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Lecture 4 Against Evans: Dickie on Causal Sources

1. <u>Review</u>

2. Clarifying the Question

Dickie (2011) begins by distinguishing between two separate questions that we can ask about proper names as philosophers of language:

- 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.

Evans' View

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) IA Meaning/IB Logic Causal Theory of Names

The relation between an object and some particular file (or the information therein) must be a causal one: "a name's bearer (if it has one) is the dominant causal source of the information the associated files contain" (49).

3. Counterexamples to Evans

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'

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)

Problem 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)

- Forming beliefs on the basis of an astrologer's pronouncements is not a reliable belief-forming method.
 - So speakers in the community stand in a relation to the child that is *unreliable* for producing knowledge
 - Thus, the child is not the dominant causal source of information

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Producer-Consumer Account of 'Causal Source'

Some preliminary 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.

The view...

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).

Dickie: This neither necessary nor sufficient for reference fixing.

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Against necessity: There are 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.

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)

Against sufficiency: 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.

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. [E.g.] '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)

- The speaker's 'Ferdinand'-file is full of information that is appropriately related to the information in the producers' 'Ferdinand'-files.
 - But they don't seem to be using it to refer to the footballer.

Dickie's Diagnosis: Evans' account goes wrong because 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.

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-using practices are "model-building tasks" (63).

- In various uses of *a*, we are building a model of *o*'s actual and possible behaviours—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*.

More terminology...

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.

NOTE: Passing information on these channels only counts transmitting the name-using practice **if what is transmitted is governed by** *o*'s **possible behaviour**.

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Connection with the object? The Governance view includes the concepts of producers and consumers, and producers must have the right kind of rapport with *o* (as defined earlier)

Governance, more precisely: My use of *a* refers to *o* iff

(i) I am a producer in a practice referring to o

- (ii) There is an information channel (or network of channels) connecting me to a producer in the practice, and the channel transmits governance. (I.e. it is one such that the information passed respects o's possible behaviours.)
- (iii) I am a parasitic consumer in the practice of using *a* to refer to *o*.

Consider the counterexamples to Evans' view.

- **Astrologer**: Since there is no reliability requirement in this view, the Astrologer case poses no threat.
- Rio Ferdinand: 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*.