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THE PROBLEM OF REFERENCE CHANGE

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1 Reference Change and Reference Preservation

Reference is the relation between a word—proper name, common noun or ~~or~~ description—and the item in the world we use it to talk about. Both reference change—the same word being used by later users to whom it has been passed on to refer to something different—and reference preservation—the word retaining its reference when transmitted to other users—are possibilities (rather, everyday actualities) which philosophers of language must accommodate. Both have figured prominently in the ~~twentieth~~20th-century debate between descriptivists and their opponents.

For descriptivists, inspired by and developing ideas from Frege and Russell, reference change has not appeared as a threat; rather the challenge has been to develop an account of reference which allows preservation of reference through changes in knowledge and belief which affect the descriptions speakers associate with names. A descriptivist account which requires every name to be associated with a reference-determining description, or cluster of descriptions, is challenged by the evident fact that a name's reference can remain the same despite the users no longer

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knowing things that were once well-known and gaining many erroneous beliefs. In an obvious way legends and tall- stories can accumulate about a famous figure, and the less interesting truths about him be forgotten, so it may be that present-day users are still talking about the person who was the original reference of the name (King Arthur or Jonah or Goliath) despite complete ignorance of his activities and widespread erroneous belief. Ignorance and error are no bars to reference, it seems, and hence the onset of ignorance and the accumulation of error are likewise no bars to reference preservation.

The opponent of descriptivism, following on from Kripke (1972[BIB-006]), has no problem with explaining such preservation of reference. What has been perceived to be a problem for him is rather to explain how reference can change, without any intention that it does so, *just because* later users associate different information—different descriptions—with a name from those which earlier users associate with the name. The most famous example of such reference change in the philosophical literature is that of 'Madagascar', introduced by Evans (1973[BIB-004]) as a challenge to a causal theory of names, and discussed inconclusively, by Kripke and Dummett (in Davidson et al. 1974[BIB-002]; in Harman et al. 1974[BIB-005]). 'Madagascar', or some earlier form of the name, was originally a name of part of the African mainland and became, without anyone's intending a change of reference, via a process of transmission from African natives to Europeans, in which Marco Polo was involved

(actual historical details are unclear, see Burgess 2014[BIB-001]; Taylor 1898[BIB-011]), a name of the great African island. The challenge to the opponent of descriptivism is to explain how the reference change could have happened, consistently with their anti-descriptivist emphasis, which allows them so easily to explain how a name can preserve reference through radical change in the associated descriptions.

The focus of this discussion will be on the apparent problem reference change presents to the Kripkean and the Madagascar example specifically. The conclusion will be that the problem the example highlights is a genuine one to which there is no obvious solution for the anti-descriptivist.

2 Kripke and His Opponents

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Already in 'Naming and Necessity', Kripke acknowledged that two uses of the same word can, in some sense, be part of the same chain without preserving reference, if only because a user of the name might not intend to use it in the way, he believes, it was used by the person from whom he acquired it. He notes that if he decides to name his pet aardvark 'Napoleon' the reference of the name has changed: preservation of reference requires not only (if at all) a causal link between later users and earlier users but at least an absence of an intention to change reference. In the Addenda he reinforces the point by noting the possibility of a change of reference from something real to something fictional, as in the case of 'St Nicholas' ('Santa Claus'). He then adds: 'According to Evans, "Madagascar" was a native name for a part of Africa.

Marco Polo, erroneously thinking that he was following native usage, applied the name to an island' (Kripke 1972[BIB-006]:, 768).

The key feature of the example is that the change of reference was inadvertent; no one ever intended it. Indeed, there was always an intention to preserve reference. In the Addenda Kripke briefly considers how to accommodate this and suggests that the social character of naming is crucial. But he does not go into further details.

