

The Philosophy of Language

Lecture Five

Causal Pictures of Naming

Rob Trueman
rob.trueman@york.ac.uk

University of York

Causal Pictures of Naming

Introduction

Kripke's Causal Picture

A Little Bit of Metaphysics

Two Old Millian Problems

Evans' Causal Picture

Re-Cap: Kripke's Objections to Descriptivism

- In the last lecture, we looked at Kripke's objections to descriptivism
- Descriptivism makes two claims:
 - (i) Every proper name is synonymous with some definite description
 - (ii) Anyone who understands a proper name knows the definite description it is synonymous with
- Kripke presented three arguments against descriptivism:
 - The Epistemic Argument
 - The Semantic Argument
 - The Modal Argument
- The Modal and Semantic Arguments focussed on (i); the Epistemic Argument focussed on (ii)

Kripke's Legacy

- As we saw last week, none of these objections were entirely decisive
 - The Modal Argument was the most powerful objection, but the descriptivist had some possible responses
- Nonetheless, Kripke's attack on descriptivism was **very** influential, and nowadays, there are not many descriptivists left
- Instead, lots of philosophers have followed Kripke in proposing some sort of **causal** picture of naming
- Our aim in this lecture is to look at a couple of these pictures

A Fundamental Idea: Rigid Designators

- **Rigid designators** are expressions which refer to the same object in every world (where they refer to anything at all)
- 'Aristotle' is a rigid designator
 - In any world where Aristotle exists, 'Aristotle' refers to Aristotle
 - In any world where Aristotle *does not* exist, 'Aristotle' doesn't refer to anything at all

A Fundamental Idea: 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
- 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

Causal Pictures of Naming

Introduction

Kripke's Causal Picture

A Little Bit of Metaphysics

Two Old Millian Problems

Evans' Causal Picture

What Next, After Descriptivism?

- Let's grant for the sake of argument that Kripke has refuted descriptivism:
 - In general, proper names are **not** synonymous with definite descriptions
 - When you use the name 'Donald Trump', you refer to a particular man, but **not** because you have in mind some description which he and he alone satisfies
- But if descriptivism is not the right theory of how names work, then how do they work?
- Why is it that when you use 'Donald Trump', you refer to the particular person you refer to?

A Causal Picture of Naming

- Kripke recommended that we replace descriptivism with a **causal picture** of naming
- I am being careful not to call it a *theory*, because Kripke (*Naming & Necessity*: 93) was clear that he did not mean to present a fully fledged theory of naming
- When criticising descriptivism, Kripke remarked:

It really is a nice theory. The only defect I think it has is probably common to all philosophical theories. It's wrong. You may suspect me of proposing another theory in its place; but I hope not, because I'm sure it's wrong too if it is a theory. (Naming & Necessity: 64)

Sketching the Causal Picture

- One day a child was born, and his parents named him 'Donald Trump'
- Those parents introduced that baby to lots of people, and told them that he was called 'Donald Trump'
- Those people started using that name to refer to that child, and other people picked the name up from them
- And thus more people started using that name to refer to that person, and thereby passing that name on to the people who heard it

Sketching the Causal Picture

- After a few decades, this chain of people passing the name on reached you, and you picked up on using the name 'Donald Trump'
- The reason that you now refer to Donald Trump when you use 'Donald Trump' is that there is a long chain of communication, passing the name from one person to another
- You are at one end of that chain, and at the other is Donald Trump's parents, naming him 'Donald Trump'

Sketching the Causal Picture

- Speaking more generally, this is the guiding idea behind Kripke's picture of naming (*Naming & Necessity*: 90–7):
 - One day someone names (or *baptises*) a person or object 'NN'
 - As a result, people start using the name 'NN' to refer to that person/object, and thereby transmit it to more and more people
 - The reason that you now refer to that person/object when you use 'NN' is that there is a chain of communication passing that name from person to person, with you at one end and the initial baptism at the other

Two Questions

- That is the sketch, to fill it in we need to know more about two details:
 - (i) What happens at the initial baptism?
 - (ii) How exactly do the links in a chain of communication pass the use of a name on?

What is an Initial Baptism?

