Lecture 3
Elaborations on the Causal Account

1. **Review**

   Last week, we explored Kripke's (sketch of an) account of names—a causal-historical theory of names. On that theory the meaning of a name is given by its causal history; speaker's use of that name refers to some object in virtue of that use being connected by a chain of reference-preserving causal relations to the event in which the object was dubbed with that name.

   Twin Earth and Rigid Designation

   During our discussion of the Twin Earth argument, a question was raised concerning what role (if any) rigid designation had to play in that argument.

   Recall that this argument was Putnam's case for externalism about the meanings of at least some words in our language—i.e. for the claim that meanings are not 'just in the head'. For our purposes, we were interested in the possibility of externalism, since a causal account of names seems to require that what *I* mean by a name is at least in part determined by factors outside of my head.

   Now, the question that arose was this: won't the argument go through as long as it is the case that the meaning of some word is at least in part a function of its extension? In other words, isn't it the case that we do not need to suppose that (for instance) 'water' rigidly designates in order for it to turn out that two different speakers could mean two different things by 'water' even if their psychological states are the same?

   As it turns out, the answer is, **no**. Here's why…

   Putnam considers an objection to the claim that in 1750 and in (say) 1950 'water' had the same extension. For instance, you might want to say that in 1750 (before the chemical make-up of the substance we called 'water' was discovered) the extension of 'water' was 'the set of all things that matches the operational description of what we call "water"' (e.g. boils at 100 Celsius, falls from sky when it rains, etc). If this is the case, then Oscar and Twin Oscar, in 1750, mean exactly the same thing by 'water'. As a result, this case would fail to be an example of divergence in meaning despite sameness of psychological states.

   In response, Putnam argues that 'water' has a hidden indexical component. He argues that when I say something like 'This liquid is called water' of some liquid in a glass, say, I am doing something like giving an ostensive definition. He then maintains:

> "My 'ostensive definition' of water has the following empirical presupposition: that the body of liquid I am pointing to bears a certain sameness relation (say, *x is the same liquid as y*, or *x is the same$_L$ as y*) to most of the stuff I and other speakers in my community have on other occasions called 'water'." (1975: 225)

So, part of what it is to call something 'water' on this account is to say that it is the very same stuff as that which has been called 'water' by others in my linguistic community. And this is the case, whether I or anyone else in that linguistic community knows what exactly *that stuff* is. So, in 1750, a traveller from Earth might visit Twin Earth and say of Twin Earth-lakes that 'they are filled with water'. Here, it is not that the traveller means something different by 'water' than the traveller in 1950; instead it is that the 1750's traveller has mistakenly taken what they've seen on Twin Earth to fall under the *same$_L$* relation to what they've encountered on Earth.

In other words, in order for it to come out that Oscar and Twin Oscar *mean* two different things by 'water' even though they are in the same psychological states, it must also be the case that Oscar and (Oscar's 1950's descendant) Oscar 5.0 mean the same thing by 'water'. If Oscar only means 'the clear stuff we can drink' by 'water' then he and Twin Oscar will turn out to mean the same thing by 'water' in 1750. But if Oscar means 'any liquid that is the same$_L$ as *this stuff* ' by 'water', then he will turn out to mean something different from Twin Oscar.

Okay, so how does this involve rigid designation? Well, if 'water' has this indexical nature, if its extension ranges over everything that satisfies the 'same$_L$ as this stuff' relation, then 'water' could not have the same meaning and also refer to any stuff that fails to satisfy that relation. Thus, at all possible worlds, the extension of 'water' must satisfy this relation. Suppose there were some world where it did not, then there, 'water' would really just be a homophone of our word; it would have a distinct meaning.

2. **Gareth Evans on the Causal-Historical Account**
Evans rehearses the ideas—now familiar to us—that motivate the causal theory of names. He then raises some problems for Kripke's sketch of a theory.

Note: Kripke's account left many details out, so we needn't necessarily see these as objections or counterexamples to his account. Instead, we can understand these observations as helping to test the limits of a causal-historical account. This will facilitate giving a more precise causal account of names, as is Evans' eventual intention.

Failure of Sufficiency

One of the reasons the causal account of names was compelling was that it looks like we can successfully refer using a name even when we do not associate that name with any particular description.

To use Evans' example, suppose S is in a conversation with a group of people at the pub, and they begin speaking about some Louis. S might chime and say something like: 'What did Louis do then?'. In this case, it seems clear that S refers to the subject of the conversation with my use of 'Louis'. For reasons we've already covered, a descriptivist account will struggle to account for such a case. And a causal account looks to do much better.

However, the causal account as we've stated it so far will also lead to unintuitive results. Let's suppose that the people S was in conversation with at the pub were talking about Louis XIII. If being connected by the right kind of causal chain to a dubbing event *suffices* for the meaning of a name, then it will turn out that:

> at any future time, no matter how remote or forgotten the conversation, no matter how alien the subject matter [to S] and confused the speaker, S will denote one particular Frenchman— […]Louis XIII—so long as there is a causal connexion between his use at that time and the long distant conversation. (192)

This, Evans argues, is highly unintuitive. And yet, it resulted from a very intuitive thought about S's ability to refer in the original conversation at the pub.