The possibility of reference change is also discussed in Dummett's first reply to Kripke (Dummett 1973:, 148–151). He says that we can sometimes establish with reasonable probability that a name has been transferred from one bearer to another. But he says: 'Kripke's account leaves no room for the occurrence of a misunderstanding, since to speak of misunderstanding would presuppose that the name did in fact have a sense which could be understood'. Dummett illustrates the possibility of reference change by explaining that there is a German card game now called 'Tarock', which is different from the game called 'Tarock' played with the Tarot pack once played in Germany and still played in Austria. This change in reference in Germany may well have been inadvertent, Dummett suggests. At any rate, it is perfectly intelligible that it should have been, since we have a criterion for determining what game a name is being used as a name of independently of the historical origin of the name.

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Dummett's complaint (1973[BIB-003], 150–151) is that Kripke's story cannot accommodate such reference change without becoming vacuous:

> Kripke expressly wishes to allow that the association with a name of a description which in fact does not apply to the person … for which the name was originally introduced does not deprive that name of reference to that person … it merely reveals a false belief about the referent. There is therefore no room in Kripke's account for a shift of reference in the course of a chain of communication … Intuitively … there is no such guarantee [of preservation of reference] …. Once this is conceded, the account crumbles away altogether. We are left with this: that a name refers to an object if there exists a chain of communication, … at each stage of which there was a *successful* intention to preserve its reference. This proposition is indisputably true; but hardly illuminating.

Dummett's thought is that if no mention of 'success' is included we do not have a sufficient condition for preservation of reference. Whereas, if it is included, we have such a condition only trivially, because of the transitivity of identity. If X refers to A with N and Y's intention is to refer to what X refers to then if Y's intention is successful Y does refer to what X refers to, i.e., A, and so it goes on. The mention of a

causal historical chain falls away as irrelevant. Dummett elaborates this point in his contribution to a discussion with Kripke published in *Synthese* (Harman et al. 1974[BIB-005] 5:, 516–517).

Kripke (Harman et al. 1974[BIB-005] 5:, 518) replies by acknowledging that

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> 'One might think, by some kind of transitivity … that if I refer to the same thing as he, and he refers to the same thing as me and so on, then it all goes back to the same things as the original man.'

But, he explains, this

> 'isn't true because more than one intention of reference may be transmitted, even *type* of reference … utterance reference and so on. That's where the picture needs to be qualified. It isn't a matter of success or lack of success, but where he has a conflict of intentions … you may transmit only one point of conflict to the next man and that may be what happens.'

He illustrates what he has in mind with the famous case of Smith and Jones. I see someone raking leaves. In fact, he is Jones, but I take him to be Smith, so I say, 'Smith is raking leaves' (or ask 'Why is Smith raking leaves?' or whatever). I am using the name 'Smith', even here, as a name for Smith. If I am apprised of my mistake I will withdraw and admit that it isn't Smith who is raking leaves. Smith is the semantic referent of the name. On the other hand, the primary interest of myself and my conversational partner may be the activities of the man raking leaves, i.e., Jones. So Jones is the utterance referent of the name. 'The semantic referent of a designator, ', Kripke explains,

> 'is given by a *general* intention to refer to a certain object …. The speaker's referent is given by a specific intention, on a given occasion, to refer to a certain object. If the speaker believes the object he wants to talk about … fulfils the condition for being the semantic referent, then he believes that there is no clash between his general intentions and his specific intentions.
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> ' (*1977*, 264).

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Referential uses of singular terms, such as the use of 'Smith' in the Smith/Jones scenario, are ones in which the speaker has a complex intention: 'He has a specific

intention, which is distinct from his general intention, but which he believes, as a matter of fact, to determine the same object as the one determined by his general intention' (1977: 264).

Kripke explains using this apparatus how he thinks reference shifts can inadvertently occur. A particular utterance intention (the utterance intention to refer to Jones, or the island, or the card game currently played in Germany) becomes a very general habitual intention. Our habitual primary intention is to refer to the utterance reference.

