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REFERENCE, CONTEXT,
AND
PROPOSITIONS



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Declaration

Except where otherwise acknowledged,
this thesis is my own work.

K. J. Day

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Kai Yee Wong
Canberra 1990

Abstract

This thesis is a detailed investigation of a web of philosophical problems surrounding what I call *Kripke's Thesis*: if proper names are directly referential then such identity statements as 'Hesperus is Phosphorus', which are constructed from two distinct but co-referential proper names, are necessary and yet *a posteriori*.

Chapter 1 clarifies some confusions surrounding Kripke's view about rigidity (rigid designation) and his theory of naming. Problems concerning the scope interpretation of rigidity, rigid descriptions, and Kaplan-rigidity are dealt with. My major claim is that the fundamental notion of Kripke's theory of naming is *direct reference*, not rigidity.

In Chapter 2, I first establish the 'modal half' of Kripke's Thesis. Then an objection against Kripke's Thesis is presented. The central claim of the objection is this: given that proper names are directly referential and that the proposition expressed by (e.g.) 'Hesperus is Hesperus' is *a priori*, 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' expresses the same *proposition* as 'Hesperus is Hesperus', and is therefore *a priori*. An attempt, based on a suggestion by Plantinga, to defend Kripke's Thesis is shown to be unsuccessful.

In Chapter 3, it is first noted that the objection previously presented involves the assumption (T): '*a priori*' applies primarily to propositions and derivatively to sentences. Then, on the basis of Stalnaker's semantic apparatus of *propositional concepts*, a two-dimensional account of *a priority* is developed. By rejecting (T) and embracing a sentence-relative view of '*a priori* propositions', this account provides a defence of Kripke's Thesis. It is argued that this is not an *ad hoc* defence.

In Chapter 4, attention turns to some problems concerning *context dependence*, a central feature of the two-dimensional account proposed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 starts with the observation that the account seems to be committed to an indexical treatment of proper names. This prompts a demonstration of the compatibility of indexicality and rigidity. The demonstration, drawing on Kaplan's semantics for indexicals, introduces, however, the more serious problem of how to square the purported indexicality of proper names, as revealed by the two-dimensional account, with Kaplan's

contention that proper names have a stable *character*. A solution which invokes the notion of *frame relativity* is proposed.

The first section of Chapter 5 aims to clarify the intricate relation between 'singular propositions' and 'direct reference'. The rest of the chapter is a detailed analysis of Salmon's attempt to refute Kripke's Thesis. It is argued that Salmon's attempt fails, and that the source of his failure lies in his characterization of *a priority*. Some objections to this analysis are considered and rejected.

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Preface

This thesis is a study of some problems in recent philosophy of semantics, with special reference to the work of Saul Kripke and David Kaplan. In his classic article, 'Naming and Necessity' (1972) Saul Kripke claims that, given his view on reference, such identity statements as 'Hesperus is Phosphorus', which are constructed from two distinct but co-referential proper names, are examples of necessary *a posteriori* truths. I shall call this *Kripke's Thesis* (or *the Thesis*, for short). In this work, I attempt to defend this thesis by scrutinizing a web of philosophical problems surrounding it. I also hope that, by doing so, some issues arising from what is commonly called *the theory of direct reference*, of which Kripke and Kaplan are two of the major exponents, will also be clarified.

Kripke has advanced two other theses concerning the necessary *a posteriori*. One involves natural kind terms (i.e., species names like 'water', 'cat' and mass terms like 'water'), and the other has to do with theoretical identifications involving certain terms for natural phenomena (e.g., 'Heat is molecular motion'). And, according to some interpretations of 'Naming and Necessity', there is another thesis, which has to do with Kripke's view on the essentiality of origin. When I started my research in 1986, I believed that, compared with these other theses, Kripke's Thesis was much less problematic and was therefore an "easy case" of the necessary *a posteriori*. My reason was this: Kripke had already argued forcefully that, given his views on reference, a

proper name designates rigidly (that is, it designates the same object with respect to every possible world). From this, and given the way identity is handled in the orthodox-Kripkean semantics for modal logic, it follows that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus', if true, is necessarily true. Hence we obtain the 'modal-half' of Kripke's Thesis. And it would seem that nobody would argue against the other half, namely that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is *a posteriori*.

So I set myself the task of tackling the "difficult theses". I started by writing on the "easy case", only to get it out of the way. But soon I became intrigued by the following observation: while many discussions of and debates on Kripke's Thesis are couched in terms of propositions, there is in 'Naming and Necessity' neither an official doctrine concerning propositions nor any employment of the apparatus of propositions; on the other hand, however, talking in terms of propositions seems to allow one to construct a general and forceful argument against the Thesis that undoubtedly deserves serious consideration. This prompted me to study the argument more closely, and the more I studied the argument, the more I came to believe that Kripke's Thesis was by no means an easy case, as I had earlier thought.

