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Kripke's Objections to Description Theories of Names

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In "Naming and Necessity" Saul Kripke describes some cases which, he claims, provide counterexamples both to cluster theories and, more generally, to description theories of proper names. My view of these cases is that while they do not provide counterexamples to cluster theories, they can be used to provide evidence against single-description theories. (I count as single-description theories both "short-for-descriptions" theories of the Frege-Russell sort and what I shall call below "fixed-by-attributes" theories.) In this paper I shall defend both of the claims involved in my view.

1. *Kripke's cases.*

Although it is somewhat of an oversimplification to do so, I will take all of Kripke's cases as directed against a single principle endorsed by every cluster theorist. The principle is that for every speaker s, token $\boldsymbol{a}$ of a proper name, individual x, and time t,

(CD) if s utters α at t and s is not immediately experiencing x at t, then α refers to (denotes) x only if there is a property F such that: (i) x is the one and only individual that is F; (ii) at t, s believes that there is just one individual that is F; and (iii) the property of being F is not question-begging with respect to s's use of α at t.

Let us understand that on cluster theories of names, the referent of a given name-use (or token) is supposed to be usually determined by a non-empty cluster of properties which the user associates with the name. Cluster theorists like P. F. Strawson and John Searle have not provided any clear answer to the question of *how* a given cluster determines the referent of its associated name-use. They have instead been content to say that a name-use refers to an object if the object satisfies a "sufficient" number of the properties in the associated cluster (see [8], p. 490, for instance). But they have clearly demanded that for an object to be the referent of a name-use, it is *necessary* that it uniquely satisfy at least one of the properties in the cluster. Why have they demanded this?

Each property F in a reference determining cluster is supposed to provide a non-question-begging answer of the form 'the one and only F' which the name-user would give to the question 'Who or what are you referring to?' A question-begging answer to this question would be given by a speaker if he said in response, for instance, 'The one I am now referring to with α' or 'The one I now have in mind' or 'The one I mean (by α)'.[1] The cluster theorist claims that the referent of a name-use must uniquely satisfy a member of the associated cluster since (a) for an object to be the referent of a name-use, the speaker must mean or intend to refer to that object with the use, and (b) for a speaker to mean, or intend to refer to, a given object to the exclusion of all others, there must be at least one non-question-begging property F uniquely satisfied by this object which the speaker would use to pick out or identify the object to which he intends to refer as 'the one and only F'. (See Searle [9], p. 87, and Strawson [10], p. 185). This is basically why cluster theorists have endorsed (CD).

But Kripke argues that a speaker may refer to an object with a name, even if no object satisfies *any* of the properties in the associated cluster. For example, where the φ's are the properties in a given cluster, he says:

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1 In calling such descriptions "question-begging" I am following terminology which Donnellan uses in [2], p. 365.

> suppose...that nothing satisfies most, or even any substantial number of the φ's. Does this mean the name doesn't refer? No: ...you may have false beliefs that are true of absolutely no one. And these may constitute the totality of your beliefs. ([4], p. 295)

If this is so then of course the cluster theory principle (CD) is false.

One case which Kripke gives in arguing for the just-quoted claim is that of a speaker *s* who uses the name 'Gödel' and whose sole answer to the question 'Who are you referring to?' would be 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'. Kripke asks us to suppose that no one discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic. Perhaps the proof miraculously appeared on a sheet of paper. Perhaps a subtle error in Gödel's argument has not yet been noticed. Nevertheless, Kripke claims, our speaker *s* would still be referring to Gödel with his name. If this claim is correct, then (CD) is false.

Another case which Kripke gives is one in which again a speaker uses 'Gödel' and associates with this name only the description 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'. But in this case, we are to suppose that it was not Gödel but *someone else* who first proved incompleteness. As Kripke puts it, we are to suppose that "a man named 'Schmidt', whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold of the manuscript and it was thereafter attributed to Gödel." Kripke then claims: "So, since the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic is in fact Schmidt, we, when we talk about 'Gödel', are in fact always referring to Schmidt. But it seems to me that we are not. We simply are not" ([4], p. 294).