- An initial baptism is supposed to be the event in which we introduce a name as the name of some person or thing
- The paradigm example is the naming of a child: the parents simply introduce the name for the child, and then that is its name
- After that, the chains of communication we discussed earlier spread the use of that name around
- But can we say anything more about how baptisms work?

Baptism by Ostension

- Kripke distinguishes two ways in which a baptism can work
- The first is by **ostension**
 - Ostension is the act of pointing to something in the environment, or otherwise bringing something in the environment to everybody's attention
 - For example, if I point to this desk, that is an act of ostension: I am *ostending* the desk
- When we name a child, this is usually done via ostension:
 - We simply ostend the child, and announce that this child is called 'NN'

The Sophistication of Ostension

- Baptism by ostension is probably the most ordinary kind of baptism, but there are a couple of comments worth making about it
- First, as Wittgenstein pointed out in his *Philosophical Investigations*, ostension is not quite as simple as it might seem
- Whenever we point at something, we are simultaneously pointing at lots of other things
 - For example, when I point at a child, I am also pointing at its skin, and at a particular collection of atoms, and at the air between us, and...

The Sophistication of Ostension

- So for baptism by ostension to work, you need to be able to figure out which of the many things I am pointing to is being baptised
 - If I point at a child and say, 'This is to be called "Donald Trump" ', am I baptising a child, a child's skin, or a collection of atoms?
- Now clearly, we can figure out which thing is being baptised in an ostensive baptism, but the point is that this is a very sophisticated ability

The Limits of Baptism by Ostension

- The second comment I want to make is that baptism by ostension is fairly limited
- Sometimes, I want to introduce a name for something which isn't in my environment, and which I cannot ostend!
 - For example, suppose that there is a Victorian policeman on the search for a murderer, and as of yet he has no idea who the murderer is; the policeman might want to introduce a name for the murderer, 'Jack the Ripper', but clearly he cannot ostend the murderer — he does not know who the murderer is!
- Given the limitations of ostension, we need another method for baptism

Baptism by Description

- Happily, Kripke has another method for baptism: baptism by **description**
- To return to the case of 'Jack the Ripper', although the policeman cannot **ostend** the murder, he can say this:
 - 'Jack the Ripper' is to refer to whoever committed the Whitechapel murders
- In this way, we can name the Whitechapel Murderer 'Jack the Ripper', even though we cannot ostend him

Baptism by Description versus Descriptivism

- You might be surprised by Kripke's willingness to use descriptions in baptisms: wasn't Kripke supposed to **reject** descriptivism?
- The fundamental claim of descriptivism is: every name is synonymous with some definite description
- That is what Kripke rejects, and he even rejects it in cases like 'Jack the Ripper'

Baptism by Description versus Descriptivism

- Even if the name 'Jack the Ripper' was introduced in the way I described, that does **not** make 'Jack the Ripper' synonymous with 'the person who committed the Whitechapel murders'
- If it were, then this sentence would be necessarily true:
 - If Jack the Ripper exists, then Jack the Ripper is a murderer
- But it is not necessarily true: there is a possible world in which Jack the Ripper slipped, hit his head and entered a coma, long before he murdered anyone

Reference-Fixing Descriptions

- When Kripke rejected descriptivism, he rejected the idea that names are **synonymous** with definite descriptions
- But he (*Naming & Necessity*: 57–9) is clear that we can still use a description to **fix the reference of a name**
 - When we use a description in a baptism to fix the reference of a name, that **does not** make the name synonymous with the description
 - We just use the description to pick a particular person out, and then use our new name as a rigid designator referring to that person
 - After the baptism, the description is just thrown away
- This is a *key point* to remember: we can fix the reference of a name with a description **without** making the name synonymous with the description!!!

