

PHIL 332: Philosophy of Language  
Class 10: The Causal Theory of Names

1. A few classes ago we discussed four facts about names that are problematic for the Millian (i.e. direct reference) theory of names (as long as it is understood as a theory of the *meaning* of a name, not just of its reference).
2. There is another question about names: When a name refers to an object, why does it refer to that object and not some other? Why does 'George Bush' refer to that guy and not some other guy?
3. Descriptivists have a story to tell about this (but note: Russell would reject the question).
4. But direct reference theorists cannot give the same story. What should they say?
5. Kripke proposes the following causal-historical picture:
  - a. Person 1 uses the name *N* to refer to an object *a* by *baptizing a* with the name *N*. This is *reference fixing*.
  - b. The reference may be fixed by ostension ('Hesperus'). This requires standing in an appropriate causal relation to *a*.

It may also be fixed by description ('Neptune'). But the name does not thereby become synonymous with the description.

Kripke allows that reference fixing by ostension is a special case of reference fixing by description.
  - c. Person 1 can then go on to use the name *N* to refer to *a*.
  - d. Person 2 can use *N* to refer to *a* by having an appropriate intention: an intention to use *N* to refer to whatever it is that Person 1 uses *N* to refer to. This is *reference borrowing*. Example: overhearing in the pub (bar).
  - e. Person 3 can borrow from Person 1 or Person 2. And so on. This generates a chain of *reference preserving links*.
6. Issues:
  - a. Naming after
  - b. Santa Claus

- c. The imposter cat
  - d. Names for numbers and other abstract objects
  - e. Wagera Indians (Evans, p. 318)
  - f. Ambiguity
  - g. Change in reference: 'Madagascar', Evans's two babies
7. Evans ('The Causal Theory of Names', 1973) is most concerned about Kripke's version of the causal theory being unable to account for change in reference of a name.
  8. Evans: Suppose a speaker believes that there is a unique thing which is F, G, H, and so on, and intends to refer to it using the name N. Then what he actually refers to with N is the dominant causal source of this belief.
  9. Cases:
    - a. I deduce that there is a tallest man in the world and that he is over 6ft tall. I name him 'Bruce'. Evans allows that this might be accounted for by a description theory.
    - b. The inventors of a legend about 'Tony' should not count as the referent of 'Tony'.
    - c. If I believe that there is a guy who is F, G, H, ..., and call him 'Bill', then just because Ben was the cause of my believing that this guy is F (perhaps I saw Ben being F and thought it was this guy) it doesn't follow that I refer to Ben when I use 'Bill' – I refer to the dominant source of my belief about this guy.
    - d. If I keep mistaking Bill for this guy then perhaps 'Bill' will start to refer to this guy.
    - e. There can be *deferential* uses of names: Turnip.