# The Philosophy of Language
### Lecture Four

# Kripke against Descriptivism

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# Kripke against Descriptivism

## Re-Cap: Frege versus Russell

- Frege distinguished between the **reference** of a term and its **sense**

  - The **reference** of a term is the thing that the term stands for; it is what we talk about when we use the term in a sentence

  - The **sense** of a term is the way in which it presents its reference

- Russell thought that Frege's senses were a bit spooky, and wanted to return to the idea that terms only have a reference

  - **Millianism**: There is nothing more to the meaning of a term than *reference*

## Re-Cap: Definite Descriptions

- Russell focussed on definite descriptions, which are expressions of the form 'the *F*'

- On the face of it, it seems that definite descriptions have a sense and a reference, just as Frege said

  - 'The author of *Harry Potter*' and 'the author of *The Silkworm*' both refer to the same person: J.K. Rowling

  - Nonetheless, these two descriptions surely have different senses; they pick out J.K. Rowling in two different ways

- Russell agreed that **IF** you think of a definite description as a genuine singular term, then you would need to draw a distinction between its sense and its reference

- But Russell insisted that definite descriptions are not really singular terms!

## Re-Cap: Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions

- The author of *Harry Potter* is very rich

  (a) There is at least one author of *Harry Potter*; and
  (b) There is at most one author of *Harry Potter*; and
  (c) Anyone who authored *Harry Potter* is very rich

- The *F* is *G*

  (a) There is at least one *F*; and
  (b) There is at most one *F*; and
  (c) All *F*s are *G*s

- In a short sentence:

  – There is exactly one *F*, and it is *G*

## Re-Cap: Informative Identities

(1) J.K. Rowling = J.K. Rowling

(2) The author of *Harry Potter* = J.K. Rowling

- (1) is trivial, but (2) is not. How can that be?

- On Russell's analysis, (2) becomes:

  - Exactly one person wrote *Harry Potter*, and that person is J.K. Rowling

- It is now easy to see that (2) says a lot more than (1)

## Re-Cap: Indirect Contexts

(1) Sharon wonders whether J.K. Rowling = J.K. Rowling

(2) Sharon wonders whether the author of *Harry Potter* =
J.K. Rowling

- (1) is false and (2) is true, even though the author of *Harry Potter* **is** J.K. Rowling. How can that be?

- On Russell's analysis, (2) becomes:

    Sharon wonders whether: exactly one person authored *Harry Potter*, and that person is J.K. Rowling

- It is easy to see how Sharon might wonder that without wondering whether J.K. Rowling = J.K. Rowling!

## Re-Cap: Negative Existentials

(1) The present King of France does not exist

- This sentence is obviously true, but how can it be if there is no present King of France out there for us to say doesn't exist?

- On Russell's analysis, (1) becomes:

  - It is not the case that there is exactly one present king of France

- This is true, since there is no present king of France at all

## Re-Cap: The Law of the Excluded Middle

(1) The present King of France is bald

(2) The present King of France is not bald

- Neither (1) nor (2) is true. But isn't (2) the negation of (1)?

- On Russell's analysis, (1) and (2) become:
  - There is exactly one present king of France, and every king of France is bald
  - There is exactly one present king of France, and no king of France is bald

- (2) isn't really the negation of (1), and so it is fine it they are both false

- The negation of (1) is really this (which is true):
  - It is not the case that: there is exactly one present king of France, and every king of France is bald

## But Hold On!

- Russell has shown us how to solve four problems by applying his analysis of definite descriptions

- **BUT HOLD ON:** We can construct versions of these problems *without* using definite descriptions!

## The Four Puzzles, without Definite Descriptions

- **Informative Identities**
  - 'Hesperus = Phosphorus' is informative, but 'Hesperus = Hesperus' is not

- **Indirect Contexts**
  - 'Sharon wonders whether Hesperus = Phosphorus' can be true even when 'Sharon wonders whether Hesperus = Hesperus' is not

- **Negative Existentials**
  - 'Vulcan does not exist' is true, even though 'Vulcan' doesn't pick anyone out

- **The Law of the Excluded Middle**
  - 'Vulcan orbits the Sun' isn't true, but 'Vulcan does not orbit the Sun' doesn't look true either

## Definite Descriptions in Disguise

- Russell's solution was to say that ordinary proper names are really abbreviations for definite descriptions

