

## Lecture 4

### **Against Evans: Dickie on Causal Sources**

#### **1. Review**

Last week we looked at Evans' arguments against Kripke's **causal historical** account of names. Evans presented two kinds of counterexample to Kripke's theory: the first sort arising from rule-governed naming conventions, and the second sort arising from cases of reference change. Evans then sketched a new positive account proper names which also appealed to causal relations.

Today, we'll look at Imogen Dickie's (2011) arguments against Evans, and her theory of proper names which is also informed by the thought that motivated the causal account. Namely: that an appropriate connection to the intended referent is necessary for an adequate theory of names.

#### **2. Clarifying the Question**

Dickie begins by distinguishing between two separate questions that we can ask about proper names as philosophers of language:

- (1) **Reference-Fixing Question:** "How is it determined which object (if any) is the bearer of a proper name as used by a community of speakers?" (43)
- (2) **Formal Semantic Question:** "How should a proper name be treated by a semantic theory for our language (a theory stating how a sentence's truth conditions depend on contributions made by its parts)?" (45)

She clarifies that she means to answer the first of these and not the second. She does not deny that these questions may bear some relation to one another; she merely asserts that it is possible to answer one without taking a stand on the other. For instance, consider the Millian semantics of names (on which, if an object  $o$  is the bearer of a name  $a$ , then  $o$  is the semantic value of  $a$ ); Dickie points out that this view assumes that there is some reference-fixing relation, but does not specify what that is.

She then describes the three accounts of names (i.e. reference fixing) that we have discussed so far. I recommend looking at her statements of the description-cluster view (what she calls "The Sophisticated Description Theory of Reference Fixing") and the causal-historical view (what she calls "The Causal Inheritance Theory of Reference Fixing") (on 46 and 47 respectively).

Her account of Evans is also very helpfully clear, and includes some of Evans' later modifications to the view we looked at last time. For these reasons, I'll rehearse it here.

She uses the analogy of a **filing system** to describe Evans' account (this is an analogy Dickie draws from Evans himself). On this picture, our beliefs are the files in the system, and proper names are labels on the files.

*Each file is a cluster of information that the speaker takes to be about a single thing. A name plays a label-like role in determining how information entering the filing system is processed. For example, all the information I receive in the form of sentences containing the name 'George W. Bush' is sent to my 'George W. Bush' file. A name's bearer (if it has one) is the object (if there is one) that the file of beliefs the name labels is about. (49)*

From here, Evans' view is that the relation between an object and some particular file (or the information therein) must be a causal one. As Dickie explains, "a name's bearer (if it has one) is the dominant causal source of the information the associated files contain" (49).

We witnessed the advantages of this account last week. But as you might expect, Dickie raises some objections to the view.

### 3. **Counterexamples to Evans**

One question that immediately arises about Evans' view concerns **causal sources**. What does it take for some object to be a causal source of a set of information? What does this relation consist in?

#### **Reliabilist Account of 'Causal Source'**

Dickie describes Evans' 1973 explanation of causal sources as a **reliabilist** account, since Evans refers to **aptitude** for producing knowledge. She states the position thus:

**Reliabilism:** "o is the 'causal source' of the belief S would express by saying 'a is F' if and only if the belief is caused by S's standing in a relation to o of a type such that, in general, standing in this relation to a thing puts you in a position to know that the thing is F" (50)

She then argues that this won't work because sometimes we can successfully refer to some *o* even when we stand in the wrong kind of relation to *o* for knowledge-production. Consider the following case:

**Astrologer:**

*It is a time of faith in astrology. An astrologer makes a series of predictions about a small child: 'She will free us from tyranny', 'She will build a great city', and so on. These predictions are widely disseminated, and are accepted by whoever hears them. Other details about the child ('She is two feet tall', 'She is the child of X and Y') are left behind as irrelevant to the prophecy. In this way, many speakers in the community end up with files labelled by the child's name and containing only information derived from the astrologer's predictions. (51)*

Intuitively, when members of this community use this child's name—'Clare', say—that name refers to *her*—the child. But, the astrologers are not good sources of information; forming beliefs on the basis of an astrologer's pronouncements is not a reliable belief-forming method. But since the speakers in the community stand in a relation to the child that is *unreliable* for producing knowledge, it follows from the reliabilist account of causal sources that the child is not the dominant causal source of information for 'Clare'. That much seems acceptable. But on Evans' causal account of proper names, if the child is not the dominant causal source of information for 'Clare', then 'Clare' does not refer to the child.

**Producer-Consumer Account of 'Causal Source'**

This view—from Evans (1982)—is slightly more complicated than the previous. It involves a bit of new terminology.

**Producer:** A speaker *S* is a *producer* with respect to the practice of using a name *a* to refer to an object *o* iff *S* "knows *o* as *a*". And *S* knows *o* as *a* iff

*S* has a specific kind of rapport with *o*, where the use of *a* forms part of this rapport: *S* has the capacity to identify *o* demonstratively and reidentify *o* after breaks in observation; *S* exercises this capacity from time to time; *S* uses *a* in storing information gained by interactions with *o*, keeping this information in a file on which *a* is the label; if *o* is a person or animal, *S* may use *a* in addressing *o*; and *S* is very likely to use *a* in transmitting information about *o* to others. (52)

**Consumer:** A speaker *S* is a (participating) *consumer* with respect to the practice of using a name *a* to refer to an object *o* iff *S* “does not know *o* as *a*, but *S* does have an *a*-file that stands in an appropriate (reference-fixing) relation to *o*” (52), where the appropriate relation is one such that the information in *S*’s *a*-file is “dominantly derived from the contents of the *a*-files” (52) of *producers*.

