

Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*
Lecture Five

Back to Necessity and A Priority

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Back to Necessity and A Priority

Introduction

Three Distinctions

The Necessary A Posteriori

The Contingent A Priori

Summary

Re-Cap: 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 objections to descriptivism:
 - The Modal Argument
 - The Semantic Argument
 - The Epistemic Argument
- Kripke completely rejects descriptivism: in general, names are not synonymous with definite descriptions

Re-Cap: The Causal Picture of Reference

- Kripke replaces descriptivism with this Causal Picture of Reference
- On this picture, we introduce a name by baptising a person, either by ostension or by description
- After we introduce a name by baptism, that name becomes a rigid designator for the thing being baptised
 - Even if we use a description to fix the reference of a name, that name **does not** become synonymous with that description!
- That name is then spread from person to person through a causal chain of communication

Metaphysics (at last!)

- In the remaining four lectures of this module, we will start looking at the **metaphysical** conclusions that Kripke drew from his discussion of names
- We will start in this lecture by looking at some very famous claims that Kripke made about the relation between necessity and a priority

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The Contingent A Priori

Summary

Three Distinctions

- In Lecture 1, I introduced the following distinctions:
 - (i) The a prior/a posteriori distinction
 - (ii) The analytic/synthetic distinction
 - (iii) The necessary/contingent distinction
- Historically, philosophers have been quite bad at seeing the difference between these distinctions, but they **are** different

The A Priori/A Posteriori Distinction

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

The Analytic/Synthetic Distinction

- The analytic/synthetic distinction is a **semantic** distinction, i.e. a distinction concerning truth and meaning
- Roughly: to say that a statement is **analytic** is to say that the statement is true (or false) purely by virtue of the meanings of the words it contains
- Roughly: to say that a statement is **synthetic** is to say that it is true (or false) partly by virtue of the meanings of the words it contains, and partly by virtue of how the world is

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

Different but Co-Extensive?

- Clearly, these are three **different** distinctions, but it is natural to think that they will still be co-extensive
 - A statement is a priori iff it is analytic, and it is analytic iff it is necessary, and it is necessary iff it is a priori
 - A statement is a posteriori iff it is synthetic, and it is synthetic iff it is contingent, and it is contingent iff it is a posteriori
- The only philosopher before Kripke who was famous for denying that these distinctions were co-extensive was Kant
 - Kant believed that some a priori truths were synthetic, not analytic

Different but Co-Extensive?

- Kripke does not have much to say about the analytic/synthetic distinction; he focusses on necessity and a priority
- Even Kant thought that the necessary/contingent distinction was co-extensive with the a priori/a posteriori distinction
 - A statement is necessary iff it is a priori
 - A statement is contingent iff it is a posteriori
- But Kripke used his new ideas about how names work to argue that these distinctions are not co-extensive after all
 - (i) Some necessary truths can only be known a posteriori
 - (ii) Some contingent truths can be known a priori

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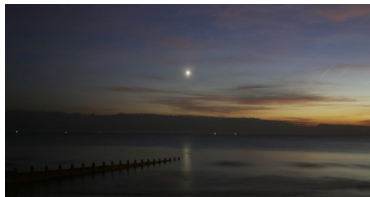
The Necessary A Posteriori

The Contingent A Priori

Summary

Hesperus and Phosphorus

- 'Hesperus' is the name for the brightest object in the evening sky
- 'Phosphorus' is the name for the brightest object in the morning sky
- Ancient Babylonian astronomers discovered that Hesperus and Phosphorus were one and the same thing
- Today we know that Hesperus/Phosphorus is the planet Venus



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

- We have to remember 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

Rigid Designators

- 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 (*N&N*: 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!

Clarification 1

- What about worlds in which Hesperus and Phosphorus do not exist? Will
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorusstill 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 would 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

A Necessary A Posteriori Identity

- Putting these points together,
 - (1) Hesperus is Phosphorusis a **necessary a posteriori** truth
- It does take experience to figure out that (1) is true, but despite that fact, (1) couldn't have been false!

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 we can know it **a priori**: there are many identities that require experience to discover

Both Names Must Be Rigid!

- I said that if 'a' and 'b' are both rigid designators, then

$$(3) a = b$$

will be **necessarily** true, if it is true at all

- It is important to stress that both names **must** be rigid for this to work
- If one of them is rigid and the other isn't, then there will be a world where they do not refer to the same thing

Both Names Must Be Rigid!