    - Hesperus $\Rightarrow$ the brightest object in the evening sky

    - Phosphorus $\Rightarrow$ the brightest object in the morning sky

    - Vulcan $\Rightarrow$ the planet which causes the perturbation in Mercury's orbit

- Once these proper names are analysed as definite descriptions, we can apply Russell's solution to the problems they get involved in

# Kripke against Descriptivism

- Let's call Russell's idea that every proper name is synonymous with a definite description, **descriptivism**

- As some of you know from last year's metaphysics module, Kripke was strongly opposed to descriptivism

- This week we are going to look again at Kripke's objections to descriptivism

- **BUT IMPORTANTLY:** we will not just repeat the material from last year; this time, we will also look at ways that a descriptivist might fight back!
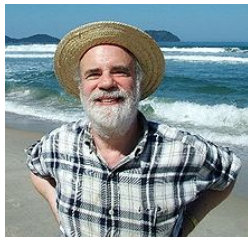
# Kripke against Descriptivism

Introduction

## Descriptivism

The Epistemic Argument

The Semantic Argument

The Modal Argument

Defending Descriptivism: Scope Ambiguities

Defending Descriptivism: Rigidified Descriptions

Conclusion

## The So-Called 'Frege-Russell Theory'

- Kripke doesn't call the theory that every proper name is synonymous with a definite description, 'descriptivism'; he calls it the 'Frege-Russell Theory'

- It is easy to see the *Russell* in this Frege-Russell theory, but where is the *Frege*?

- Kripke thinks that for Frege, the sense of a proper name is a description associated with that name

  - 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' pick out Venus in different ways because they are associated with different descriptions, they have different "descriptive contents"

- This way of interpreting Frege was very common, especially amongst American philosophers in the 70s, but as I mentioned in Lecture 2,there is very little evidence to support it

## Introducing Descriptivism

- Here is an initial statement of descriptivism:
  - Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

- However, Kripke thinks that there is more to descriptivism than that

- Descriptivism *also* tells us that everyone who **understands** a name **knows** which definite description it is synonymous with
  - For example, anyone who understands 'Hesperus' must know that it is synonymous with 'the brightest object in the evening sky'

## Understanding a Name

- This extra understanding condition fits with a picture of how we actually **use** names to refer to things

- On this picture, when we want to refer to something, we identify it with a definite description

  - When I use the name 'Hesperus', I identify the thing that I am referring to by describing it as the brightest object in the evening sky

- This certainly seems to be how Russell thought we used (grammatically) proper names

## An Odd Consequence

- On this picture of how we understand names, it seems inevitable that we will end up meaning different things by the names that we use
- Here are two different definite descriptions that Donald Trump satisfies
  - The host of the American *Apprentice*
  - The 45th President of America
- Before 2016, many people would have used the first description in place of 'Donald Trump', now many would use the second
- Russell was well aware of this consequence of his theory
- He thought it would be fine if different people replace a name with different descriptions, so long as those descriptions all stood for the same person

## Descriptivism, the Simple Version

- Descriptivism can be taken as the conjunction of these two claims:

  (i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

  (ii) Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with

- Really, this is still a bit of a simplistic theory; lots of philosophers preferred the **cluster** version of descriptivism

## The Cluster Theory

- According to the cluster theory, names are not really synonymous with a **single** definite description; they are associated with a whole **cluster** of descriptions

- For example, 'Aristotle' might be associated with:
    - The most famous student of Plato
    - The most famous teacher of Alexander the Great
    - The author of *Nicomachean Ethics*
    - The author of the *Physics*

- The idea is that 'Aristotle' refers to whatever object satisfies the majority of these descriptions

- We can make this idea even more sophisticated by giving different 'weightings' to each description

# An Example

- Suppose it turned out that no single person satisfied all of the descriptions associated with 'Aristotle'

  - The most famous student of Plato [5]
  - The most famous teacher of Alexander the Great [2]
  - The author of *Nicomachean Ethics* [10]
  - The author of the *Physics* [10]

- One person, A, satisfied the first two descriptions, another person, B, satisfied the second two

- On the cluster theory, we can say that 'Aristotle' refers to B, not A

  - A has a score of 7/27, whereas B has a score of 20/27

## Keep It Simple!

- The cluster version of descriptivism is **much** more plausible than the simple version