Dickie also defines a distinct notion of a **parasitic consumer**. This is a speaker who uses *a* to refer to *o* but does not have any associated *a*-file.

With these terms to hand, we can now state Evans’ producer-consumer account of causal sources:

**Producer-Consumer:** “*o* is the bearer of my uses of *a* if and only if I am either a producer, a participating consumer, or a parasitic consumer in a practice of using *a* to refer to *o*” (53).

Since reliabilism plays no role in this new account of a causal source, it is not vulnerable to counterexamples like Astrologer. Nevertheless, a connection to the object is preserved in the distinct kind of rapport that producers must bear to the relevant object.

This view seems more promising, but Dickie argues that it is neither necessary nor sufficient for reference fixing.

Against the **necessity** of Producer-Consumer, Dickie argues that there seem to be cases where our *a*-file isn’t at all informed by the *a*-files of producers, and yet we are still (intuitively) able to refer to the same object as the relevant producers. Consider:

**Chaucer:**

*Chaucer lived from about 1343 to 1400. He was well known in his lifetime. But in the centuries after his death, for reasons to do with the invention of the printing press and Henry VIII's desire to create an English national literature, the pool of claims made using Chaucer's name became flooded with invented attributions of literary works to him, and fabrications about his life, ancestry, place of birth, and so on. As a result of this flood of invention, there was a period of several hundred years (ending with the 'purging of the apocrypha' in the nineteenth century) during which even Chaucer experts had 'Chaucer' files most of the information in which was derived from fabrications made long after Chaucer's death. (53-4)*

Arguably, people using the name 'Chaucer' after his death but before the purging of the apocrypha were referring to the same person that, say, Chaucer's contemporaries were when they used his name. But, the former speakers had 'Chaucer'-files populated by information that was not at all derived from those of the speakers who knew Chaucer as 'Chaucer' (i.e. the producers). Thus, if our intuition is right, then Producer-Consumer is not necessary for reference-fixing.

Against the **sufficiency** of Producer-Consumer, Dickie argues that sometimes we can fail to refer to an object even when our *a*-file is appropriately informed by the *a*-files of the relevant producers. Sometimes we misinterpret the information we receive. Consider:

**Rio Ferdinand:**

*During a conversation about football teams and players, somebody tells me that Rio Ferdinand is based in Leeds and plays in a white strip. This is the first time I have heard the name 'Rio Ferdinand'. For no very good reason, I assume that 'Rio Ferdinand' is a name for a team (rather than a player). I follow news stories expressed using 'Rio Ferdinand', and after some years I have quite a rich 'Rio Ferdinand' file formed by incorporating what I pick up from various news sources in a way consistent with my belief that Rio Ferdinand is a football team. So, for example, my file contains the beliefs I would express by saying 'Rio Ferdinand is moving to Manchester', 'Rio Ferdinand scored two goals on Saturday', 'Some of Rio Ferdinand were in London at noon on Friday and some were in Glasgow', 'Two thirds of Rio Ferdinand are vegetarian', 'Rio Ferdinand might merge with Crystal Palace'. (54-5)*

Here, the speaker's 'Ferdinand'-file is full of information that is appropriately related to the information in the producers' 'Ferdinand'-files. And yet, it intuitively seems like the speaker in the case is just using 'Rio Ferdinand' differently; they don't seem to be using it to refer to the footballer. But, on the Producer-Consumer view of causal sources, Rio Ferdinand is the dominant causal source of the speaker's beliefs, so they do in fact refer to him when they use 'Rio Ferdinand'.

Dickie argues that the reason Evans' account goes wrong in these ways is that it assumes that, successful use of a name (or participation in some name-using practice) should be defined in terms of having information **from** or **of** the relevant object. The counterexamples show that, even when that relationship between information and object is disrupted, we can still sometimes successfully participate in a name-using practice.

#### 4. Dickie's Governance View of Reference-Fixing

Dickie proposes a view where we understand reference-fixing in broadly the following terms:

**Governance:** "A speaker *S*'s uses of *a* refer to *o* only if they are governed by *o*'s possible behaviour." (59)

The idea is that name-practices are "model-building tasks" (63). In various uses of *a*, we are building a model of *o*'s actual and possible behaviours—what Dickie calls a **narrative**—and associating that model with a name *a*. Why *possible* behaviours? This is what allows for successful reference-fixing even when speakers are in error about *o*.

Using the same definitions of producers and consumers from above, Dickie defines the following notion:

**Information Channel:** There is an information channel between two speakers iff there is a chain of speakers connecting them such that each speaker inherits information expressed using *a* from their predecessor and passes information expressed using *a* to their successor.

Speakers in the name-using practice pass information this way, but that only counts transmitting the practice if what is transmitted is governed by *o*'s possible behaviour. Through the network of information channels in a community of speakers, the community collectively builds a narrative associated with *a*.

Also, since the Governance view includes the concepts of producers and consumers, the theory also preserves the idea that somewhere along the line, there must have been someone who stood in the right kind of relation to *o*—someone who had a rapport with *o* like that described above.

Now consider the counterexamples to Evans' view. Since there is no reliability requirement in this view, the Astrologer case poses no threat. Concerning the Rio Ferdinand case, on the Governance view we can say that what has gone wrong is that the speaker's use of 'Rio Ferdinand' is not governed by the possible behaviour of people. It's governed by the possible behaviour of *sports teams*.