> 'If so, then the original semantic intention is over-ridden by another semantic intention which has arisen out of the utterer's reference becoming habitual and common among the speech community. And then tracing back the chain before this shift has occurred is illegitimate.'
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> *Harman et al. (1974: 515).*

Kripke adds that one important thing that makes such shifts occur, is that this is what is most important in communication now. He emphasises that one reason why he thinks the 'historical theory' is true (he does say this, although he of course insists in 'Naming and Necessity' that he is offering at best a picture not a theory) and why the

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intention to use the word as you've heard it is primary is that 'we use names to talk to each other, and if you're using it with a different referent from the hearer just because of your own private beliefs, you're not going to communicate with him'. Therefore, 'we have a strong bias in favour of keeping the referent fixed even if our own beliefs about the object become erroneous' (Harman et al. 1974: 515–516). However, notwithstanding this motivation for allowing the intention to refer to what was previously referred to by the name to dominate, it can happen that this is overridden.

> 'It may be that if the speakers form another common intention in their speech community habitually to refer to *that* by the name which originally arose because of an error, then that is so primary in communication that it overrides what we would get to from a traceback.'
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> *Harman et al. (1974: 516).*

Kripke acknowledges that this is vague and tentative but adds that it is what he has to say about this.

However, it is not clear that Kripke *need* say more. After all, his primary concern is just to refute the description theory. So, as he has emphasised, notwithstanding his using the phrase 'historical theory' (in Kripke 1974), he is not

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giving a theory of reference to replace the description theory, but merely a picture. So he is not intending to give a necessary and sufficient condition, or even a merely sufficient condition, for reference preservation. He is committed at most to the claim that a name *typically* refers to the thing its introducer baptised as long as there is not, as in the 'Napoleon' case, a conscious opting out of the initial referential practice and not, as in the Madagascar case, a widespread communal intention to which the users conform, which is in fact an intention to refer to something other than the thing initially baptised. But, of course, this claim, as Dummett insists, is consistent with the description theory, since it is consistent with the thesis that any user of a name must associate~~d~~ some identifying description with it that designates its bearer. So the question still remains, even if the description theory is refuted by Kripke, so long as it is allowed that *some* non-trivial sufficient condition of reference preservation must exist, how any non-descriptivist account can provide one. This is the question Gareth Evans addresses in 'The ~~causal~~ Causal ~~theory~~ Theory of ~~names'~~ Names' (1973).

~~3~~ Evans

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Evans's paper has two parts. The first is an attack on an explicitly causal theory of reference and reference change, which he, of course, is cautious in ascribing to Kripke (though he does so).

The second part is an attempt to develop an eclectic theory, bringing together the best element of the causal theory with the best element of the description theory

(which he takes to be false—though not, in fact, refuted by Kripke's arguments as given ((Evans 1973: 196)),)), and to show how it can account for reference change.

First, I shall look at Evans's critique of the causal theory and then turn to his own eclectic theory. I think the key question addressed in his paper is whether any non-descriptivist theory can account for reference change. If Evans's eclectic theory can do so and can also be distinguished from a descriptivist account this is so. If not, Evans provides no reason to think that referential change can be accommodated by non-descriptivist theorists. This is what I will conclude.

The causal theory Evans targets is what one would extract from Kripke if one were to set aside his modestly cautious remark that he is only providing a picture. Evans's statement of it is the following (1973: 191):

> A speaker, using a name 'NN' on a particular occasion, will denote some item x if there is a causal chain of *reference-preserving links* leading back from his use on that occasion ultimately to the item x itself being involved in a name-acquiring transaction such as explicit dubbing or the more general process whereby nicknames stick. I mention the notion of a reference-preserving link to incorporate a condition that Kripke lays down; a speaker S's transmission of a name 'NN' to a speaker S'[2] constitutes a reference-preserving link only if S [sic] intends to be using the name with the same denotation as he from whom he in his turn learned the name.

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With the typo (the second occurrence of 'S' should be 'S') corrected, this states a sufficient condition for a name, on a particular occasion, denoting an item x. If any sufficient condition for reference preservation can be extracted from 'Naming and Necessity' it is this one.