Back to our Two Questions

- Earlier, we said that there were two questions we need to answer to fill out Kripke's Causal Picture of Naming
 - (i) What happens at the initial baptism?
 - (ii) How exactly do the links in a chain of communication pass the use of a name on?
- So far we have focussed on question (i)
 - We have seen how names are meant to be **introduced** into our language
- Now it is time to look at question (ii)
 - We want to see how names are meant to spread around the language, after they have been introduced

Causal Chains

- The first thing to stress is that chains of communication are **causal chains** (*Naming & Necessity*: 93)
- You acquire the use of a name (in part) by *hearing* other people say it, or *seeing* them write it, or whatever
- More generally, it takes a **causal** interaction with someone else for them to transmit their use of a name to you
 - You picked up on the name 'Donald Trump' (in part) by **causally interacting** in some way with people who were using the name
- Hence this picture is called the **Causal Picture of Reference**

Reference Despite Ignorance

- The next thing I want to mention is that on the Causal Picture, it does not take much for you to acquire the use of a name
- According to descriptivism, you cannot use a name to refer to someone unless you know some description which they uniquely satisfy
- But on the Causal Picture, all you need to do to refer to someone is acquire the use of their name from someone else

Reference Despite Ignorance

- Richard Feynman was a very famous physicist in the 20th Century, but most of us do not know enough about him to distinguish him from all of the other famous physicists from the 20th Century
- As a result, according to descriptivism, we cannot really refer to Richard Feynman
- To refer to Richard Feynman, we need to understand some name which referred to him
- But according to descriptivism, we cannot understand a name unless we know which definite description it is synonymous with
- But I do not know any definite description which picks Feynman out, rather than, say, Murray Gell-Mann

Reference Despite Ignorance

- But on the Causal Picture, we can refer to Richard Feynman:
 - Richard Feynman was named 'Richard Feynman' by his parents
 - That name got passed down from person to person, and eventually reached us
 - So now when we use the name 'Richard Feynman', we refer to Richard Feynman
- On this front, the Causal Picture looks more plausible than descriptivism
- Surely I am still referring to Richard Feynman, and saying something true about him, when I say:
 - 'Richard Feynman was a great physicist, but I don't really know anything more about him'

An Extra Complication

- The last thing I want to say about Kripke's idea of a chain of communication is that we need to make it a little bit more complicated
- As Kripke points out (*Naming & Necessity*: 96–7), in order for you to acquire the use of a name, it is not enough that you causally interact with someone who already uses it

An Extra Complication

- Suppose you hear the name 'Napoleon' for the first time from someone lecturing on French history
- You're not really paying attention to the lecture, but you like the name
- You decide to steal the name 'Napoleon' as a name for your cat
- When you use the name 'Napoleon', you are clearly referring to your cat, not the French emperor!
 - When you say, 'Napoleon has a fluffy face', you are saying something true about your cat, not something false about an emperor



An Extra Complication

- So what more do you need to do acquire the use of a name from someone else?
- Simple: you just need to intend to use the name to refer to the same thing that the person you acquired it from used it refer to
- The person you acquired the name 'Napoleon' from was using it to refer to the French emperor, but you did not form the intention to use it in the same way

An Extra Complication

- This is a simple fix, but it does come at a cost: as Kripke (*Naming & Necessity*: 97) puts it, we no longer have an **eliminative** explanation of reference, i.e. an explanation which itself doesn't mention the notion of reference
- But that isn't so uncommon in philosophy: can you give an eliminative explanation of knowledge, or goodness, or consciousness, or...?

Summing It All Up

- Names are introduced via **baptisms**
 - In an *ostensive baptism*, I ostend something in public view, and give it a name
 - In a *baptism by description*, I use a description to single something out, and then give that thing a name; crucially, that does not make the name synonymous with the description
- Names are then spread around the linguistic community via chains of communication
 - These chains are causal chains
 - But there is more to them than just causation: in order to acquire the use of a name from a causal interaction with someone else, you must form the intention to use the name to refer to the same thing as the person you acquired it from

Causal Pictures of Naming

Introduction

Kripke's Causal Picture

A Little Bit of Metaphysics

Two Old Millian Problems

Evans' Causal Picture

A Remarkable Metaphysical Consequence

- Kripke's picture of how names work has a fairly remarkable metaphysical consequence
- This is a module in the Philosophy of Language, and so we will not linger on the metaphysics for too long
- But it would be a shame not to mention it at all...