  - The cluster theory was famously argued for by Searle in his 'Proper Names' (available via the VLE)

  - Kripke gives a full statement of what the view involves on pp. 64–70 of *Naming and Necessity*

- However, in this lecture, we are going to stick with the simple version of descriptivism

  (i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

  (ii) Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with

- All of the objections to the simple theory can be re-worked to apply to the cluster theory

# Kripke against Descriptivism

Introduction

Descriptivism

## The Epistemic Argument

The Semantic Argument

The Modal Argument

Defending Descriptivism: Scope Ambiguities

Defending Descriptivism: Rigidified Descriptions

Conclusion

## Our Stock Example

- According to descriptivism, 'Aristotle' is synonymous with some definite description. Which one?

- For now, let's suggest: 'the teacher of Alexander'

- That is obviously far too simple a suggestion to really be plausible: amongst other things, Alexander surely had many teachers!

- But let's just pretend that Aristotle was Alexander's one and only teacher, and use this description as our example
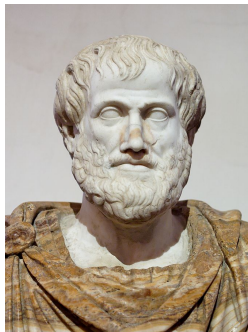
## Synonymy and Substitution

- What does it mean to say that 'Aristotle' and 'the teacher of Alexander' are synonymous?

- Well, at the very least, it ought to mean this:

  - If we have two sentences which are exactly the same *except* one of them has the name 'Aristotle' where the other has the definite description 'the teacher of Alexander', then those two sentences **mean exactly the same thing**

- Here is an example of what I have in mind:

  (1) Aristotle was Macedonian
  (2) The teacher of Alexander was Macedonian

- If 'Aristotle' and 'the teacher of Alexander' are synonymous, then (1) and (2) must mean the same thing

## The Epistemic Argument

(1) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander

(2) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- There is an important epistemic difference between (1) and (2):

  - (2) is knowable **a priori**, but (1) is not

- However, descriptivism obliterates this difference

## The Epistemic Argument

(1) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander

(2) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- Descriptivism tells us two things about 'Aristotle':
  (i) 'Aristotle' is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander'
  (ii) Anyone who understands 'Aristotle' knows that it is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander'

- (i) implies that (1) and (2) mean the same thing

- (ii) implies that anyone who **understands** (1) **knows** that it means the same thing as (2)

## The Epistemic Argument

(1) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander

(2) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- As a result, descriptivism implies that if (2) is knowable **a priori**, then so is (1)
    - Anyone who understands (1) knows that it means the same thing as (2)
    - So anyone who understands (1) can figure out that it is true iff (2) is true
    - And so they can convert their a priori knowledge of (2) into a priori knowledge of (1)

## Things Get Even Worse

- Kripke also offers a simpler epistemic objection to descriptivism

- We've happily suggested that 'Aristotle' is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander', but lots of people don't know that

- In fact, it may be that many people don't know anything about Aristotle other than that he was a famous Greek philosopher

- Those people can't swap 'Aristotle' for **any** definite description

- But in that case, descriptivism implies that they cannot understand the name 'Aristotle'!

# Dropping the Understanding Clause?

- We are treating descriptivism as the conjunction of two claims

  (i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

  (ii) Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with

- The Epistemic Arguments focus on (ii):
  - If we didn't assume that you need to know which definite description a name is synonymous with in order to understand it, then these problems wouldn't get going

- Can we save descriptivism by simply dropping (ii)?

# Rejecting a Picture of Understanding

- Earlier, we pointed out that (ii) is part of a picture of how we actually use and understand names

  – When we want to refer to something, we identify it with a definite description

- If we reject (ii), then we have to reject that picture of understanding

- What would descriptivism look like if we did that?