Apparently, Kripke means that in this case, we *are* referring to Gödel. If so, and if he is right, then again (CD) is false. However, his main point in giving this example is to show that cluster theories do not provide the correct *sufficient* conditions for name reference. (All we know if (CD) is false is that they do not provide the correct necessary conditions.) We obtain this result since in this case we are dealing with a one-membered cluster. Here, if Kripke is right, an individual's uniquely satisfying *all* the members of a name-use's associated cluster is not sufficient for that individual to be the use's referent.

Kripke considers a reply that might be made to his Gödel-Schmidt case, namely, that the speaker might have had some *other* description in mind which Gödel *does* satisfy. Suppose he had in mind the description 'the man to whom the discovery of incompleteness is commonly attributed'. Kripke answers this reply by saying that the same sort of counterexample as he has already

given applies here as well. The speaker might still be referring to Gödel even if, unbeknownst to him, the discovery is now commonly attributed to Schmidt ([4], p. 296).

There is something puzzling about this objection which Kripke imagines might be made to his case. For how exactly is it supposed to be relevant? After all, the initial case was one in which there were no descriptions which the speaker associated with 'Gödel' other than 'the man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic'. So what is the point of suggesting that the speaker might have associated some *other* description with 'Gödel'? Surely, the point is not that some case other than the one Kripke gives would not provide a counterexample to cluster theories. For this point, though true, has no bearing on the issue of whether the case Kripke *does* give provides a counterexample. Perhaps the point of the reply is this. In the sort of case Kripke imagines, one in which the user of 'Gödel' believes he is referring to the man who discovered arithmetic's incompleteness, it is *natural* to assume that the user would also have various other beliefs about the referent, beliefs yielding further properties in the cluster associated with the use. Consider for instance the properties mentioned in the descriptions:

(a) the man to whom the discovery of arithmetic's incompleteness is commonly attributed;

(b) the man of whom I have heard (read) that he discoverd the incompleteness of arithmetic;

(c) the only man named 'Gödel' of whom I have heard;

(d) the man named 'Gödel' of whom I have heard (read) that he discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic.

Since the descriptions (b), (c), and (d) are descriptions which the speaker would give, the pronoun 'I' represents a first-person reference on his part. Notice how extremely likely it is that a typical user of 'Gödel' would associate descriptions of this sort with his use of 'Gödel' when he also intends to refer with this name to the discoverer of incompleteness. But then the sinister possibility arises that when Kripke claims that in his case the speaker is referring with 'Gödel' to Gödel and not Schmidt, his claim seems intuitively correct only because we tacitly assume that the speaker has at least four *other* ways (represented by (a)-(d) of picking out the referent of his use. Then, since Gödel, and not Schmidt, in fact uniquely satisfies four out of five of the properties in the use's associated cluster, Kripke's claim

might seem intuitively correct only because it is the correct claim to make *on the cluster theory*.

This point is well taken. For suppose that Kripke had described his case so as to explicitly *rule out* certain of (a)-(d) as being in the cluster which *s* associates with 'Gödel'. Imagine, for instance, that *s* uses 'Gödel' with the intention of referring to the discoverer of incompleteness, but *s* believes both that he has never in his life heard of anyone named 'Gödel' and that he has never heard the proof of incompleteness attributed to anyone named 'Gödel'. What would *s* be doing using 'Gödel' in such circumstances? We can only assume that by some wild coincidence *s* just happened to pick the name 'Gödel' and decided to use it to refer to the discoverer of incompleteness (perhaps he just happened to like the sound of 'Gödel'). If we assume that Schmidt rather than Gödel proved incompleteness, who is *s* referring to with 'Gödel'? The intuitively correct answer now is *Schmidt*, not Gödel. Or, if we assume that no one proved incompleteness, it is now intuitively correct that *s* is referring to *no one* with 'Gödel'.

