

Naming and Necessity

Description

This course surveys Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity*, the indispensable text for contemporary metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of language, and philosophy of mind. At center stage in our discussion will be the relations between semantics (the study of linguistic meaning), epistemology (the study of how we know about things), and metaphysics (the study of the natures of things). Specific topics canvassed will include the nature, sources, and varieties of linguistic representation; the relation between our linguistic abilities and our other cognitive abilities; the nature of necessity and how we come to know about it; and the relation between our minds and our brains.

Requirements

Students are expected to attend all classes, read assiduously, and participate in classroom discussions. From time to time I will give homework assignments. Course grades will be determined by summing using the following weights:

Participation and homework	10%
midterm	20%
9-12 page paper	30%
final	40%

Office Hours

I am here to teach you. You are strongly encouraged to come by my office hours, at 70 S. Williams St. #107, Tuesdays from 2:30 to 3:30 P.M. for help or discussion.

Readings

Readings will be mainly from the paperback edition of *Naming and Necessity* available in the bookstore. Additional readings, comprising commentary and criticism, will be available online on the course BlackBoard website, accessible at <http://bb.uvm.edu>.

Disclaimer

This is not a contract. Changes to course design and grading policies may be made at any time if, and only if, such changes promote the educational ends of the course.

Topics

The following is a provisional list of topics for the course.

I. Course Introduction

- (a) **Naming: The question of the semantic bond:** How your use of ‘Aristotle’ now single out the right guy?
- (b) **Necessity: the mysteries of necessity:** What is it about Obama in virtue of which he could not have been a turnip? How do we know he could not have been a turnip?

II. Tools

- (a) **Necessity:** how things had to be (and how they couldn’t have been).
- (b) **A Priority:** knowledge independent of your senses.
- (c) **Analyticity:** truth in virtue of meaning.
- (d) **Possible Worlds:** fully-spelled-out possible scenarios.
- (e) **Designators:** words and phrases that refer to things.
 - i. **Proper Names:** *e.g.* ‘Aristotle.’
 - ii. **Definite Descriptions:** expressions of the form ‘the so-and-so,’ *e.g.* ‘the man who corrupted Hadleyburg.’
- (f) **Rigid Designation:** designating the same thing in every possible world.
- (g) **Synonymy vs. Reference-fixing:** Kripke’s distinction between a description’s *meaning the same thing* as ‘Aristotle’, and simply singling out the referent which ‘Aristotle’ is to have.

III. Descriptivism: “Proper names are disguised definite descriptions”.

- (a) **Synonymy Descriptivism:** “Proper names are synonymous with the definite descriptions speakers associate with them.”
- (b) **The Modal Argument(s):** Kripke: synonymy descriptivism is false because it incorrectly characterizes what ‘Aristotle’ refers to in other possible worlds.
- (c) **Widescopeism [OPTIONAL]:** Can Synonymy Descriptivism escape the modal arguments?
- (d) **Reference-fixing Descriptivism:** “Proper names get their reference fixed by definite descriptions.”
- (e) **The Epistemic Argument(s):** Synonymy and Reference-fixing Descriptivism are both false because they incorrectly characterize how we can know things about Aristotle.
- (f) **The Semantic Argument(s):** Kripke: Synonymy and Reference-fixing Descriptivism are false because they get the actual referent of ‘Aristotle’ wrong.
- (g) **Further Flavors of Descriptivism**
 - i. **Cluster Theory:** One descriptive condition, or enough of a bunch (or cluster) of descriptive conditions?
 - ii. **Socialized Association:** conditions associated with a proper name by the speaker or by her community?
- (h) **The Empirical Inadequacy Objection:** When we don’t have enough information to single out the referent.
- (i) **The Core of Descriptivism:** Is there one?

- (j) **The Circularity Constraint:** How about the description, “the referent of ‘Aristotle’”?

IV. **The Causal-Historical Theory of Reference:** Kripke’s answer to the question of the semantic bond.

- (a) **The Theory Stated:** A referent for ‘Aristotle’ is secured by the history of the speaker’s use of the name.
- (b) **Difference from Descriptivism:** being in a good position to refer to Aristotle vs. knowing enough to single him out.
- (c) **The “Madagascar” Problem:** ‘Madagascar’ used to refer to the east coast of continental Africa. Now it doesn’t. How can the causal-historical theory accommodate this fact?
- (d) **The Unwitting Contradiction Problem [OPTIONAL]:** When you don’t recognize the same name all over again, the causal-historical theory allows you to contradict yourself without realizing it.