The A Priori/A Posteriori Distinction

- **The a priori/a posteriori distinction**
- This is an **epistemological** distinction, i.e. a distinction concerning knowledge
- Roughly: to say that a statement is **a priori** is to say that we do not need any experience of the world to know whether it is true
- Roughly: to say that a statement is **a posteriori** is to say that we cannot know whether it is true without some experience

The Necessary/Contingent Distinction

- The necessary/contingent distinction is a **metaphysical** distinction, i.e. a distinction about the kinds of facts that statements describe
- Roughly: to say that a statement is **necessarily** true is to say that not only is it true, it *had* to be true; it *couldn't* have been false
- Roughly: to say that a statement is **contingently** true is to say that although it is true, it didn't *have* to be true; it *could* have been false

Two Distinctions, Or Just One?

- Historically, philosophers have tended to assume that these two distinctions are **co-extensive**
 - A statement is a priori iff it is necessary
 - A statement is a posteriori iff it is contingent
- At first this seems very natural:
 - If a statement is a priori, then you do not need to check how the world is to find out if it is true; surely, then, you can only know things a priori if they are true in every world?
 - If a statement is a posteriori, then you need to check how the world is to find out if it is true; surely that can only be because that statement is not true in every world?
- However, Kripke used his picture of how names work to argue that there were *a posteriori necessities!*

Rigid Designators Again

- Recall that a rigid designator is an expression which refers to the same thing in every world (where it refers at all)
- It is fairly clear that on Kripke's Causal Picture of Naming, proper names will turn out to be rigid designators
 - We introduce names not as abbreviations for descriptions, but assign names directly to things in baptisms
 - No matter what world we are describing, if we use a name then we will refer to the thing that we baptised with that name
- **IMPORTANTLY:** I am not saying that proper names only turn out to be rigid on Kripke's Causal Picture
- There are other pictures of naming which also say that names are rigid

An A Posteriori Identity

- Consider the following identity statement:
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorus
- (1) is true, but what kind of truth is it?
- First off, it is definitely **a posteriori**:
 - You couldn't figure out that Hesperus is Phosphorus just by thinking about it
 - You need to go out and do some astronomy!
- But now let's ask: is (1) contingent or necessary?

A Contingent Identity?

- At first you might think that the obvious answer is: it is only **contingently** true that Hesperus is Phosphorus
- After all, we can imagine a world in which the brightest object in the evening sky was different to the brightest object in the morning sky
- Wouldn't that be a world in which Hesperus wasn't identical to Phosphorus?
- Kripke gives a very clear answer: No!

Kripke's Anti-Descriptivism

- It is essential to bear in mind that Kripke has completely rejected descriptivism: he does not think that proper names are synonymous with definite descriptions
- 'Hesperus' is **not** synonymous with 'the brightest object in the evening sky'
- 'Phosphorus' is **not** synonymous with 'the brightest object in the morning sky'

Kripke's Anti-Descriptivism

- As a result, Kripke does **not** think that the following two statements mean the same thing as each other
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorus
 - (2) The brightest object in the evening sky is the brightest object in the morning sky
- So merely describing a world in which (2) is false does not thereby show that there is a world in which (1) is false

'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' are Rigid

- Kripke thinks that 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' are **rigid designators**: their job is just to refer to exactly the same thing in every possible world
 - Kripke can allow that we used descriptions to fix the references of 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus', but after that we threw the descriptions away
 - Once the references for 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' were fixed, they became rigid designators of those references (*Naming & Necessity*: 57–8)
- So 'Hesperus' rigidly refers to the same thing in every world, namely Venus
- And likewise, 'Phosphorus' rigidly refers to exactly the same thing in every world, also Venus

A Necessary Identity

- Now consider this identity claim again:
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorus
- (1) is actually true, because 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' both refer to Venus in the actual world
- But since 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' are rigid designators, they do not just refer to Venus in the **actual** world: they both refer to Venus in **every** world
- So (1) is true in **every** world
- So (1) is necessarily true, despite only being knowable a posteriori!