## Descriptivism without Understanding

> *associated with each name as used by a group of*
> *speakers who believe and intend that they are using the*
> *name with the same denotation, is a description or set of*
> *descriptions cullable from their beliefs which an item has*
> *to satisfy to be the bearer of the name. This description*
> *is used to explain the rôle of the name in existential,*
> *identity and opaque contexts. The theory is by no means*
> *committed to the thesis that every user of the name*
> *must be in possession of the description*

> *(Evans, 'The Causal Theory of Names', p. 188)*

## Descriptivism without Understanding

- As a community, we have a practice of using the name 'Aristotle'

- This practice is guided by the many beliefs that members of the community have about Aristotle

- Some of those beliefs are more important than others

    – If it turned out that no one person wrote all of the texts attributed to Aristotle, then we would probably say that Aristotle did not exist

    – But if it turned out that all of the texts but one were written by Aristotle, we wouldn't deny that Aristotle existed; we would just say we were wrong about what he wrote

## Descriptivism without Understanding

- Somehow, this complex practice, guided by our many beliefs about Aristotle, makes it the case that 'Aristotle' is synonymous with a definite description (or cluster of descriptions)

- But it is not expected that every, or even any, member of the community be able to say which description it is

  - It is our complex practice of playing chess according to certain rules that makes certain configurations of pieces losing configurations

  - But it is not expected that every, or even any, member of the community will be able to tell whether a given configuration is a losing configuration

## Descriptivism without Understanding

- On this picture, descriptivism consists of a single claim

  (i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

- Even by itself, (i) suffices to solve the various problems we started the lecture by looking at

  – Why is it that 'Hesperus = Hesperus' is trivial and 'Hesperus = Phosphorus' isn't?

  – Because 'Hesperus' is synonymous with 'the brightest object in the evening sky', and 'Phosophorus' is synonymous with 'the brightest object in the morning sky'

- The question is just whether you think we are giving up too much when we abandon the descriptivist picture of understanding

# Kripke against Descriptivism

## The Gödel-Schmidt Case

- Kripke uses the following example to illustrate his **Semantic Argument**

- Gödel was a famous mathematician of the 20th Century, and his most famous achievement was proving some results called the Incompleteness Theorems

- All that most people know about Gödel is that he proved these theorems, so it would be natural for a descriptivist to suggest the following:

  - 'Gödel' is synonymous with 'the prover of the Incompleteness Theorems'

# The Gödel-Schmidt Case

- But now imagine the following (fictional!) story:

    - Although everyone *thinks* that Gödel proved the Incompleteness Theorems, he didn't really

    - Really, a man called Schmidt proved it, and then Gödel stole Schmidt's manuscript, killed Schmidt, and published the results under his own name

- Kripke asks the following question: If this story were true, who would the name 'Gödel' refer to: Schmidt or Gödel?

## The Gödel-Schmidt Case

- Kripke says that the answer is obviously that 'Gödel' would still refer to Gödel

  - If this story turned out to be true, and was reported on in the news tomorrow, we wouldn't all say: Oh, so all along we were referring to Schmidt when we used the name 'Gödel'!

- But if 'Gödel' is synonymous with 'the prover of the Incompleteness Theorems', then 'Gödel' would refer to Schmidt in this scenario!

- So 'Gödel' cannot be synonymous with 'the prover of the Incompleteness Theorems'

## Generalising the Semantic Argument

- So far, all that the Semantic Argument shows is that 'Gödel' isn't synonymous with 'the prover of the Incompleteness Theorems'

- This does not yet count as a refutation of descriptivism: 'Gödel' might be synonymous with **another** description

- To get to a refutation of descriptivism, we must assume that we could run the Semantic Argument on **any** description we might suggest as synonymous with 'Gödel'

- It's not obvious that you can generalise the argument in this way...

## Gödel Experts

- Some people are experts about Gödel (e.g. his biographers)

- They could give lots of good definite descriptions for Gödel, for example

  – The Austrian logician who was born in Brünn on the 28th of April 1906, and starved to death on the 14th of January 1978

- Now suppose that it turned out that Schmidt satisfied the description (or cluster of descriptions) that Gödel experts associate with 'Gödel'

- In that case, it seems quite plausible to say that 'Gödel' really refers to Schmidt

  – Gödel turned out to be Schmidt all along!

# A Proposal

- **Proposal:** We use the experts' description as our synonym for 'Gödel'

- There are two versions of this proposal, depending on whether you think that descriptivism should include a claim about understanding

## Version One

(i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

(ii) Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with

- Experts and non-experts use the name 'Gödel' differently

- Experts use it as an abbreviation for whatever definite description they think is most appropriate

- Non-experts use 'Gödel' as an abbreviation for 'the person the experts call "Gödel" '

- Perhaps it is a little strange to say that experts use 'Gödel' differently from non-experts, but is it really that strange?