(4) Hesperus is my favourite heavenly body

- Let's imagine (4) is true; still, (4) is only **contingently** true
- While 'Hesperus' is a rigid designator, 'my favourite heavenly body' is **not** rigid
- In each world, 'my favourite heavenly body' picks out whatever happens to be my favourite heavenly body
 - In the actual world, 'my favourite heavenly body' picks out Hesperus, but in a world where my favourite heavenly body is Jupiter, 'my favourite heavenly body' picks out Jupiter instead
- As a result, there are worlds in which 'Hesperus' and 'my favourite heavenly body' pick out different things, and so (4) is false in those worlds

The Key Things to Remember

- Here are the **KEY THINGS** to remember about what we have just gone through
- If '*a*' and '*b*' are both rigid designators, then ' $a = b$ ' is necessarily true, if it is true at all
 - Example: Hesperus is Phosphorus
- If '*a*' is rigid but '*b*' is not, then if ' $a = b$ ' is true, it will only be contingently true
 - Example: Hesperus is my favourite heavenly body
- But even if ' $a = b$ ' is necessarily true, it may still only be knowable **a posteriori**
 - Example: Hesperus is Phosphorus

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Summary

Two Distinctions (which aren't even co-extensive)

- Earlier we reminded ourselves of these two distinctions:
 - (i) The a priori/a posteriori distinction
 - (ii) The necessary/contingent distinction
- I mentioned that before Kripke, most philosophers thought that these two distinctions were co-extensive:
 - A statement is a priori iff it is necessary
 - A statement is a posteriori iff it is contingent
- Kripke has already done enough to show that these distinctions are **not** co-extensive
 - 'Hesperus is Phosphorus' is necessarily true, but can only be known a posteriori
- However, Kripke also presented another kind of counterexample: he argued that there are **contingent** truths which we can know **a priori**

The Standard Metre

- The French invented the metric system after in the aftermath of the French Revolution
- They made a “standard metre”: a bar of metal, whose length was used to define the metre
- We continued to use a metal bar to define the metre until 1983, at which point we re-defined the metre as the distance that light travels in a vacuum in $1/299,792,458$ seconds



A Metre Long Metre Standard

- Let's use 'S' as a name for the bar that the French used as their standard metre, and now consider the following sentence:

(5) S is one metre long
- (5) is definitely true, but what kind of truth is it?
 - Is it necessary or contingent?
 - It is a priori or a posteriori?

A Necessary Truth?

- It might be tempting to say that
(5) S is one metre long
is necessarily true: after all, the metre is **defined** as the length of S !
- But Kripke (*N&N*: 54–5) thinks that this is a mistake
- According to Kripke, '1 metre' is not *synonymous* with 'the length of S '
- Rather, '1 metre' is a **rigid designator** which refers to a particular length
- It is true that we use the length of S to **fix the reference** of '1 metre', but as we have already discussed, that *does not* make '1 metre' synonymous with 'the length of S '

A Contingent Truth

- If '1 metre' is a rigid designator for a particular length, then
(5) S is one metre long
isn't necessarily true
- Just imagine a world in which we applied some physical force on S which changed its length
 - For example, imagine that we heated S up, so that it expanded
- In that case, S would have a different length from the length it actually has, and since '1 metre' is a rigid designator for the length that S actually has, S would not be 1 metre long
- So there is a possible world in which (5) is false, and so (5) is only contingently true

An A Priori Truth

- Now let's ask whether
(5) *S* is one metre long
is a priori or a posteriori
- According to Kripke (*N&N*: 56–7) the answer is: a priori
- Although '1 metre' is not synonymous with 'the length of *S*', we did still use that description to fix the reference of '1 metre'
- So we can figure out that (5) is true just by thinking about how we fixed the reference of '1 metre'
- This is a priori knowledge: we discovered that (5) is true **without** getting involved in any sort of empirical investigation

A Contingent A Priori Truth

- So putting both of these points together, we can say that

(5) *S* is one metre long

is a **contingent a priori** truth

- We can figure out that (5) is true without getting involved in any empirical investigations, but despite that fact, (5) could still have been false!

Generalising this Example

- Consider a statement of this form:
 - (6) If a exists, then a is F
- Suppose that ' a ' is a rigid designator, and that we fixed its reference by stipulating that it is to refer to the F
- In that case, (6) is a priori
 - We can figure out that (6) is true just by thinking about how we fixed the reference of ' a '
- But nonetheless, (6) will usually only be contingently true:
 - Typically, there will be some world in which a exists but is not F

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Summary

The Key Things to Remember

- Here are the **KEY THINGS** to remember from this lecture
- Before Kripke, most philosophers thought that the a priori/a posteriori distinction was co-extensive with the necessary/contingent distinction
 - A statement is a priori iff it is necessary
 - A statement is a posteriori iff it is contingent
- But Kripke argued that this was wrong: there are necessary a posteriori truths, and contingent a priori ones too

The Key Things to Remember

- Kripke's main example of a posteriori necessities are true identity claims
- In general, if 'a' and 'b' are **both** rigid designators, then the following will be necessarily true, if it is true at all:
 - $a = b$
- The standard example of this is:
 - Hesperus is Phosphorus

The Key Things to Remember

- Kripke's example of an a priori contingency is:
 - S is one metre long
- Since we fixed the reference of '1 metre' as the length of S , we can know that this is true a priori
- But since '1 metre' is not synonymous with 'the length of S ', and S could have been a different length, it is not necessarily true that S is one metre long

Next Lecture

- Kripke has thoroughly severed the connection between *a priori* and *necessary*
- Kripke moves on from here, and suggests that there are **lots** more a posteriori necessary truths
- We will start looking at them in the next lecture