Clarification 1

- What about worlds in which Hesperus and Phosphorus do not exist? Will
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorus
still be true in those worlds?
- Hard to say: some philosophers say yes, some say no
- We could get around this problem by swapping (1) for:
 - (1') If Hesperus exists, then Hesperus is Phosphorus
- (1') is guaranteed to be true in every world, even ones where Hesperus and Phosphorus do not exist
- But to keep things simple, we'll ignore this worry, and stick with (1)

Clarification 2

- When we say that
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorusis necessarily true, we are **not** saying that everyone in every world uses the names 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' to refer to Venus
- If Mars had been the brightest object in the evening sky, then we might have called Mars 'Hesperus', rather than Venus
- The point is that as **we** use the names 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' when **we** are describing other possible worlds, using **our** language, (1) always comes out true, no matter which world **we** are describing

Generalising this Example

- Consider any true identity statement:
(3) $a = b$
- If 'a' and 'b' are both rigid designators, then (3) is not just true, it is **necessarily true**
 - For (3) to be true at the actual world, 'a' and 'b' must refer to the same thing in the actual world
 - But if 'a' and 'b' are rigid designators, and refer to the same thing in the actual world, then they refer to the same thing in every world
 - So (3) is true at every world, and so necessarily true
- But even though (3) will be necessary if 'a' and 'b' are rigid, that does not mean that it can be known **a priori**: there are many identities that require experience to discover

Causal Pictures of Naming

Introduction

Kripke's Causal Picture

A Little Bit of Metaphysics

Two Old Millian Problems

Evans' Causal Picture

Kripke as a Millian

- Kripke's Causal Picture of Naming is very often taken to be Millian
 - Names rigidly designate objects, and that's all there is to it
- Kripke himself seems to think of it this way
 - Kripke rejected Frege's sense/reference distinction because he assumed that the sense of a name would have to be contained in a definite description
 - However, as we have emphasised many times now, that is not the only way to think about Fregean sense!
- We will see in a moment that this is not *obviously* right that Kripke's picture is automatically a version of Millianism
- But for the time being, let's suppose that it is

Two Problems for Millianism

- We've already seen that Millianism faces serious problems
- **The Problem of Informative Identities**
 - 'Hesperus = Phosphorus' is informative, but 'Hesperus = Hesperus' is not
- **Negative Existentials**
 - 'Vulcan does not exist' is true, even though 'Vulcan' doesn't pick anyone out

Negative Existentials

- Remarkably, for a long time lots of philosophers after Kripke reverted to the old idea that since 'Vulcan' is empty, it is automatically meaningless, and so 'Vulcan does not exist' is meaningless too
- More recently, however, philosophers have looked for ways to accommodate intelligible empty names in something like Kripke's Causal Picture
 - See Sainsbury's *Reference without Referents*, especially chapter 3
- There are lots of details in Sainsbury's book, but here is the rough idea

A Mistaken Interpretation of Kripke

- Philosophers sometimes say that on Kripke's picture, a name gets its meaning from the causal chain connecting that name to the person it refers to
 - The name 'Donald Trump' gets its meaning from the fact that there is a causal chain connecting our uses of that name to Donald Trump
- It would be hard to fit intelligible empty names into this picture
 - Empty names cannot be meaningful, because there is no person or thing for that name to be linked to via a causal chain
- But importantly, this is a misunderstanding of Kripke's picture!

Names are Introduced at Baptisms!

- According to Kripke, a name gets its meaning from the causal chain connecting that name to an *initial baptism*
 - The name 'Donald Trump' gets its meaning from the fact that there is a causal chain connecting our use of the name 'Donald Trump' to a baptism
- What is more, baptisms are not always done via **ostension**; sometimes they are done by **description**
- This opens up more space for intelligible empty names

Introducing an Empty Name via a Baptism

- Suppose we introduce the name 'Vulcan' via baptism by description:
 - 'Vulcan' is to refer to whatever planet causes the perturbation in Mercury's orbit
- As it happens, no planet causes Mercury's perturbation, so the name comes out empty
- But there was still a successful baptism, we still *introduced* the name into our language
- Subsequent uses of 'Vulcan' are meaningful because they are causally connected with this baptism in the right kind of way

A Residual Worry: Unsuccessful Baptisms

- Not every baptism successfully introduces a name into our language
- Imagine there are two twins in front of me, I gesture at them both broadly, and say: This child is to be called Jimmy
- This baptism does not successfully introduce the name 'Jimmy' into our language, because it just isn't clear who it is meant to refer to