Evans (1973[BIB-004], 192) rejects it because it ignores the importance of surrounding context, and, he says, regards the capacity to denote something as a 'magic trick' which has somehow been passed on, and once passed on cannot be lost. He insists that what a name denotes depends upon what its user's dispositions are bent towards. Hence what it names can change as the context changes, old dispositions are lost and new ones come into existence.

His story (1973, 192) about the pub conversation about Louis is intended to illustrate this. Conformably with Kripke's ideas if I overhear a conversation in a pub about a certain 'Louis', get interested and even make contributions——though I have no idea who Louis is apart from what I can glean from the conversation——then, Evans agrees with Kripke, in that context I am using 'Louis' as the name of the person——say Louis XIII of France——the conversation is about. But that context may be lost. If long after, I use the name 'Louis' again when I have forgotten the conversation and by some confusion have associated it with a description which was not heard in the pub, say 'a basketball player', the mere fact that I am now using the

same name and my use is causally connected to the long-forgotten conversation does not, he insists, establish that I am in any interesting sense speaking of the French king.

Evans goes on to illustrate, with various examples, the unsatisfactoriness of any theory which involves the general position that the denotation of a name in a community can be found by tracing a causal chain of reference-preserving links back to some item so long as there is no intention to change reference.

His key point is that reference preservation cannot involve wholly different mechanisms from reference acquisition. Generally, for meaning or reference:

> There aren't two fundamentally different mechanisms involved in a word's having a meaning: one bringing it about that a word acquires a meaning, and the other—a causal mechanism—which operates to ensure that its meaning is preserved. The former processes are operative all the time; whatever explains how a word gets its meaning also explains how it preserves it, if preserved it is. Indeed, such a theory [a causal theory of reference/meaning preservation] could not account for a word's changing its meaning. It is perfectly possible for this to happen without anyone's intending to initiate a new practice with the word; the causal chain would then lead back too far.
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> (1973, 195)

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The Madagascar case is introduced by Evans to illustrate the possibility of such unintended reference shift along a causal chain of '~~reference~~ reference-preserving' links, i.e., ones satisfying the definition he gives (1973~~:~~, 191), not ones that actually guarantee reference- preservation.

Evans also mentions a simple imaginary example. Two babies are mistakenly swapped soon after birth, but not before their mothers bestow names on them. So henceforth the man universally known as 'Jack' is so-called because a woman dubbed some other baby with the name.

Evans concludes that the causal theory unamended must be rejected. But he insists (1973~~:~~, 196) that the description theory must be rejected also. For even if 'Goliath was the Philistine David slew' is the *whole* information connected with a name in a community, he says, this does not have the consequence that 'Goliath' is in that community a name of that man. (In fact, Biblical scholars now suggest that David did not kill Goliath but another Philistine, and the attribution of the slaying to Elhannan the Bethlehemite in 2 Samuel 21 xix is correct.)

So Evans's aim is to produce an eclectic theory which accommodates the possibility of reference change but cannot be brought under the descriptivist banner.

The most important features of Evans's eclectic theory are two: (i) the causal element is not, *pace* Kripke, a link between the initial baptism and subsequent uses of the name, but between the states and activities of the object which is the bearer of the

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name and the beliefs about that object possessed by the users of the name, (ii) not any such causal link is sufficient for an object to be the object named; rather the object named must be the *dominant* source of the name users' information.

What is really wrong with the description theory, Evans says, is not so much the idea that the intended referent of a name is determined by associated information, but the idea that the determination is a matter of *fit*. There is, he says, something absurd in the thought that the intended referent of a use of a name could be some item completely causally isolated from the user's community just because it fits better than anything else the cluster of descriptions associated with the name. Comparably, I do not see something just because it matches perfectly my visual impressions. It must be the cause of them. Equally, Evans suggests, an item cannot be the intended referent of the name unless it is the causal source of (some of) the information associated with it.

However, it is not sufficient for something to be the referent that it be *a* causal source of information associated with the name. For there may be more than one. Jones, the leaf raker, is the source of a body of information associated with the name 'Smith' by the observer, though the belief expressed is a belief about Smith. Again (Evans 1973: 200), 'I may form the belief about the wife of some colleague that she has nice legs upon the basis of seeing someone else—but the girl I saw is the source'.