## Version Two

(i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

(ii) ~~Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with~~

- Experts and non-experts use the name 'Gödel' in the same way

- They both use it as an abbreviation for whatever definite description the experts think is most appropriate

- Perhaps it is a little strange that most speakers do not know what description 'Gödel' is synonymous with

- But we have already given up on (ii) in the face of the Epistemic Argument

## Who are the Experts?

- In some cases, it is relatively easy to say who should count as the experts about a given thing or person

  - Gödel's biographers are experts on Gödel

  - Academics who study ancient Greek history and philosophy are experts on Aristotle

- It is clear who we should defer to when we are looking for definite descriptions to be synonymous with 'Gödel' and 'Aristotle'

- But what about ordinary people, like you and me?

- My friends and family are the experts on me

  - My family and friends use 'Rob Trueman' as an abbreviation for some appropriate definite description, and then everyone else defers to them

# Flexibility

- But we should also grant that there is considerable flexibility in who we want to count as experts

  - If you care more about Aristotle as a philosopher than as a man, you will probably take the people who study his work to be the Aristotle experts

  - If you care more about Aristotle as a man than a philosopher, you will probably take the people who study his life to be the Aristotle experts

- This need not be seen as a weakness of descriptivism

- It makes descriptivism a very *flexible* view of how names work, which allows for a lot of purpose relativity

# Kripke against Descriptivism

## A Modal Difference

- Consider these two sentences again:

  (1) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander

  (2) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- Earlier we pointed out one important difference between (1) and (2): (2) is knowable a priori, (1) is not

- But now here is another important difference: (1) is **contingently** true, but (2) is **necessarily** true

# Necessity and Contingency

- To say that a sentence is **necessarily** true is to say that it is not just true, but couldn't have failed to be true

  – A necessary truth is true in **every** possible world

- To say that a sentence is **contingently** true is to say that although it is true, it didn't have to be

  – A contingent truth is true in the **actual** world, but **false** in some other world

# The Contingency of (1)

(1) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander

- (1) is only contingent because there are possible worlds in which someone else taught Alexander, instead of Aristotle

- Imagine that Aristotle got hit in the head when he was 10, and that this stopped him from becoming a great philosopher.

- In this world, Alexander still wanted to learn about philosophy, and so got a different philosopher, called Bob, to be his teacher

- So in this world, (1) is false; thus (1) is only **contingently** true

## The Necessity of (2)

(2) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then the teacher of
Alexander taught Alexander

- (2) is necessarily true, because in **every possible world** where
  exactly one person taught Alexander, the teacher of Alexander
  taught Alexander

- That's because 'the teacher of Alexander' just picks out
  whoever happens to be the one and only teacher of Alexander
  in a given world

- Consider again the world we described earlier, where Aristotle
  got hit in the head, and Bob became Alexander's one and
  only teacher

- In this world, 'the teacher of Alexander' doesn't pick out
  Aristotle; it picks out Bob, and so (2) is still true!

## The Modal Argument

- Let's keep things simple and suppose that descriptivism states that 'Aristotle' is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander'

- If this is right, then substituting 'the teacher of Alexander' for 'Aristotle' should never change the meaning of a sentence

- In that case, these two sentences mean the same thing:

  (1) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then Aristotle taught Alexander

  (2) If exactly one person taught Alexander, then the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- But these sentences must mean different things, because (1) is contingently true and (2) is necessarily true

## Kripke's Diagnosis

- Kripke takes this argument to reveal an important difference between proper names and (most) definite descriptions

  - Proper names are **rigid designators**, but (most) definite descriptions are not

- A **rigid designator** is an expression which designates the same object in every world (in which it designates anything at all)

  - The proper name 'Aristotle' designates the same person in every world (where it designates anything at all)

  - The definite description 'the teacher of Alexander' designates different people in different worlds; in our world it designates Aristotle, in another world it designates Bob the Philosopher

## More about Rigid Designators

- **VERY IMPORTANTLY:** When we say that 'Aristotle' refers to Aristotle in every world, we are **not** saying that everyone in every world uses 'Aristotle' as a name for Aristotle

    – There are surely worlds where people speak a language in which 'Aristotle' is a name for Plato!