A Residual Worry: Unsuccessful Baptisms

- How can we characterise the difference between a successful baptism and an unsuccessful one?
- If we assumed that **every** meaningful name has to refer to something, then that would be easy:
 - A name 'NN' is successfully introduced via a baptism iff that baptism makes 'NN' refer to a particular person
- But if we want to allow that there are some meaningful but empty names, it is less clear how to characterise the difference

Informative Identities

- (1) Hesperus = Hesperus
- (2) Hesperus = Phosphorus

- How can Kripke account for the fact that (1) is trivial and (2) is informative?
- As far as I can tell, there is only one hope: find a way of re-introducing the sense/reference distinction into Kripke's picture
- There are lots of ways you might try to do that, but for now I am just going to focus on one popular suggestion
 - We will look at another kind of suggestion in the next part of the lecture

Different Causal Chains

- There is a causal chain connecting our use of the name 'Hesperus' to the baptism which introduced the name into our language
- There is a causal chain connecting our use of the name 'Phosphorus' to the baptism which introduced the name into our language
- These are two **different** causal chains
- That is why 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' have different senses
 - 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' belong to different **practices of use**

A Problem

- Differences in sense are supposed to account for the fact that speakers find some identities informative, and others trivial
- You might think that this requires that the speakers be able to tell if two names have the same sense
- But it is not always clear to a speaker whether two names have their causal roots in the same baptism
 - ‘Cicero’ and ‘Tully’ both refer to the same Roman orator
 - As it turns out, they were introduced in the same baptism
 - The Roman orator was baptised ‘Marcus Tullius Cicero’, and different historians abbreviated this name in different ways
 - But ordinary speakers like us can’t tell that they were introduced via the same baptism

Causal Pictures of Naming

Introduction

Kripke's Causal Picture

A Little Bit of Metaphysics

Two Old Millian Problems

Evans' Causal Picture

Reference Changes

- We all know that sometimes, a name can change its reference over time: we start off using a name to refer to one thing, but over time we start using it to refer to something else
- We have already seen how Kripke can accommodate this when someone **intentionally** changes the reference of a name
 - You intentionally stole the name 'Napoleon', and gave it to your cat
- The trouble is, this sometimes happens unintentionally, and it is not clear how Kripke can accommodate that

Madagascar

- 'Madagascar' is the name of an island off the east coast of Africa
- But apparently, 'Madagascar' was *originally* a name for a portion of the African mainland
- Apparently, Marco Polo heard some locals use 'Madagascar', and for some reason thought that they were referring to the island
- But whatever exactly happened, it is undeniably true that *now*, 'Madagascar' has become a name of the island, not a portion of the mainland



The Madagascar Problem

- This sort of thing happens all the time, but it poses a problem for Kripke
- Marco Polo acquired the name 'Madagascar' from people who used it to refer to a portion of the African mainland
- **Importantly:** Marco Polo *intended* to use 'Madagascar' to refer to the same thing as the people he acquired it from
 - This is not like the case where you purposefully stole the name 'Napoleon' for your cat; Marco Polo was *intending* to use 'Madagascar' in the same way as the people he learnt it from
- On Kripke's Causal Picture, this should mean that as Marco Polo used it, 'Madagascar' refers to a bit of the African mainland

The Madagascar Problem

- What is more, it also means that as we use 'Madagascar' today, it **still** refers to a bit of the African mainland!
 - So long as we all intended to use 'Madagascar' in the same way as the people we acquired it from, then we form a chain which goes right back, via Marco Polo, to the initial baptism of a bit of mainland Africa
- But that is absurd: surely by now, 'Madagascar' refers to the island!
 - When we say 'Madagascar is an island', surely we are saying something true about an island, not something false about a portion of mainland Africa

The Madagascar Problem

- This problem has become known as the **Madagascar Problem**, and was introduced by Gareth Evans in his paper, 'The Causal Theory of Names'
- Evans thought that to solve it, we had to find a way of combining descriptivism with Kripke's Causal Picture
- Like some descriptivists, Evans thought that every proper name was associated with a cluster of descriptions
- But unlike those descriptivists, Evans did not think that the name just picked out whatever satisfied those descriptions
- He thought that a name picked out the thing which was the **causal source** of that information (or most of it)

!!!!!! DISCLAIMER !!!! DISCLAIMER !!!!!

