

Chapter Five

Kripke's theory of Proper Names

The concept of proper name has already been discussed by Mill. Because Mill was the first philosopher who ingrained the seed of proper name from which the subsequent philosophers have developed the concept of proper names. Even though Mill has not been a recognized linguistic philosopher but from his classification of names later philosophers got many important clues on the basis of which they have enabled to develop the concept of proper name. Mill says that proper names have connotation as well as denotation. Mill divided name into singular and general. Singular names are non-connotative and it denotes a single thing or an attribute only but the general name are connotative and designate an indefinite number of individuals. So, according to Mill proper names has connotational aspect. Frege's sense theory of name is similar to Mill's theory of general connotative names. Frege also says that proper names have sense as well as reference. On the other hand, Russell's theory of definite description is akin to Frege's sense theory of name. Again, Russell's theory of logically proper name is a direct referential theory which is accepted by Kripke. He opines that proper names do not have any sense. Kripke constructs his views in opposition to Russell's description view and Frege's theory that the sense of a term determines the reference of that term, a view that is probably mistakenly. Contrary to Russell, Kripke argues that names cannot be disguised descriptions' on three grounds:

- (a) "There are numerous instances where a name is not associated with any uniquely identifying description or cluster of descriptions.

(b) A person may know how to use a proper name without knowing the appropriate set of descriptions associated with that name. Speakers often legitimately use proper names to refer to individuals without having the required information which would uniquely identify that individual to them.

(c) Certain names, proper names and natural kind terms in particular, are rigid designators in the sense that they are not disguised description.”¹²⁰

Kripke's argument regarding proper name is based mainly on the distinction between what he calls rigid and non-rigid or accidental designators. A rigid designator is one which designates the same object in all possible worlds; i.e., if it designates a certain object in the actual world then it designates the same object in all other possible worlds in which the object exist at all (it being inconceivable that there are some possible worlds in which the object does not exist). “A non- rigid designator, on the other hand, is one which does not designate the same object in all possible worlds; i.e., there are possible world in which the designator designates objects that are different from what it designates in the actual world”.¹²¹ ‘The square root of 4’ is a rigid designator for it designates the same object, namely, the number 2, in all possible worlds; but ‘the president of the USA in 1970’ is a non-rigid designator for it does not designate the same individual in all possible worlds: it designates Richard Nixon in the actual world, but that is only due to the actual outcome of the relevant Presidential election, and the result of the election need not have been what it actually was; the result of election might have been different and a different man might have been elected.

¹²⁰ Kripke.Saul. *Naming and Necessity*: 1980: Oxford: Blackwell: Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. P. 321.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p. 322.

In terms of this distinction between rigid and non-rigid designators, we can now formulate Kripke's basic argument against the theory that proper names have sense as well as reference. The following is my formulation of the argument:

"If a proper names has a sense then the reference of the proper name is determine by its sense, i.e., there is associated with a proper name a certain condition, whatever that condition may be, and an object is designated by the name if and only if it satisfies that condition. If this is how the reference of a proper name is determined then a proper name can not be a rigid designator; at least it can not in general be a rigid designator."¹²² For, there is no guarantee that the object which satisfies the condition associated with the proper name in the actual world would also satisfy it in all other possible worlds. It may well be that some other object satisfies the condition in another world. In fact, if the reference of a proper name is determined by its sense, it will be a non-rigid designator and behave exactly like 'the president of the USA in 1970'. But a proper name is a rigid designator. It does not have any sense.

How can we show that a proper name is a rigid designator? Kripke's argument for this is quite straightforward. A proper name must be a rigid designator for; otherwise, we could not make counterfactual assertions by their help, as we can actually do. In order to assert that the man who was actually the president of the USA in 1970, by virtue of having won the relevant election, might not have been the president, for it was just a contingent matter of fact that he won the election, now we can use the name of the person and say 'Nixon might not have been the President of the USA in 1970'. This counterfactual could not mean what its means unless the proper name 'Nixon' designated the same individual in both

¹²² Ibid. p. 323.

the actual world, in which he is the President, and the possible world, in which he is not.

Let us consider briefly whether Kripke's argument really amounts to a refutation of the sense theory of proper names. There is no doubt that the argument is valid in the sense that if the premises are all true then the conclusion is also true. So, the question is whether the premises of the argument are all true.