It is clear, then, that Kripke has given no counterexample to cluster theories at all. For suppose, on the one hand, that the only assumption of Kripke's Gödel-cases is that the cluster associated with the speaker's use of 'Gödel' is one-membered and contains just the property of having discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic. Then, as we've just seen, it is natural to suppose that the speaker is referring with 'Gödel' to whomever made this discovery, and we have no counterexample to (CD). Suppose, on the other hand, that Kripke makes other unmentioned assumptions about his cases, assumptions which lead him to reach different conclusions than the ones we reached in the previous paragraph. For all we know these assumptions are such that if they were made explicit, they would yield cases in which the claim that Gödel is the referent of 'Gödel' is consistent with (CD). Again we have no counterexample to (CD). (No doubt Kripke's main assumption is that the uses of 'Godel' in his cases are *typical*, similar to ones that he would make or that members of his audience would make. But if the uses are typical, properties like (a)-(d) are in the associated clusters, and again we have no counterexample.)

Kripke does raise some objections to claims that in his Gödel-cases the speakers would probably have had other properties in mind which Gödel does uniquely satisfy. But these objections are unconvincing. One such objection is that we can take a description like (a) and construct a case in which Gödel is the referent of a use of 'Gödel' even though he does not satisfy (a) ([4], p. 296). I fail to see the point of this objection. Even if we can take each description proposed as one a speaker probably had in mind and show that the

referent might not have satisfied *it*, we have in doing this still not constructed a counterexample to (CD). What is necessary to refute (CD) is a case in which it is intuitively obvious that a given object is the referent of a name-use even though it uniquely satisfies *none* of the properties in the use's associated cluster. It is a sufficient reply to Kripke's cases to point out that they do not have this feature; Kripke's point about (a) has no bearing on this reply.

Another of Kripke's objections is to the *sort* of property to which a description theorist would apparently have to appeal in reply to his cases. For an individual to satisfy descriptions (a)-(d), there must have been *other* references to this individual which the speaker in question has witnessed. When a speaker's reference with a name is determined by such properties, we might say, as Strawson does ([10], p. 185), that the speaker's reference "borrows its credentials" from other persons' references (though note that in the case of (a)-(d), not all of these other references need have been made with the name in question, or with any name at all).

Of course if one person's use of a singular term borrows its reference-credentials from a second person's use, which borrows from a third person's, and so on, the chain of reference-borrowings cannot be infinite or circular, if the first person's use is to have a referent. For instance, if I borrow my reference from another's, who borrows his from another's, who borrows his from *mine*, none of these references will be successful. Kripke comments:

> Is one sure that this won't happen?...[a]lthough in general such chains do exist for a living man, you won't know what the chain is. You won't be sure what descriptions the other man is using, so the thing won't go in a circle, or whether by appealing to [the other speaker's reference] you won't get back to the right man [i.e., Gödel] at all. So you cannot use this as your identifying description with any confidence. ([4], p. 298).

In the "Addenda" to his paper Kripke makes it clear that he meant this remark as an objection to the assumption by cluster theorists like Strawson that "buck-passing" properties could play a role in determining reference ([4], p. 766). But I find it hard to see the force of the objection. What, for instance, is the difficulty if a buck-passing property sometimes fails to lead back to the "right" man? Here, Kripke seems to have in mind the point he made earlier concerning the use of (a) to determine the reference of 'Gödel': the speaker might refer to Gödel even though at the time, and unbeknownst to the speaker, most people attribute the discovery of incompleteness to Schmidt.

