all possible worlds. To be clear about the notion of the necessity or trans world identity is to be clear about the notion of the possible worlds. Possible worlds are not to be envisaged as the recurrence of the same observable qualities. If possible worlds are thus misconceived a planet looking like our own but having different chemical composition, different position in the solar system could have been conceived as the possible variation of the earth. Fool's gold looking like our gold but a different atomic weight would be mistakenly held as the possible world in which gold has a different atomic weight, or an imposter impersonating the king would be thought of as a possible world in which the king could have been born of different gametes. Possible worlds are not what we find through journeying in spaceships or observing through the telescope. Every living and non-living individual conceivably has a twin that resembles its original in terms of every observable property. But these twins are rather counterparts of the original in another possible world – all that it means that there is a possible world in which an observational duplicate of this individual exists. But the counterpart in a possible world is never identical with the thing itself. Kripke also states that it was perhaps Leibnitz who was the father of the counterpart theory – ingeniously suggesting that Leibnitz's possible worlds were never modal variations on the actual objects, they were mere counterparts of the actual. Possible worlds are captured by the counterfactuals that we can frame on the actual individual in the actual world. Moreover, it is not our knowledge of the transworld identity of the object but the reality of the object ordoessendi that determines our formulation of the legitimate range of counterfactuals. It is the synthesis of all these issues- the a priori contingent and a posteriori necessary truths, necessity/ contingency being a real

issue, trans world identity being not the sameness of observable properties but the actual object- that carves out the connection between proper names and essence. Proper names designate the same object in all possible worlds and thus are called 'rigid designators'. Not that the designated object has to exist in the actual world t , but if it does it will be the same object that has to be designated in all possible worlds. A non-rigid designator is that which does not designate the same object in all possible worlds. A designator is strongly rigid when the object it designates is a necessary existent. Kripke argues that transworld identification can be spelled out in terms of more basic particulars, but they have to be particulars, not qualities. Fear of admitting bare particulars of Russell goad philosophers to invoke pure qualities- thus reducing things to a bundle of qualities. Both the questions-whether the object is behind the bundle and whether it is nothing but the bundle- are wrong. The reference may be fixed by a contingent property that belongs to the designated object only in the actual world. The reference of the name 'one meter' (name of a particular length) may be fixed by the length of a particular metal rod S at the time t_0 . But since this length of the rod even at the fixed time can vary with the possible variation of heat etc. the phrase 'the length of S at the time t_0 ' is not a rigid designator while the phrase 'one meter' is. What Kripke suggests is that there is a minimal structure of space or rather spatial units that exists necessarily and irrevocably, so that this structure spills over all possible changes in the material content or the changes that may occur through the actual interaction of material units.⁴⁷ Similarly '2+2' will be a rigid designator but 'the man who launched the Satyagraha movement in 1943' is not. (However while 'one meter' and '2+2' being mathematical terms are strongly rigid designators for Kripke, the third designator is non-rigid.) Thus here we tend to think that since we stipulate a term as identical with a particular feature (one meter as the length of S) that stipulated feature would constitute its meaning or its priori essence. But since that feature may not actually belong to that object in a possible world or may belong to a different object here we have a clear case of an a priori contingent proposition. It is important to repeat how Kripke's theory of non-descriptonal reference is different from the second version of descriptonal reference. For Kripke it is the object itself that enters into the relation of reference, on the other hand, it is a cluster of properties that determines reference. None of these properties in the cluster is an unfailing reference-fixer by itself; each of them may misfire and calls forth the aid of other features in the cluster. If the length of the rod S varies with a variation of temperature, it will fall back on a more resistant device; if the length of King Henry I's arm stretched out from the tip of his finger to his nose happens to measure one yard, it will still be susceptible to an accident shortening his arm and thus fall back on

another feature as determining reference of 'one yard'. All such identities are apriori and contingent, whereas for Kripke when the real object enters into a relation with proper names any acclaimed identity relation with that object-cannot but speak of a self-identity and thus be necessary. Such a necessary identity may of course be known a posteriori. Frege uses the term 'sense' in two senses: a) 'sense' as meaning of a designator, b) 'sense' as the way the reference of the designator is determined. Thus he conflates between the essential description (synonym of the designator) and accidental description (reference fixer) and takes both of them to senses. As we have seen Kripke has already rejected the version of description-theory held by Frege and Russell.