The first premise of the argument is: if the proper name has a sense, then there is associated with every proper name a certain condition such that the proper name designates an object if and only if the object satisfies the condition. We think that this premise is true. In order to see that it is, it is necessary clearly to distinguish two significantly different ways in which one may maintain that a proper name is associated with a condition. One may maintain that a proper name is associated with a condition in that the condition only fixes the reference of the name. Again, one may maintain that a proper name is associated with a condition not only in that the condition fixes the reference of the name, but also in that the fulfillment of the condition by the object is strictly entailed by its being designated by the name, so that the fulfillment of the condition is 'logically necessary and sufficient for the object's being designated by the name.'¹²³

One may maintain that the condition involved in the description 'the length of the standard metre bar in Paris' is associated with the designator 'One metre', but only by way of determining its reference, and that is why it is logically possible that the length designated by 'one metre' would cease to satisfy the condition- it would cease to satisfy the condition in the logically possible event of the metre bar changing in its length, and would still continue to be designated by the same designator. Now, we think that it should be clear that one who wants to maintain that

¹²³ Ibid. p. 325.

a proper name has sense must maintain that some condition or the other is associated with every proper name not in the first but in the second manner, For, if the condition is to constitute the sense or meaning of the name, the relation between the condition and then name must be more intimate than what a mere fixing of the reference would demand. There must, in fact, be a logical connection between the two.

Let us now consider the second premise of Kripke's argument in my formulation: if the reference of a name is determined by its sense, if, that is, a name designates an object if and only if it satisfies a certain condition, then it can not be a rigid designator. This premise is really doubtful, especially in view of certain thing which Kripke himself has said. As Kripke has pointed out, some designators which are of this kind are rigid designator, e.g., 'the square roots of 4'. It is not the case that this designator stands for one number in the actual world and a different number in another possible world. The square root of 4 is to be in all possible worlds. One may, however, argue at this juncture that 'the square root of 4' could be a rigid designator in spite of the fact that its sense determines its reference because the sense consists of a property which is essential to the number it designates but, for the first thing, 'the square root of 4' is not really a proper name, and, for the next, what it designates is not one of those things which are usually supposed to be designated by proper names – persons, things and places – and it is extremely doubtful whether they can be said to have any essential properties. But this way out of the difficulty is not open to Kripke himself, because he has not only maintained but has actually argued at length that particular persons and things, typical bearers of proper names, can be said to have essential properties. To quote two of his own examples, "the property of being born to the parents to whom he is in fact born is an essential property of

Nixon, and the property of being made of the block of wood of which it is actually made is an essential property of a wooden table.”¹²⁴

We think, however, that we can pursue this line a little more in defence of Kripke. What is important, it may be said, is not whether things designated by proper names have essence, but whether these essences play any role in the designation of objects by proper names. It can be argued that they do not. In the first place, Locke may indeed be right in maintaining that these real essences of things, as these essences have to be are not in general knowable, and, as such, can not be used by those who use proper names. In the second place, even if these essences are knowable, it is not by their help that the references of the proper names is, or need be, determined. What may be said to be necessary for use of proper names is that we should have a means of identifying the objects they are intended to refer to; i.e., we should be in a position to tell which objects they are supposed to be names of. But this can be done by the help of accidental characteristics: the description which may be used for the purpose of fixing the reference of a proper name need not be necessarily satisfied by what the name designated. Here, we may again refer to the the relation between Nixon’s and ‘the president of USA in 1970’ or the relation between ‘one metre’ and ‘the length of the standard metre bar in Paris’

We have a feeling that this is the line in which a defence for Kripke has not been sought. But we are not sure whether it would constitute a defence of Kripke’s second premise in my formulation, viz., that ‘if the reference of a name is determined by its sense then it can not be rigid designator.’¹²⁵ This seems to be the line to take if what we want to prove is that a proper name does not have any sense at all. For if it is not the

¹²⁴ Ibid. P.325.

¹²⁵ Ibid. p. 336.

essential property which determines the reference of the name for its users then it is not the essential property which constitutes its sense. But this indeed is a strange, if not an absurd, conclusion to draw.

This uncertainty over the second premise of the argument which we have attributed to Kripke surely weakens it. We should, nevertheless, take a look at the third premise of the argument: a proper name is a rigid designator. This premise has an intrinsic interest of its own, although, if there is any thing wrong with the second premise, it would not save Kripke's argument.

We think that being a rigid designator is an essential characteristic of a proper name, and that lying emphasis on this and showing its various important implications are Kripke's major contribution to the subject, even if what we have described as his argument to refute the sense theory of proper name does not succeed. But, at the same time, we believe that the basic insight behind the principle that proper names are rigid designators was formulated by John Stuart Mill. At one place, Mill tells us that 'a proper name is a name of the thing itself.'¹²⁶ We take this to mean that the proper name designates the objects which it designates irrespective of the properties it may or may not have, whether or not it satisfies a certain description or condition. If, thus, the proper name stands for the thing itself, independently of all those consideration, then there is no reason why the proper name should not be a rigid designator. To strengthen this point, we may not that we are, in any case, in need of rigid designators. If we do not have such designators, we shall never be able to say significantly that this or that object satisfies, or fails to satisfy, such and such conditions, or that this or that object might not have satisfied such and such conditions, or that it satisfies the conditions only contingently, at all. And what could such a designator, a designator which