What I am about to present is Evans' view in 'The Causal Theory of Names'. He later developed his views in his book, *The Varieties of Reference*. This book is **brilliant** but difficult. Not everything I attribute to Evans here seems to fit well with what he said in that book.

!!!!!! DISCLAIMER !!!! DISCLAIMER !!!!!

The Madagascar Case

- Before Marco Polo, people associated lots of information with the name 'Madagascar'
- At that time, the source of that information was a portion of the African mainland
 - People explored that portion of the mainland, discovered what it was like, and then associated that information with the name 'Madagascar'
- At that time, then, 'Madagascar' referred to a portion of the African mainland

The Madagascar Case

- Then Marco Polo came along, learnt the name 'Madagascar', but wrongly thought it was a name for the island
- But at first, the African mainland was still the causal source of most of the information that Marco Polo associated with 'Madagascar'
 - We can imagine that Marco Polo had not yet explored the island, and so got all of his information about Madagascar from the stories the locals told him
- As a result, at first, Marco Polo was also referring to a portion of the African mainland, and so just said something false when he said 'Madagascar is an island'

The Madagascar Case

- After that, Marco Polo spreads the name 'Madagascar' around, and tells everyone that it refers to the island
- Lots of explores then go out and explore the island, record lots of notes about the island
- These notes get extensively reproduced and shared around the world
- All of this information gets associated with the name 'Madagascar'

The Madagascar Case

- Eventually, the island becomes the causal source of more and more of the information associated with the name, until it is the source of the vast majority of it
- By the end point, on Evans' picture, 'Madagascar' has shifted to referring to the island
- So now when we say, 'Madagascar is an island', we say something true

An interesting question: At what point exactly did 'Madagascar' go from referring to a bit of the mainland to referring to the island?

A plausible answer: there was not exact point; there was a grey period where it wasn't clear what it referred to

The Twins Case

- Suppose someone has some identical twins, A and B, and immediately names A them 'Jimmy' and B 'Timmy'
- The nurse then takes the twins away to check them over, and returns them a little later
- Unfortunately, the nurse got confused, and swapped the twins around
- No one ever notices, and from then on they use the name 'Jimmy' to talk about B, and 'Timmy' to talk about A

The Twins Case

- On Kripke's picture, it turns out that the people in this scenario are always talking about the wrong child when they use 'Jimmy' or 'Timmy'
 - 'Jimmy' was introduced via a baptism as a name for A
 - Everyone picked up the name 'Jimmy' with the intention of using it in the same way as the person they learnt it from
 - So everyone ends up referring to A when they use 'Jimmy', even though they only use it when they want to talk about B
- This strikes many people as intuitively absurd

The Twins Case

- On Evans picture, 'Jimmy' still refers to A for a while after the mix up
- Before the nurse mixed the twins up, we associated some information with 'Jimmy'
- For example, we associated the description 'the first born twin'
- So long as A was the source of most of the information associated with 'Jimmy', then 'Jimmy' refers to A

The Twins Case

- But as time goes on, we will associate more and more information with 'Jimmy'
- B will be the source of all this information, and so after a while, B will be the dominant source of the information associated with 'Jimmy'
- At some point in this process, then, 'Jimmy' will come to refer to B

The Twins Case

- This strikes many people as the right conclusion
- If the mix up was spotted very quickly after it happened, it would be right to say of B, 'Whoops, that's Timmy, not Jimmy!'
- But that reaction would be totally inappropriate if the mix up were only discovered 40 years later, when B has a family and a mortgage under the name 'Jimmy'

Summing Evans' Picture Up

- Evans' picture is an interesting hybrid of causal and descriptivist approaches, which seems to get better results than Kripke's Causal Picture
- It also re-introduces something like Frege's sense/reference distinction
 - The sense of a name is given by the information associated with that name
- But it is also worth emphasising that on Evans preserves Kripke's insight that names are **rigid designators**
 - As we use a name, it picks out the causal source of the majority of the information we associate with that name
 - It picks out that very same object in every world we describe

Tomorrow's Seminar

- The reading for tomorrow's seminar is:
 - Evans, 'The Causal Theory of Names'
- 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 9
- For next week's seminar, read:
 - Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism '
- Access to this paper can be found on the VLE Reading List