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Lecture 2 The Causal-Historical Account

1. Review

Problems for descriptivism:

- (1) Problems arising from entailment. The descriptive account had highly unintuitive consequences for what sentences including names entail.
- (2) Ambiguity and disagreement. On the descriptive account, sentences that look contradictory fail to be so when the speakers know some subject under two different descriptions.
- (3) Modal objection. Names have different modal profiles to descriptions. Therefore, the latter cannot be substituted into all sentences containing the former *salva veritate*.
- (4) Epistemic objection. On descriptivism, some sentences that are knowable a priori are equivalent in meaning to sentences that are *not* knowable a priori.
- (5) Semantic objection. It seems like we can successfully refer, even when we know the subject under a false description; but descriptivism precludes this.
- **(6)** Fictional entities. It looks like we can make true claims about fictional things. But if sentences with names are quantified sentences, then all claims about fictional things are false.

2. Kripke's Causal-Historical Account

Someone, let's say, a baby, is born; his parents call him by a certain name. They talk about him to their friends. Other people meet him. Through various sorts of talk the name is spread from link to link as if by a chain (Kripke 1980: 91)

- There is an initial naming or dubbing event.
- Each subsequent use of the relevant name refers to the named object when
 - it is linked by a (causal) "chain of communication" to that dubbing event
 - and when the speaker intends to use that name with the same reference as the source from which they learned it

Advantages over descriptivism:

- (1) Problems arising from entailment. On the causal-historical account, names are not equivalent in meaning to a description. So sentences do not entail unrelated parts of the description corresponding to the name.
- (2) Ambiguity and disagreement. On a causal-historical account, as long as both speakers can trace a causal chain back to the *same* dubbing event, then they can successfully disagree.
- (3) Modal objection. This objection to descriptivism arose because they identify the meaning of a name with the meaning of a description. Since the causal account does not do this, modal divergence cannot occur.

(4) Epistemic objection. Same as (3), mutatis mutandis.

(5) Semantic objection. Same as (3), mutatis mutandis.

Related problem: Unusual causal chains, like *changes of reference*.

E.g. Suppose x and y are two different babies. The parents of x name their child 'Flopsy' and the parents of y name their child 'Mopsy'. Now suppose that the two babies get switched so that, unbeknownst to them, the parents of x take y home, and vice versa. What does the following mean?

'Flopsy is so big now!'

(6) Fictional entities. The causal account can explain the meaning of fictional names by identifying a kind of quasi-dubbing event such as the creation of a character in the writing of a play.

Solution to the puzzle of identity statements:

Different names have different meanings in virtue of having **different causal histories**. So identity statements with two different names are not tautologous.

3. Putnam on Meaning

Twin Earth Argument

- On Earth, the stuff we call 'water' is **H**₂**O**.
- On Twin Earth, there is a liquid that speakers call 'water'
 - That liquid is indistinguishable in almost every way from H₂O.
 - That liquid is made of different stuff—call this stuff 'XYZ'.

Note: for the rest of the argument to work, we must grant (with Putnam) that XYZ *is not water*.

- On Twin Earth, the word 'water' means XYZ.
- On Earth, the word 'water' means H₂O.

IA Meaning/IB Logic Causal Theory of Names

Imagine two individuals who live in 1750 (i.e. some time before the chemical make-up of water was discovered).

Suppose that Oscar lives on Earth and speaks English.

Suppose that TwinOscar lives on Twin Earth and speaks Twinglish.

Oscar and TwinOscar have all **the same beliefs** about the stuff they each call 'water'. (e.g. they both believe 'water' to identify the stuff that falls when it rains, that fills the oceans, etc.)

The *stuff* picked out by 'water' in English and Twinglish was exactly **the same in 1750** as it is now. (I.e. H₂O in English, and XYZ in Twinglish)

Therefore: Oscar and TwinOscar each meant something different when they uttered 'water' even though what was "in their heads" was the same. So, **meaning is not (just) in the head**.

Relevance to the names debate:

This argument provides one reason for thinking what I mean when I speak can at least sometimes depend on what the world is like.

If Putnam is right, it is at least the case that whenever a term or name is a **rigid designator** the meaning of that term or name will depend on what the world is like outside of the speaker.