- The idea behind rigid designators is this:

    – When **we** describe other possible worlds, we use **our** language, not the language of the people in that world

    – To say that 'Aristotle' is a rigid designator is to say that no matter what world **we** describe, using **our** language, **our** word 'Aristotle' refers to the same person

# Kripke against Descriptivism

## Dummett's Defence of Descriptivism

- The first defence of descriptivism we will look at is due to Michael Dummett

- According to Dummett, Kripke's Modal Argument does not manage to show that 'Aristotle' and 'the teacher of Alexander' are not synonymous

- I should warn now that it is a bit complicated, and it might be tricky to understand it the first time around



Michael Dummett

## Dummett's Understanding of the Argument

- Dummett understands Kripke as pointing out that these two sentences have different truth-values

  (1) Necessarily, Aristotle taught Alexander

  (2) Necessarily, the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

  (To keep things simple, I am just omitting the 'if exactly one person taught Alexander' bit)

- (1) is false, and (2) is true

- But if 'Aristotle' is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander', (1) and (2) should have the same truth-value

  (We will see later that Kripke thought that Dummett misunderstood his argument; but let's not worry about that now!)

## Applying Russell's Theory of Definite Descriptions

- To explain why Dummett was unimpressed by Kripke's argument, we need to apply Russell's theory of definite descriptions:

  – The teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

  – Exactly one person taught Alexander, and that person taught Alexander

- There are now two different places where we can plug in the 'necessarily'

  (A) Exactly one person taught Alexander, and necessarily, that person taught Alexander

  (B) Necessarily, exactly one person taught Alexander, and that person taught Alexander

## The Truth of (B)

(B) Necessarily, exactly one person taught Alexander, and that person taught Alexander

– In symbols: $\Box \exists x \forall y((Ty \equiv y = x) \,\&\, Tx)$

- If we limit our attention to worlds where exactly one person taught Alexander, (B) is true

If you don't want to limit your attention to those worlds, just stick the 'if exactly one person taught Alexander' back in:

Necessarily, if exactly one person taught Alexander, then exactly one person taught Alexander, and that person taught Alexander

# The Falsity of (A)

(A) Exactly one person taught Alexander, and necessarily, that person taught Alexander

- In symbols: $\exists x \forall y ((Ty \equiv y = x) \,\&\, \Box Tx)$

- (A) is false

  - We are imagining that exactly one person did teach Alexander: Aristotle

  - But it is not necessarily true of that person that he taught Alexander

# A Scope Ambiguity

(A) Exactly one person taught Alexander, and necessarily, that person taught Alexander

(B) Necessarily, exactly one person taught Alexander, and that person taught Alexander

- The difference between (A) and (B) is a question of scope
    - In (A), 'necessarily' has narrow scope, in (B), 'necessarily' has wide scope

- Dummett's big idea was that (A) and (B) correspond to (1) and (2):

(1) Necessarily, Aristotle taught Alexander

(2) Necessarily, the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

## Defending Descriptivism

- Dummett says that 'Aristotle' is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander', we just have different grammatical conventions governing these expressions

    - 'Necessarily' **cannot** take wide scope over the proper name 'Aristotle'

    - 'Necessarily' **can** take wide scope over the definite description 'the teacher of Alexander'

- In this way, Dummett thought we could explain Kripke's intuition that proper names in general are rigid designators:

    - In general, 'necessarily' can **never** take wide scope over a proper name

# Kripke's Response

- Kripke responded to Dummett by saying that his point was not that these sentences have different truth-values:

  (1) Necessarily, Aristotle taught Alexander

  (2) Necessarily, the teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- His point was that these sentences have different **modal** values:

  (1′) Aristotle taught Alexander

  (2′) The teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- (1′) is contingently true (true at this world but false at others), and (2′) is necessarily true (true at every world)

- Since we are not adding the word 'necessarily' into (1′) or (2′), Dummett's point about scope ambiguities just doesn't come up

## Who Is Right?

- Whether or not Kripke is right depends on what we think about possible worlds

- Some philosophers take talk about possible worlds very seriously, but others think that they are just a useful way of speaking

- **Really**, when we say that '*P*' is true at all possible worlds, we are just saying that 'Necessarily *P*' is true