But surely, a cluster theorist could allow such a possibility and at the same time allow buck-passing properties to play a role in determining name-reference. For instance, the cluster (a)-(d) might

yield Gödel as the referent of a use of 'Gödel', even if (a) happens to be satisfied by Schmidt. Here, (a) leads back to the "wrong" man, though the cluster of which (a) is a part yields the "right" man, and the other properties in the cluster are buck-passing. There is no difficulty for cluster theories here. Perhaps Kripke has in mind a case in which (a) is the *sole* member of a cluster determining reference for 'Gödel'. But in such a case (as I argued earlier), if Schmidt satisfies (a), it is far from clear that Schmidt would in fact *be* the "wrong" man.

Kripke objects that one who uses a name on the basis of buck-passing properties would not really know whether he has borrowed his reference from a reliable source. Perhaps the chain of reference-borrowings goes in a circle, or perhaps at the far end of the chain no original reference was made to any individual at all. This might be a problem for individual name-users; a given person might be totally unjustified in believing that any individual at all satisfies the buck-passing description(s) with which he would try to identify the referent of his name-use. But this fact does not pose any obvious theoretical difficulty for cluster theories. Even if it were true, as Kripke seems to think it is, that such beliefs are almost always unjustified (and this suggestion is extremely dubious) there would still be no particular difficulty for cluster theories, since it is certainly not necessary for a proponent of such a theory to endorse the implausible thesis that a speaker's use of a name has a referent only if the speaker knows it does.

Finally, Kripke claims that "Strawson apparently must require that the speaker *know* from whom he got his reference, so that he can *say*: 'By "Gödel" I mean the man *Jones* calls "Gödel"' ([4], p. 299). Then Kripke objects that "If the speaker has forgotten his source, the device is unavailable to Strawson; if he misremembers it, Strawson's paradigm in his footnote can give the wrong results" ([4], p. 300). But Kripke doesn't explain why Strawson *must* require that the speaker remember from whom he got the reference. Why should he require this? After all, there are other ways in which one can borrow reference without depending on such memories (see descriptions (b)-(c)). The claim that Strawson's device might yield the "wrong" results when the speaker misremembers from whom he got his reference was considered before in connection with Kripke's objection to the use of (a).

We may conclude that Kripke has offered no relevant objection to the reply to his 'Gödel'-cases that the user of 'Gödel' would probably have had other properties in mind that Gödel does uniquely satisfy. Thus his cases do not pose conclusive counterexamples to the cluster theory principle (CD). Nor does his

Gödel-Schmidt case show that no cluster theory will provide the sufficient conditions for name-reference.

Searle has said that the clusters of properties which determine the reference of a name are composed of those properties most "commonly attributed"to the referent ([7], p. 160). Similarly, Strawson suggests that the cluster will provide a "composite description incorporating the most frequently mentioned facts" ([10], p. 196). But Kripke's 'Gödel'-cases show that one who wishes to maintain a cluster theory of names will have to allow that properties which are *not* frequently attributed by use of the name, properties such as that of being a man named 'Gödel' of whom a particular speaker has heard, may nevertheless play a decisive role in determining reference. Kripke has shown that the Strawson-Searle variety of cluster theory is strictly false, since his cases show that a person may be the referent of a name even if that person does not possess the characteristics most commonly attributed to him. But this is a minor difficulty, one which is easily repaired by allowing properties such as those mentioned in (a)-(d) to be members of reference-determining clusters. Certainly, Kripke's examples do not, as he claims show that "the whole picture given by this theory of how reference is determined seems to be wrong from the fundamentals" ([4], p. 300).[2]

2. *The effect of Kripke's cases on single-description theories.*

By a single-description theory of names, I mean a theory which endorses (at a minimum) the following thesis:

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2 Thus Kripke's 'Gödel'-cases are valuable, not because they show that no cluster theory is correct, but because they suggest ways in which previous cluster theories must be revised in order to be made correct. I have proposed such a revised cluster theory in my paper [5]. Kripke makes several other valuable points in his discussion of names in [4], the most important of which is that proper names are rigid designators, that is, are terms which denote the same individual in every possible world. The sort of view I am defending here, on which the referent of a name in the actual world is determined by a cluster of definite descriptions, is of course consistent with Kripke's idea that names are rigid designators.