c) *Kripke's Attack on the Anti-Essentialism*

Let us see how Kripke will counter both the descriptivist and the anti-essentialist. We have already noted that for Kripke to say that an individual or a particular (whether living or non-living) could have originated from a different source than the one from which it actually does, does not make sense. For him, to claim such a possible difference in origin is virtually to say that the thing might not have been what it is. To claim that the queen might have been a frog with external human appearances is to claim that the very same queen, who owes her identity to a specific material origin, might not have come from that origin-which means that the queen might not have been what she is. The apparent sense in claiming a possible difference in origin actually amounts to a different claim-viz. the actual place or the actual world in which the queen is born might have contained an exact facsimile of the queen, and this facsimile is born of different gametes, or more specifically it is a nonhuman species or an automaton. However it is difficult to decide how an amphibian can have the same observable properties as a human, but Kripke has other arguments in favor of this point, which claims that there might be a place containing reptiles which are perceived as tigers (and thus as mammals) through a mass illusion. Such a possibility does not validate reptiles being tigers, but only validates there being a place which contains reptiles that look like tigers. Thus for Kripke the essences of natural kind objects are non-qualitative. Kripke cautions us against confusing two types of question concerning two kinds of essences. The first question is a temporal question asking what properties an object must retain, as opposed to what properties it can add and shed along with the passage of time in its life-history. This is not the question with which Kripke is concerned. He is rather engaged with the second kind of question pertaining to non-temporal essences - where the question takes the following shape-what properties an object cannot fail to have, as contrasted with the properties it might have lacked-through its timeless

existence. The temporal question conceives essences as substances that endure through change, while the non-temporal characterization of essences fixes it as the origin of the object, where interestingly, the origin is fixed non-temporally, bypassing the questions as to whether/how the originally substances undergoes metamorphosis through historical vicissitudes. Now here comes another scintillating insight of Kripke that is related with his idea of qualitative twins having different essential identities. He says that the possibility of the originally a substance changing over time is not really a meaningful possibility of the very object originating from a material source other than the one from which it actually originates. Such a possibility is a counterfactual not on the object but on the actual universe. The question can be rephrased as—could the actual universe have gone on till this point of time from which it takes a different turn? To rephrase this question in more concrete terms—could this hunk of coal from this point of time have metamorphosed into a hunk of wood? Now interestingly, this question does not frame the genuine possibility of an object originating from a different substance. The projection of this possibility of coal changing into wood from a certain point of time is the possibility where the object itself did not come into being at all. This possibility pertains to a phase when the object was not there. So the projection of this possibility is not one on the object at all. To say that I might not have existed, or the eggs from which I were born might have been deformed or destroyed is not a counterfactual on me, but on the actual universe which could have been otherwise—in so far as it might not have contained me. Alternatively this proposal may be floating a possibility of a certain description not actualizing in a concrete instance – which is a statement about meaning and not about reference. Kripke concedes that what he claims to be the non-qualitative essence— viz. the atomic number of gold or the atomic structure of water - i.e., H₂O—may not be the required essences, and that the entire atomic theory may be wrong. We can say that to concede that the atomic theory may be wrong is to concede that the observable properties coupled with the theory—say the microscope images of the H₂O structure may be subject to error—in which case the nonqualitative essence of H₂O is clearly shown to elude representation. But it is crucially important to note that for Kripke if the atomic number of gold happens to be 79, or water is H₂O in one world – they must be so in all possible worlds. Thus while conceding the possibility that an object which is empirically discovered to be composed of molecules could have been an ethereal entelechy, Kripke goes on to state—'one thing we cannot imagine happening to this thing is that it, given it is composed of molecules, should still have existed and not have been composed of molecules.... once we know that this a thing composed of molecules—that this very nature of the substance of which it is made—we

can't then, imagine that this thing might have failed to have been composed of molecules'. Following the same line of argument we can perhaps say that the reproductive theory of the birth of living beings may be wrong—the phenomena of animals being born from eggs and sperms – are cases of mass illusions. But here also Kripke will claim that if the reproductive theory is true in the actual world and if an individual is born of particular gametes in the actual world – this must be so in all possible worlds. This does not apply to observable properties of the individual – one cannot say that if water is perceived as cool and wet in the actual world it must be so in all possible worlds, or if Rabindranath is fair in the actual world he must be so in all possible worlds. Above all—we must also reckon that if water is perceived to have an H₂O structure under microscope it does not follow that water is H₂O in all possible worlds.

II. CONCLUSION

Now, We would like to wind up this section with an attempt to work out how Kripke might have replied to Quine's refutation of de re modality based on the examples of a mathematician and cyclist. We can suggest that for Kripke, the terms 'cyclist' and 'biped' would be non-rigid designators. The act of cycling can be carried out in different ways in accordance with conceivable differences in the physical constitution of the cyclist. With some imagination the notion of legs and the notion of bipedness alongwith can be made to undergo variations – pertaining to the size of the legs, placement in the body, required proportion with the entire body, their efficacy in relation to the other bodily functions. In that case Quine's assumption that all cyclist are necessarily biped will turn out to be unwarranted. This point can be pressed by reminding ourselves of certain other examples of non-rigid designators used by Kripke – viz. those of 'morning star' and 'evening star'. That the property of being the morning star and the property of being the evening star get instantiated in one object is a contingent incident. Hence 'Morning Star is identical with Evening star' expresses a contingent proposition. Similarly Quine's assumption that the property of being a cyclist and that of being a biped get necessarily instantiated in the same set of individuals is unwarranted. Thus 'All cyclists are bipeds' is contingent and may even be false in the actual world. Now as the proposition-All cyclists are necessarily bipeds - turns out to be false, Quine cannot avail it for demonstrating the required contradiction in the theory of de re essences. (In the next section we shall see that Plantinga actually constructs a similar argument against Quine's argument against de re essences.

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