So Evans brings in the notion of dominance. A cluster or dossier of information can be dominantly of one item though it contains elements whose causal source is different. And persistent misidentification can bring it about that a cluster is dominantly of some item other than it is dominantly of originally.

He illustrates this with a story about Napoleon. In scenario 1 an imposter takes over Napoleon's role and name when he is an unknown ~~Army~~ army officer and goes on to rise to power and fame. In scenario 2 very late in Napoleon's career an imposter takes over. In scenario 1 Evans says the information we have will be dominantly of the later man. So it will be correct for us to say that Napoleon impersonated an unknown army officer before rising to fame. In scenario 2, by contrast, the information we have will be dominantly of the man who has risen to fame and it will be correct to say that late in his career Napoleon was impersonated and, for example, did not fight at Waterloo. He says, 'These differences seem to reside entirely in the differences in [our] reactions to the various discoveries, and dominance is meant to capture those differences' (1973~~:~~, 201).

Evans brings the threads together with his story of Turnip. A youth nicknamed 'Turnip' leaves his village to seek his fortune. Many years later a man comes to the village and lives as a hermit. Among the few surviving older villagers the belief springs up that this is Turnip returned. He isn't. The name gets widely used as a name of the hermit. Among the older villagers the name remains a name of the young

fortune-seeker and they would agree that the hermit is not Turnip. But they may die off leaving a homogeneous community using the name to refer to the hermit. If he is the dominant source of the information associated with the name its reference will shift. On the other hand, it may be that the information passed on to the younger villagers is so important to them that the young fortune-seeker remains the dominant source and the referent of the name for them, so that being informed of the facts they would acknowledge 'the hermit isn't Turnip after all'. Again, which person qualifies as the *dominant* source of the information they associate with the name is determined entirely by how they would react to the discovery of the true situation.

The key question about this eclectic theory is whether it can account for reference change and also be distinguished from a sophisticated causal descriptivist theory (Kroon 1987[BIB-008]; Lewis 1997[BIB-009]: note 22). Descriptivists can allow that some of the descriptions associated with names in their reference-fixing clusters may employ causal vocabulary, e.g., 'the creator of such-and-such a work of art', or 'the causal origin of such-and-such uses of "N"'. They still count as descriptivists because they insist that the reference of a name is determined by (maybe weighted, majoritarian ((Kripke 1980[BIB-006]: 64–65, thesis (3)))) *fit* (satisfaction), and take the association of a cluster with a name to be a matter of its being believed (Kripke 1980[BIB-006]: 64–65) by the users of the name to be satisfied by the referent (or, at

least, the cluster's satisfaction by its referent not being something of which the users of the name are totally ignorant).

One way the eclectic theory might be distinct is by refusing a name a reference where a description theory (wrongly) assigns one. Evans envisages such a situation when he compares reference to perception and sketches the possibility of someone who is a perfect fit for all the descriptive information associated with a name in a community whilst being causally isolated from the community (1973~~:~~, 197–198). 'The absurdity~~,~~', he says,

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> that the denotation of our contemporary use of the name ‘‘Aristotle’’ could be some unknown (*n.b.*) item whose doings are causally isolated from our body of information is strictly parallel to the absurdity in supposing that one might be seeing something one has no causal contact with solely upon the ground that there is a splendid match between object and visual impression.
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But the case is hard to understand, for isn't the most important piece of information we have about Aristotle that he is the author of certain works, e.g., the *Nicomachean Ethics*~~2~~, and the causal origin of our contemporary use of that name? The case thus

does not provide any reason for distinguishing the eclectic theory from causal descriptivism.

The other way in which the eclectic theory might be in conflict with descriptivism is if it gives a different (correct) verdict on the reference of a name. Suppose that X is the causal source of the information associated with a name 'N', and another object Y is the object best fitting the descriptions (and X is in fact the reference). Will this not show the distinctness of the eclectic theory?