For a concise and comprehensive description of Kripke's views on reference, see R. B. De Sousa's [1]. This paper also contains criticisms of Kripke's view that theoretical identities in science are necessary if true, since they are composed of rigid designators. For a reply to these criticisms, see R.M. Yoshida's [11].

(SD) If s is not immediately experiencing x at t and s utters a token α of a proper name β at t, then α refers to (denotes) x only if there are a proposition p, a non-question-begging property F, and a sentence A such that: (i) x is the one and only individual that is F; (ii) s utters α in the course of uttering A; (iii) s's uttering A at t expresses s's thinking that p; and (iv) the proposition that p is expressible by a (possible) sentence A^* such that A^* may be obtained (at least in part) from A by replacing each occurrence of β in A by a definite description whose matrix expresses the property of being F.

(SD) is meant to capture a principle once endorsed by Bertrand Russell, a principle which he expressed as follows:

> Common words, even proper names, are usually really descriptions. That is to say, the thought in the mind of a person using a proper name correctly can generally only be expressed explicitly if we replace the proper name by a description. Moreover, the description required to express the thought will vary for different people, or for the same person at different times. ([6], p. 54).

In addition to holding (SD), Russell also seems to have believed that a name, as used on a given occasion, has the same meaning as the definite description which could be used to express the proposition of which the speaker is thinking at the time of use. That is, Russell seems to have held a "short-for-descriptions" theory of names. But one can hold (SD) without believing that names are used as short for definite descriptions. Theories which hold (SD) while denying that names are short for descriptions I call "fixed-by-attributes" theories.

As we have seen, the reason why Kripke's cases are ineffective against the cluster theory principle (CD) is that these cases show at most that an object may be the referent of a name-use without uniquely satisfying a particular property in the use's associated cluster, while to show (CD) is false, it is necessary to show that an object may be the referent of a name-use while uniquely satisfying none of the properties in the cluster. However, to show that (SD) is false, it is only necessary to show that the referent of a name-use may fail to uniquely satisfy one particular member of the cluster, namely, the property mentioned in the description by use of which the speaker's thought at the time would be expressed. Thus, for all we know so far, Kripke's cases might prove effective against single-description theories. Let us consider this possibility with respect to the Gödel-Schmidt case.

Given Kripke's *official* description of this case, it has no effect on single-description theories either, since on this description, we are to make the special assumption that the *only* way in which the speaker would attempt to pick out the referent of his use would be as "the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic." This assumption makes Kripke's case an atypical use of 'Gödel', so that, as we have seen, it is far from clear that Gödel would in fact be the referent of such a use had Schmidt proved incompleteness.

However, it is apparent that Kripke makes the unofficial assumption that in his case, the user of 'Gödel' is a typical user of this name, someone who has heard and read of a certain famous logician named 'Gödel', who has heard the incompleteness proof attributed to this man by use of this name, and so on. Suppose Jones is such a typical user of 'Gödel' who on a given occasion says

(1) Gödel resides in Princeton.

Jones, let us assume, utters (1) in a typical communication situation; that is, Jones intends to make by use of (1) an assertion about a given individual and to express a given belief of his concerning this individual. If asked who he means by 'Gödel', Jones would respond by using descriptions (a)-(d) as well as

(e) the discoverer of the incompleteness of arithmetic.

Descriptions (a)-(d) as used by Jones are, assume, satisfied uniquely by a certain logician (whom we shall call 'Gödel') who does in fact reside in Princeton; suppose, however, unbeknownst to Jones, we have incontrovertible evidence that it was not Gödel who first proved the incompleteness of arithmetic, but an unknown Viennese high school teacher named Schmidt who died in 1930 under mysterious circumstances. Knowing this fact, it is nevertheless clear that we would correctly take Jones to have referred with 'Gödel' to Gödel, and not to Schmidt.