I therefore decided to turn back and give closer study to the Thesis, no longer considering it an easy thesis, but rather a fundamental one concerning the necessary *a posteriori*. I started by setting out what I thought was the strongest version of the 'propositions-argument' against the Thesis. The central line of reasoning of this argument is as follows: given the Kripkean view on reference, and the unexceptional assumption that *the proposition* expressed by 'Hesperus is Hesperus' is *a priori*, it can be argued that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is also *a priori*, on the grounds that the Kripkean view on reference *entails* that 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' and 'Hesperus is Hesperus' express the same proposition.

I was convinced that, in order to examine fruitfully and thoroughly this argument, it was necessary to put it in the context of some account of

propositions. I considered, of course, the classical-Fregean account, which is widely regarded as *the* account of propositions in contemporary analytic philosophy, especially when propositions are thought of as structured entities. Given the anti-Fregeanism in Kripke's theory of reference, however, I suspected that choosing the classical-Fregean account of propositions would be question-begging and thus methodologically unsound, even though some theorists who objected to the Thesis by employing some version of the 'propositions-argument' appear to have assumed, in one way or another, a classical-Fregean account. And as we see in the thesis, combining this argument with a Fregean account of propositions, or some of its doctrines, is a main flaw in these objections.

I thought, therefore, that it would be a good strategy to work within a possible-worlds account of propositions, which is a product of the contemporary possible-worlds semantics for modal logic and is due in large part to the work of Kripke. Among the works on possible-worlds semantics I consulted were Robert Stalnaker's on semantics and logical pragmatics. Inspired by some ideas in his work, as well as by an observation of Keith Donnellan's, I developed a two-dimensional sentence-relative account of *a priori* propositions. I believed that this account would give an explanation of the possibility of necessary *a posteriori* statements and would also undermine the 'propositions-argument' by rejecting its underlying assumption.

A central feature of this account is its employment of the Stalnakerian apparatus of 'propositional concepts', which involves the notion of a context-world. To substantiate this account, I found that I had to clarify some problems arising from the use of this apparatus and the notion of context dependence in general. In connection with this, I had long been puzzled by the question of how to square my account with Kaplan's contention that proper names have what he calls a stable *character*, which is a central notion in Kaplan's indexical semantics, and which bears some significant similarity to the notion of a propositional

concept. The more I studied this question, the more I came to appreciate its subtlety and its bearing on an important feature (which I later called 'frame relativity', after Harry Deutsch) of the semantics of proper names and reference-fixing. Thus I decided that some work on context dependence should be an integral part of my project.

While I was working on the topics just mentioned, I was at the same time puzzled by the position that Nathan Salmon holds in *Frege's Puzzle* (1986) concerning the Thesis. In this book, Salmon objects to Kripke's Thesis. His argument allegedly derives most of its force from his 'unorthodox conception' (vis-a-vis the Fregean orthodoxy) of propositions, according to which some propositions are *singular propositions*, that is, structured entities in which the only thing contributed by a proper name is the named individual. I found his position puzzling because I had come to believe by then that this conception should be the most congenial conception of propositions for those who hold the theory of direct reference, which Kripke and others pioneered. If this is correct, shouldn't one expect Salmon, a staunch proponent of *singular propositions* and the theory of direct reference, to be an upholder of the Thesis, or at least a sympathizer, rather than a critic? Besides, the heart of Salmon's book is a most advanced theory of semantic values in the new tradition of the theory of direct reference; so his criticism, presumably deriving from such a theory, is a serious matter for anyone concerned with Kripke's Thesis.

Accordingly, after examining Kripke's Thesis in the context of an unstructured (possible-worlds) account of propositions and finding that it withstood the challenge from the 'propositions-argument', I turned to the project of examining it in the context of a structured account of propositions. I became convinced of two things. The first was that Salmon's argument was but another version of the 'propositions-argument' involving the assumption rejected by my account. Second, and more significantly, I saw that Salmon cannot coherently hold that assumption, given his unorthodox conception of

propositions and his account of *ways of grasping a proposition*. Thus I believed that I knew how best to refute Salmon's argument, and also that such a refutation must be another integral part of my project.