Diagnosis

According to Evans, the reason for this is that, the causal account (as stated) "ignores the importance of surrounding context" (193).

Failure of Necessity

There appear to be cases where we can successfully refer with a name *without* our use of that name standing in the right kind of causal connection to the relevant dubbing event.

Evans offers an example of a naming convention on which "newly born children receive the names of deceased members of their family according to fixed rules" (195). In this case, or indeed any case where naming conventions obey a set of rules such that one could deduce the name of an individual or object "without any causal connexion whatever with the use by others of that name" (195).

(NOTE: The dubbing and the deduced use of the name may be related as *effects of a common cause*—namely, the rules of the relevant naming convention—but this is not the right kind of causal connection. The causal account required that subsequent uses of a name be linked by a chain that *began* with the relevant dubbing event.)

Diagnosis
The speaker's role (perhaps their intention when speaking) is left out of the causal account.

Changes of Reference
These are cases of the 'switching' sort that we discussed briefly last week. Recall in that case, two different children were named ('dubbed') by their parents, and then swapped post-naming. Intuitively, the names at some point cease to refer to the child dubbed, and begin to refer to the swapped child. But the causal chain to the dubbing event remains, so it seems the causal account cannot accommodate changes of reference like this.

Diagnosis
Again, it seems that the causal account gets this case wrong because it ignores the role that a speaker's intention plays in determining what a name denotes.

Evans argues that descriptivist theories are in part motivated by a sensitivity to the importance of that to which the speaker intends to refer by the use of a name. However, *that* theory goes awry because of a lack of sensitivity to the importance of the right kind of causal connection.

On the other hand, causal theories err in the other direction.

Thus, Evans argues that we need an account of names that marries the two considerations. As he puts it:

> We must allow then that the denotation of a name in the community
> will depend in a complicated way upon what those who use the term
> intend to refer to, but we will so understand 'intended referent' that
> typically a *necessary* (but not sufficient) condition for *x*'s being the
> intended referent of *S*'s use of a name is that *x* should be the source
> of causal origin of the body of information that *S* has associated with
> the name. (198, original emphasis)

3. **Evans' Positive Account**

As just stated, Evans maintains that a combination of the insights from the descriptive and causal accounts of names will yield at least the *start* of an adequate account of names. Like Kripke, Evans makes clear that he is not purporting to offer a *complete* account. His positive proposal will simply avoid the problems that arose for traditional descriptivism and causal accounts.

He states his account thus (202):

A name 'NN' is the name of *x* if there is a community C…

1) in which the members of C use 'NN' to refer to *x*
2) it is common knowledge among the members of C that 'NN' is used to refer to *x*
3) on any given occasion of use, 'NN' successfully refers to *x* because of the knowledge in 2) (and not because of common knowledge of the satisfaction by *x* of some predicate embedded in 'NN')

To what extent does this incorporate the causal and descriptive accounts?

Well, concerning the causal account, elements of this view are built into the understanding of 1). Evans suggests in his 'Turnip' example that in order for members of C use 'NN' to refer to *x* it is necessary that *x* be the **dominant source** of information associated with 'NN'.

Consider the 'Turnip' case:

Suppose a youth, *A*, has the nickname 'Turnip'. *A* leaves their village while still young. Fifty years later, a distinct person *B* arrives in the village and lives as a hermit. There are a few elders in the village who remember *A* and mistakenly believe the hermit to be *A* having returned. As such they begin to call *B* 'Turnip'. Then, the younger residents of the village pick up the elders' use of this name, and start to call *B* 'Turnip' as well. Finally, the elders of the village die off; all those who continue to use the name use it to refer to *B*.

The question is, at the end of the story, to whom does 'Turnip' refer? On the Kripke-style causal account, it would refer to *A* (because the use is causally connected to *A*'s getting their nickname). On the descriptivist account, it would refer to *B* (because the name is now associated with the description 'the hermit who lives in the village').

On Evans' own account, he explains, the answer will depend on how you fill in the details:

If the elders didn't pass on much information at all about *A*, then 'Turnip' (at the end of the story) refers to *B* since *B* is the dominant source of information associated with 'Turnip' for the young villagers.

On the other hand, if the elders passed on enough information about *A*—information that is sufficiently "rich, coherent and important to [the young villagers]" (206)—then 'Turnip' (at the end of the story) refers to *A* as *A* would be the dominant source of information associated with the name. In this case, if they eventually came to learn that *B*, and not *A*, is the hermit "they too would acknowledge 'That man [i.e. the hermit] isn't Turnip after all'" (207).

Okay, now to what extent is the account descriptivist? Consider 1) again. We were just discussing the relevance of the *source* of information. It is the fact that *information* matters that makes the account descriptivist in nature as well as causal. Mere connection with a referent will not suffice (as the 'Turnip' case showed). Reference also requires that a **body of information** is associated with the use of that name.

In short, that a body of information is relevant is a **descriptivist** feature. And that bodies of information are individuated by their **source** is a causal feature.