¹²⁶ Mill, J. S. *A System of Logic* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, and Dyer, 1875).

refers to the thing itself, cutting through, so to say, all descriptive trappings, be, if it is not a proper name? The counterfactuals to which Kripke calls our attention do show that we have in proper names such designators as we need. Another basic insight into the nature of proper names was captured quite early by Russell, and is now developed in great detail by David Kaplan in the context of demonstrative in his brilliant monograph 'demonstratives'. It is that a proper name refers to its referent directly, and not via any characteristics. We think that the ideas that a designator stands for the object directly and that it stands for the object itself are strictly logically equivalent with each other: 'a designator stands for the object itself if and only if it refers to it directly.'¹²⁷

We want to conclude our discussion of the thesis is that the proper name is a rigid designator by saying that it seems to me that this thesis and the thesis that it does not have any sense both follow from the same basic characteristic, viz, that the proper name stands for the object itself, or, equivalently, that it refers to the object directly. It is not the case that either of these theses is a consequence of the other; in particular, it is difficult to maintain, for reasons we have already discussed, that a proper name's being a rigid designator is a consequence of its not having sense.

Thus, we do not think that what seems to be Kripke's argument against the sense theory of proper names succeeded. But the argument involves a number of ideas which are fundamental to the very notion of a proper name. The roots of all these ideas are to be found in Mill's and Russell's work.

The rigidity of a name depends upon its reference which is direct and non-contingent. If the object exists at all, then it exists necessarily in the sense that it cannot but be that object in any possible situation. Therefore the name has to be rigid across all possible situations.

¹²⁷ Kaplan, David. "Dthat" in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A.P. Martinich, pp. 316-29.

A possible situation is a possible world, according to Kripke. It contains the same objects as those that exist in the actual world though in different relations. Therefore a possible world differs from the actual world only in the way the objects are configured, that is, in their relations and their properties. The objects or the substances themselves do not change whereas their properties change. Thus, the names of the objects must refer to the objects necessarily and not contingently. ‘The possible world , for Kripke, are the possible situations that present alternative ways of describing the world and are not distant planet – like places which we see through a telescope.’¹²⁸ Therefore, whenever we talk of a possible world, we mean the alternative way of describing the world and its substances such that we can now refer to a person or thing in that world and ascribe a certain property to it. In the actual world, for example, Nixon is the American president in 1970, but in a possible world W1 he is a farmer and in another possible world W2 he is just a businessman. In all these possible worlds, Nixon remains the same person though he bears new properties “like being a farmer”, “being a businessman”, etc. Thus the rigid designator, “Nixon”, has an unalterable referent though what it refers to has new properties in each possible world.

Kripke arrives at a very novel notion of necessity in his theory of proper names and possible worlds. A sentence is necessarily true if it is true across all possible worlds or more succinctly in all possible-worlds of an actual –world. If a sentence is contingently true in the actual world like “Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander”, it can not be true in another possible world where Aristotle did not go for pedagogy at all. Aristotle might have been a doctor and therefore it will not be true that in that world he is the teacher of Alexander. Thus the sentence “Aristotle is the

¹²⁸ Kripke.Saul. “Naming and Necessity” in *Semantic of Natural Languages*, eds. Davidson and Harman.P.267.

teacher of Alexander” is only contingently true. But the sentence “Aristotle is Aristotle” remains true necessarily across all possible worlds. This may seem to be a triviality that Aristotle is Aristotle. But it cannot be a triviality because much depends on the self-identity of the person, Aristotle. To do away with the triviality, Kripke has another example of a necessary statement, e.g. “Hesperus is Phosphorus”. Here the two names “Hesperus” and “Phosphorus” refers to the same thing, the planet Venus. But they name the same individual across all possible-worlds and so the sentence “Hesperus is Phosphorus” is necessarily true. But the necessity being talked about here is not the necessity of the logical kind where necessity and analyticity are the same. This kind of necessity is called ‘metaphysical necessity.’¹²⁹

Metaphysical necessity can best be characterized as the necessity that follows from the fact that names refer rigidly to the substances they stand for and that the substances themselves have a rigid metaphysical structure. The structure is the underlying stuff of the substances which can be revealed only in a unique ostensive way. For example, water has the structure of H₂O, and gold has the atomic number 79. These structures are scientifically discovered and the metaphysical in character. Thus, the sentences “Water is H₂O” and “Gold has the atomic number 79” are epistemically a posteriori, but are yet metaphysically necessary. Their being empirical in nature does not go against their being necessarily true in every possible world. According to Kripke, the epistemological and metaphysical categories are very different from each other. What is metaphysically necessary need not be epistemologically so and vice versa. That is, there could be a truth which is apriori and yet metaphysically contingent just as there are truths which are

¹²⁹ Ibid.Pp.263-264.

metaphysically necessary but epistemologically a posteriori. This rejects the positivist theory that the only necessity is logical necessity.