Now the fact that Gödel would be the referent of Jones's use of 'Gödel' does not by itself controvert or support any particular view of names. However, the fact that we *know* that Jones would be referring to Gödel in this case indicates something about our concept of reference which is difficult to reconcile with single-description views. For on such views, we of course cannot know which individual a speaker is referring to with a name until we know which individual it is that the speaker is thinking of when he uses the name. But the assumptions of the Gödel-Schmidt case do not tell us which individual it is that the thought expressed by the

speaker's use is about. For these assumptions concern only what the speaker *meant*, or the intentions with which the speaker used the name, not what the speaker was thinking at the time of use.

For instance, it is consistent with our description of this case that the thought in Jones's mind when he says (1) is his thought that

(2) The discoverer of incompleteness resides in Princeton.

It is also consistent with this description that at the time he says (1), Jones is thinking of nothing at all that is expressible by replacing 'Gödel' in (1) by a definite description. For instance, suppose Jones reads off (1) from a list of answers he has written down to questions in a parlor game called "Residences of the Renowned", and while uttering (1), Jones is thinking only of where he should eat lunch. Surely, this is consistent with Jones's having used 'Gödel' with the intentions I ascribed to him, but it is not consistent with his thinking of a proposition having the form of (2). Thus for all our assumptions tell us Jones is thinking of Schmidt not Gödel, or thinking of neither Schmidt nor Gödel, when he says (1).

The assumptions of our case, then , do not provide evidence that Jones is thinking of a proposition about Gödel having the form of (2) when he says (1). But given these assumptions, it is intuitively correct that Jones is referring to Gödel in his utterance of (1). Consequently, referring to an object with a name does not entail thinking of a proposition expressible by use of a definite description which refers to that object. Otherwise, evidence that a person is referring to an object with a name would always be evidence that the person is thinking of a proposition expressible by a description which refers to that object, and as we have seen, this is not always the case. Hence, (SD) is false, and no single-description view is true.

I believe that the argument just given from the Gödel-Schmidt case against single-description theories captures one of the dominant motives lying behind the unwillingness of many, myself included, to embrace a single-description view, In fact, I think, cases of the Gödel-Schmidt sort have historically provided one of the main reasons why many philosophers have rejected single-description views *in favor of a cluster theory*. It is therefore not surprising that this type of case should prove effective only against single description views and not against cluster theories.

I have tried in this paper to defend cluster theories of names by defending the principle (CD) against Kripke's objections. I have not tried to argue here that (CD) is true and so I have not given reasons for believing that the correct theory of names is a description theory

as opposed to a causal theory of the sort Kripke and others have endorsed as an alternative to description theories. (See [4], pp. 298-303).[3] However, I think that a primary consideration which has led many, including Kripke, to endorse a causal theory of names, has been the belief that Kripke's examples show that no description theory of names can be true, plus the fact that causal theories are consistent with these examples. If I am right, this is not a good reason for believing that the correct theory of names is a causal theory.

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3 According to the sort of causal theory Kripke proposes, a name-use's referent is typically determined by a causal chain of communication which links the use to an initial baptism of the referent with the name. In his excellent paper [3], Gareth Evans argues that the sort of causal theory suggested by Kripke is inadequate because it does not take into account the role played by speakers' intentions in determining the reference of the names they use. However, Evans also believes that (CD) is false; so he proposes an anti-descriptionist causal theory on which (roughly) a name-use's referent is in part determined by what the speaker intends to refer to, and what a speaker intends to refer to is in turn determined by a cluster of causal connections between the speaker and the sources of the (perhaps totally incorrect) information which the speaker associates with his name-use. In my paper [5], I have argued that causal theories of the sort which Evans proposes are false. The argument of [5] also supports (CD) and thus supports the view that the correct theory of names is a description theory and not a causal theory of any sort.

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