- If you are that kind of philosopher, you should side with Dummett

  - To say that 'Aristotle taught Alexander' is **true at every world** is just to say that 'Necessarily, Aristotle taught Alexander' is true

# Kripke against Descriptivism

## An Alternative Defence

- Let's suppose that Dummett is wrong, and that Kripke's Modal Argument does show that 'Aristotle' is not synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander'

- That still does not show that descriptivism is wrong: 'Aristotle' might be synonymous with a **different** definite description

- One suggestion that has often been made is that the descriptivist should just *rigidify* 'the teacher of Alexander', as follows:

  – The **actual** teacher of Alexander

## Actuality and Rigidity

- The actual world is **this** world, the real world

- The **actual** teacher of Alexander is whoever taught Alexander **in the actual world**

- Whereas 'the teacher of Alexander' is a non-rigid, 'the actual teacher of Alexander' is rigid

    - In every possible world, 'the actual teacher of Alexander' picks out the person who was the teacher of Alexander in the actual world

    - Aristotle was the teacher of Alexander in the actual world

    - So 'the actual teacher of Alexander' picks out Aristotle in every world

## Back to the Modal Argument

(1) Aristotle taught Alexander

(2) The actual teacher of Alexander taught Alexander

- (1) is only contingently true, **but so is (2)!**

  - There are some possible worlds in which the actual teacher of Alexander (i.e. Aristotle) did not teach Alexander

- If it works, this trick is fully general: the descriptivist can always dodge the Modal Argument by rigidifying their definite descriptions

## Is This Defence Acceptable?

- I have to admit, it seems to me that there is something a bit cheap about this way of getting out of the Modal Argument

- One thing I am suspicious of is whether we really have a notion of **actual truth**, rather than just plain **truth**

- I might say that *P* is *actually true*, but in most cases I think that all I mean is that it is true, and not merely possibly true

- I certainly doubt that what I mean is that there is a special world amongst many other worlds, called the 'actual world', and *P* is true at that special world

- However, this is a very nebulous kind of worry, and so I will leave it up to you to decide for yourself whether you like the rigidifying defence of descriptivism!

# Kripke against Descriptivism

## Kripke's Attack on Descriptivism

- Kripke takes descriptivism to be committed to these two claims:

  (i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description
  (ii) Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with

- Kripke then presents three objections to it:

  - The Epistemic Argument
  - The Semantic Argument
  - The Modal Argument

- Many philosophers think that these objections destroyed descriptivism, but it is not clear that they did

## The Epistemic Argument

- The descriptivist can dodge the Epistemic Argument by rejecting (ii)

  (i) Every proper name is synonymous with a definite description

  (ii) ~~Anyone who understands a proper name knows which definite description it is synonymous with~~

- This does involve giving up on a natural picture of how we use and understand proper names, but that is not necessarily too disastrous

## The Semantic Argument

- The descriptivist can dodge the Semantic Argument by deferring to experts

- **Version 1**
  - Experts and non-experts use the name 'Aristotle' differently
  - Experts have some complex, well-informed description in mind
  - Non-experts have 'the person the experts call "Aristotle" '

- **Version 2**
  - Experts and non-experts use the name 'Aristotle' in the same way
  - They both use it as an abbreviation for the long definite description that the experts provide
  - This does mean that non-experts do not know which definite description 'Aristotle' is synonymous with

## The Modal Argument

- This is the most powerful objection to descriptivism

- **Defence 1**

  – 'Aristotle' is synonymous with 'the teacher of Alexander', but it is governed by an extra convention

  – This convention says that 'necessarily' is never allowed to take wide scope over 'Aristotle'

  – This defence only works if we think that when we say that '$P$' is true in every world, we really just mean 'Necessarily, $P$'

- **Defence 2**

  – 'Aristotle' is synonymous with the rigidified description, 'the actual teacher of Alexander'

  – This defence sounds a little bit like a cheat to me, but I certainly don't have any knockdown objection to it!

## Tomorrow's Seminar

- The reading for tomorrow's seminar is:

  – Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lecture II

- Access to this text can be found on the VLE Reading List

## Next Week's Lecture and Seminar

- For next week's lecture, read:
  - Kemp, *What is this thing called Philosophy of Language?*, Chapter 4, pp. 61–71

- For next week's seminar, read:
  - Evans, 'The Causal Theory of Names'

- Access to both of these can be found on the VLE Reading List