The natural-kind terms such as “water”, “gold” etc.¹³⁰ bear certain characteristics which are true in all possible worlds. These characteristics constitute the very structure of the substances they stand for. Since the structures are essential to the substances, any description of them has to be necessary. In that sense, water is necessarily H₂O and the sentence “Water is H₂O” representing that structure is a necessary truth. This truth is an essential truth is scientific discovery and so has a metaphysical status. For Kripke, the truth of the statement is based on the consideration of the essential nature of the properties ascribed to the substance, water. So, metaphysical necessity and essentialism can move together.

Essentialism is the doctrine of the realists who impute an essential structure to the substances found in the world. For them, the substances are having essential as well as contingent properties such that language has to devise ways and means to refer to the essential structure. This can be done directly through ostensive definitions or through descriptions which represent the essential structure. In the latter case the descriptions have to be necessary and so constitutive. The constitutive truths have to be such that they are not analytically true but true as a matter of constitution. The direct reference takes place in such a way that we have a direct route to the essence of the things in our language. The natural kind terms can be taken as names that directly stand for the substances. ‘These terms are thus not only indexical in their referring function but also are such that they refer to the substances as directly and primitively as possible.’¹³¹

¹³⁰ Ibid. p. 264.

¹³¹ Ibid.

Kripke's theory of direct reference tends towards a causal theory of reference in that it converges on proposing that the names, including the natural kind terms, causally fix their referents. Kripke's argument is this: proper names are conferred on persons at a particular point of their life and that is called baptism. The name, after such 'baptism, spreads across society through a causal chain and thus is repeatedly used by his or her contemporaries.'¹³² This chain continues to be used by people who are far away in space and time. That is how the names "Nixon", "Gandhi", etc. are used by people in our society. Here the actual **dubbing ceremony** is important because the name is used for the child for the first time. That is the first link in the causal chain and that makes other links possible. In this way 'the names acquire the significance they have as a matter of causal determination.'¹³³

The causal theory of naming, as the name suggests, goes beyond the ordinary conception of name as a tag or at best as an unmeaning symbol for use in interpersonal communication. According to the causal theory, *names are significant bits of referring devices*. They are used for communication purposes under certain causal conditions such that once a name is introduced; it goes on acquiring new significance as the use accumulates. Thus there is a direct causal source of the names and they are accountable in terms of the habits and preferences of the linguistic community. The linguistic community is the ultimate determinant of the causal sufficiency of the names. Even then, the causal theorists are not description theorists and they prefer the direct reference theory because they think that in it alone there are both necessary and sufficient conditions for the explanation of how the naming takes place. The causal theory has been to some extent espoused by Donnellan, Putnam and

¹³² Ibid.p.264.

¹³³ Ibid. p. 265.

Evans apart from Kripke himself. It states that there is “a direct, though causally determined, route to the referents from the names.”¹³⁴ Kripke outlines the theory in the following way: “For species, as for the proper names, the way the reference of a term is fixed should not be regarded as a synonym for the term. In the case of proper names, the reference can be fixed in various ways. In the initial baptism it is typically fixed by an ostensive or a description. Otherwise, the reference is usually determined by a chain, passing the name from link to link.”¹³⁵

The theory thus makes a departure from the thesis that names are arbitrary and that they could be easily changed in a society. The theory makes it a necessary historical fact that names are a stable feature of the ongoing social convention of having recorded names.

So from the above discussion we see that Russell’s theory of logically proper name is a genuine proper name that designates the same object in every possible world of an actual world as admitted by Kripke. As far as ‘reference’ aspect is concerned there we find continuity from Russell to Wittgenstein to Kripke. These three philosophers have relevance opinion regarding the concept of proper names. As Russell’s theory of logically proper name and Wittgenstein picture theory of name and Kripke’s rigid designator are the same view or related to each other. The only difference among them is that Russell interprets logical proper names in terms of *acquaintance*, Wittgenstein in terms of *logical space* and Kripke in terms of *modal necessity*.

¹³⁴ Evans, Gareth. “The Causal Theory of Names” in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. Martinich, pp. 295-307.

¹³⁵ Kripke, Saul. “Naming and Necessity” in *Semantics of Natural Language*, eds. Davidson and Harman, p. 328.