The general structure of this thesis is more or less a reflection of the development of my views as outlined above. But instead of beginning by discussing directly Kripke's Thesis, in Chapter 1 I undertake to clarify some problems concerning the interpretation of Kripke's views on naming and reference, particularly those concerning *rigidity (rigid designation)*. Rigidity has received a great deal of philosophical attention since Kripke drew the distinction between rigid and non-rigid designators. But there are still many confusions surrounding it. I attempt to dispel some of these confusions, particularly those concerning the place of rigidity in Kripke's theory of naming. I argue that, contrary to what has been suggested by many readings of 'Naming and Necessity', Kripke's theory takes not rigidity, but rather *direct referentiality* as the fundamental trait of proper names.

In light of the discussion in Chapter 1, I establish, in the beginning of Chapter 2, the modal half of Kripke's Thesis, namely that, given that proper names are directly referential, 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is a necessary truth. Then I introduce the 'propositions-argument' objection to Kripke's Thesis. The central claim of this objection is first formulated in terms of substitutivity of co-referential proper names, and then reformulated with reference to the epistemic status (*a priori, a posteriori*) of the *propositions* expressed by 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' and 'Hesperus is Hesperus'. To consolidate the objection, the 'two-propositions argument', as I refer to it, is advanced in order to forestall a possible line of response to the objection deriving from a suggestion by Alvin Plantinga.

The 'propositions-argument' is underpinned by an assumption that I call (T). According to (T), '*a posteriori*' and '*a priori*' apply primarily to propositions and only derivatively to sentences. But a recent brief remark made by

Donnellan, which suggested that '*a posteriori*' and '*a priori*' are *sentence sensitive*, casts doubt upon this assumption. Taking seriously Donnellan's observation and inspired by Stalnaker's treatment of 'it is *a priori* that' as a two-dimensional sentential operator, I develop, in Chapter 3, a two dimensional sentence-sensitive account of '*a priori* propositions'. This account draws on Stalnaker's notion of a propositional concept and exploits the idea of a possible world playing the role of context for an utterance. This account rejects (T) and thus gives an explanation of the possibility of necessary *a posteriori* propositions.

Chapter 4 takes up some problems that must be addressed if the two-dimensional account is to be taken seriously. The major concern of the Chapter is the concept of context dependence, which is fundamental to the two-dimensional account. This chapter addresses two questions. The first one concerns the compatibility of indexicality and rigidity. It arises from a central feature of the apparatus of propositional concepts employed by the two-dimensional account: that a proper name is regarded as capable of referring to different objects with respect to different context-*worlds*. This seems to suggest that the account treats proper names as some sort of indexicals whose reference may vary across possible worlds. Is this compatible with the Kripkean doctrine about the rigidity of proper names? My answer is positive. I argue that indexicality and rigidity are compatible. I draw heavily on some recent studies in formal semantics and particularly Kaplan's double-index semantics for indexicals. However, another, even more serious problem arises from this very attempt to solve the first problem by invoking the Kaplanian treatment of indexicals. On the one hand, according to Kaplan's semantic scheme, proper names are not indexicals, but, on the other hand, proper names, according to the two-dimensional account I have expounded, exhibit some kind of context dependence. How do we come to terms with these two seemingly opposed

observations? I answer this question by arguing that the purported context dependence of proper names can be explained in terms of *frame relativity*.

Chapter 5 is concerned with singular propositions. I aim to do two things. First, I attempt to make clear the exact link between 'singular propositions' and 'direct reference', since discussions in recent literature tend to run the two notions together. In doing so, I also look closely at the classical-Fregean conception of general propositions. This provides a useful foil for a detailed examination of Salmon's attempt to refute Kripke's Thesis, which is the second aim of the chapter. I argue that Salmon's attempt fails and that the source of his failure lies in his characterization of *a priority*. Some possible objections to my criticism are also considered and rejected.

There is an appendix to Chapter 5. After this work was finalized, I had the opportunity of seeing Salmon's very recent reply to an earlier and simpler version of my criticism in Chapter 5. In this appendix I comment on the main points of Salmon's reply.

A word on the format of the thesis. The thesis is divided into chapters. Each chapter is divided into sections, most of which are further divided into subsections. So there are two levels of section headings. Sections are numbered with Arabic numbers, e.g. 1, 2, 3, etc.; subsections are numbered decimally, e.g. 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, etc. For cross-reference, I use '\$' for both sections and subsections. For example, '\$4' and '\$3.1' read 'Section 4' and 'Subsection 3.1' respectively. More often than not, I divide a subsection (or a section without subsections) into parts, using bracketed numbers, such as [1], [2], and [3], without headings. I use them quite freely to break up a long discussion so as to facilitate understanding.