The difficulty, however, is that according to the eclectic theory its reference is not merely *a* source of the information associated with the name but the dominant source. Now the notion of dominance is explained entirely in terms of reactions to scenarios in which the facts are revealed. But then the notion can be applied independently of the eclectic theory. We can speak, in the same sense, of certain associated descriptions being dominant in determining the reference of a name (which is, I think, close to Kripke's idea ~~((~~1980[BIB-006]~~:~~, 64~~–~~65~~))~~ that a description theorist can allow that some descriptions can have more 'weight' than others, are more important in the 'vote'~~;~~ (see also Noonan 2013[BIB-010]~~:~~, 55)). But then the case we need to consider is one in which X is the dominant causal source of the information associated with 'N' and Y is the item which satisfies the dominant descriptions associated with the name. But if X is the *dominant* source, then Y is not the satisfier of the *dominant* descriptions associated with the name, since the reactions of users of the name would

be to agree, given knowledge of the facts, that Y is not N. And if Y is the satisfier of the dominant descriptions, then X is not the dominant causal source of information associated with the name since the reaction of the users of the name would be to say that X is not N. 'The dominant causal source' and 'the satisfier of the dominant descriptions' cannot come apart since what makes for dominance is the user's reactions and the user cannot react in incompatible ways at once.

It appears, then, that Evans has not provided a theory of naming which is both clearly distinct from any form of descriptivism (in particular, a form of causal descriptivism) and can account for reference change. We are therefore still left with the question whether any non-descriptivist theory of names can accommodate reference shift; in particular, inadvertent reference shift. What does seem clear is that any theory which can do so must incorporate the social dimension of name use.

4 Back to Kripke

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But, as we said before, given the modesty of Kripke's claims it is not clear how the possibility of inadvertent reference shifts can be thought of as a challenge to his own position. He does not claim to have a theory of reference or even a sufficient condition for reference preservation. So nothing he says is inconsistent with the proposition that in some cases, e.g., in the Madagascar case, such inadvertent reference shifts occur. It is straightforward to understand how writers after Kripke, such as Evans, who try to flesh out the anti-descriptivist picture into a theory, are

challenged by the Madagascar scenario. But it is not similarly straightforward to see how Kripke himself, who thinks that any *theory* of reference might well be subject to counter-example, and so refrains from formulating one, is so challenged. However, I think that there is a challenge to be put to Kripke, namely, to explain why the Gödel scenario he envisages is a successful counter-example to the description theory and reference has not changed so that Schmidt is not the reference of the name, while Madagascar (the island) is the reference of the name in the historical situation Evans describes so reference has changed. What is the difference?

The Gödel scenario (Kripke 1980[BIB-006]) is a situation in which Gödel, the man who in fact proved the incompleteness theorems, did not do so. He stole them from his friend Schmidt, and someone is told only 'Gödel is the author of the incompleteness theorems'.

The challenge to Kripke can be spelled out. The task is to explain why (1) 'Madagascar' is unambiguously used as the name of the island by later users who have received it from Marco Polo (directly or indirectly), despite the historical/causal connection to (a baptism of) part of the mainland, whilst, on the other hand, (2) the fictional Gödel case as Kripke envisages it is a counter-example to the description theory and Gödel is the reference of 'Gödel-' as employed by the user of the name even though he has *no* identifying description at all of Gödel, and believes that 'Gödel

is the author of the theorems' is true and so intends, when using the name, to be speaking of the author, who is, in fact Schmidt.

To be clear about this difficulty it is important to be clear that Kripke's position is that the fictional scenario he is considering (with details elaborated, of course), is a clear counter-example to the description theory, a clear case in which the user of the name both is ignorant of any descriptions identifying Gödel and associates with the name a wholly erroneous description or set of descriptions. He does not, then, think of Gödel as the man to whom the proof of the theorems is commonly attributed, nor does he think of Gödel as the person referred to by the name by those from whom he has acquired it, nor as the person referred to by the name as used previously by himself, nor as what the users of the name in his community use the name to refer to. All of these are descriptions the description theorist can appeal to.[1] But if we strip out of the case all these elements, as we must if the case is to be a candidate for a clear counter-example to the description theory, why is it that he is referring to Gödel rather than Schmidt, whereas the later users of 'Madagascar' are not referring to the part of the mainland, but to the island?

In his recent piece Burgess (2014[BIB-001]) makes a proposal in response to this question. The difference, he says, is that the user of 'Gödel' in the fictional scenario is not *acquainted* with Schmidt (he has just heard of the incompleteness theorems, though no one has shown him any proofs or told him anything about their authorship).

He now hears someone saying ‘Gödel is the author of the incompleteness theorems’ and so acquires the name ‘Gödel’ as a name for Gödel, though he has none of the Gödel-directed intentions listed above which would make it unclear that the case is a counter-example to the description theory. On the other hand, the users of ‘Madagascar’ after Marco Polo are *acquainted* directly or indirectly with the island and so, despite their intention to be faithful in their use of the name to those from whom they got it, when it is passed on to them it is for them a name of the island.

The problem with this proposal, I think, is that it neglects the insight in Evans’s remark that there are not two fundamentally different mechanisms involved in a word’s having a meaning, one bringing it about that the word acquires the meaning and another which operates to ensure that its meaning is preserved. The former process is operative all the time.

According to Kripke’s story (as noted above) the initial fixation of reference is in accord with the description theory. A name may be introduced for an object of acquaintance, but it need not be; its reference may be fixed by a description (a purely general description, a causal description employing causal vocabulary, a description containing an indexical, a metalinguistic description, or any combination thereof), or of course, a cluster of descriptions. So exactly the same may be true of the later uses of the name in which a new name-using practice is inadvertently created. It is not essential to the story of Madagascar that later users, who use the name to refer to the

island, are acquainted with it. What is essential is just that the descriptions they associate with the name that pick out the island are such that their intention to refer to the item satisfying them overrides, somehow, their intention to be faithful to the previous uses of the name they have encountered. And this can be so in the Gödel case too. What prevents it happening in the situation as we naturally imagine it, given Kripke's brief description, is precisely that all who acquire the name are, and think of themselves as being, members of an ongoing community of users of the name and intend to conform to the usage of one another. But this social context must be eliminated by stipulation, as Kripke assumes it is, if the Gödel scenario Kripke envisages is not to be easily dismissed as a counter-example to the description theory, for otherwise the user will have many alternative descriptions of Gödel available, e.g., 'the man under whose name the theorems were published' (Dummett 1973[BIB-003], 135–136) (and then the difference between the Gödel case and the Madagascar case is easily explained by the descriptivist by appeal to the idea of the dominant descriptions or the notion of weighted majoritarian fit). However, it is only this social context that makes it intelligible that, despite his ignorance and mistaken belief, the user of 'Gödel' Kripke envisages does not refer to Schmidt, but yet successfully refers when he uses the name. So the Gödel example cannot be coherently understood as a counter-example to the description theory. Hence Kripke cannot meet the challenge posed above. That is, he cannot explain both (1) why in fact 'Madagascar' undergoes

a change of reference and later is unambiguously only a name of the island and (2) why the fictional Gödel case is a counter-example to the description theory in which there is no change of reference. The significance of the Madagascar case for Kripke is thus that reflection on the difference between it and the putative Gödelian counter-example to the description theory brings out that the latter *cannot* in fact be intelligibly understood as a counter-example to the description theory at all.

Note

[1] Note that given Kripke's historical picture some uses of names are necessarily in accord with the description theory. Speaker intentions play two crucial roles in his story. There is an initial baptism in which the user intends the reference of the name to be fixed by a description. Then, when the name is passed on to a second user, he must intend to use it with the same reference as the first, and so on. Neither the baptiser's first use, governed by his baptismal intention, nor any subsequent user's first use governed by his deferential intention, can be a counter-example to the description theory. Counter-examples can only possibly emerge in subsequent uses of names by users.

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