V. **Descriptivism Redux:** The Descriptivists are back, with a new and improved theory!

- (a) **Co-opting Kripke: Causal Descriptivism:** “Just lift your descriptive condition from Kripke’s causal-historical theory of reference.”
- (b) **The “Response” Response:** How to associate a descriptive condition with a name without realizing it.
- (c) **The Argument from Unreflective Reference [OPTIONAL]:** Kids can use names, too. But they can’t even understand the Causal Descriptivist’s proposed descriptive condition.

VI. **Natural Kind Terms:** Kripke ventures into common nouns used in scientific theorizing.

- (a) **Varieties of Natural Kind Terms:** words for species (*e.g.* ‘platypus’), substances (*e.g.* ‘beer’), and phenomena (*e.g.* ‘static electricity’).
- (b) **Non-Natural Kind Terms:** Are there any common nouns which *aren’t* natural kind terms?
- (c) **Names and Natural Kind Terms:** Kripke: “They’re just the same – natural kind terms do not disguise or abbreviate definite descriptions.”

VII. **Conceptualism, or Necessity in Virtue of Meaning:** Explaining necessity in terms of features of our *words*, rather than in terms of features of the things themselves.

- (a) **Conceptualism and the Mysteries of Necessity:** What is it about bachelors, in virtue of which it is impossible for there to be a married bachelor? Conceptualist: “Nothing. It’s something about our *words* ‘bachelor’ and ‘married’.” How do we know that it is impossible for there to be a married bachelor? Conceptualist: “We know that by knowing the meanings of those words.”
- (b) **Necessity and A Priority:** Kripke on why we shouldn’t believe that a claim is necessarily true iff it is *a priori*.
- (c) **Necessities for Nixon: De Re Necessities:** There’s supposed to be a big difference between general claims of necessity, like “it is impossible for there to be a married bachelor”, and claims about the necessities for particular individuals, *e.g.*, “Nixon could not have been a turnip.”
- (d) **Skepticism about De Re Necessities:** If you’re a conceptualist, you’ve got a problem with an individual’s being necessarily a non-turnip.

- (e) **Kripke's Defense of *De Re* Necessities:** Kripke offers three different defenses of the idea that an individual can have necessity-properties.
 - i. **The Argument from Rigid Designation:** In which Kripke criticizes the Conceptualist arguments against *de re* necessities for not distinguishing between rigid designators and non-rigid designators.
 - ii. **The Argument from Possible Worlds:** In which Kripke claims that the fact that possible worlds are “stipulated” shows that there's no problem with an individual's having a necessity-property.
 - iii. **The Argument from Intuition:** In which Kripke shows that it's highly counter-intuitive to deny that an individual can have necessity-properties.

VIII. **The Contingent *A Priori*:** Things you know independently of sense experience that might have been false.

- (a) **Cases: The Standard Meter and Neptune:** Kripke's examples of the contingent *a priori*: The Chairman of the Board of Weights and Measures knows *a priori* that a certain stick (the standard meter stick) is exactly 1 meter long. French astronomer LeVerrier knew *a priori* that Neptune causes the perturbations in the orbit of Uranus.
- (b) ***A Priori* by Stipulation:** Kripke thinks that stipulating that a name refers to whatever satisfies a given description suffices for *a priori* knowledge.
- (c) **The Problem of Erroneous Stipulation:** In which we notice that LeVerrier's stipulation has turned out to be false.
- (d) **The Problem of Multiple Stipulation:** In which we notice that people use very different descriptive conditions to single out a referent for one and the same term, and that these conditions change over time.
- (e) **Reference-fixing Revisited: Can Reference be Fixed by Description? [OPTIONAL]:** Some skeptical musings about Kripke's examples.

IX. **The Necessary *A Posteriori*:** Things that had to be true that you can only know by using your senses.

- (a) **Kripke's Normal Method:** Kripke has a standard recipe for justifying *a posteriori* necessities.
- (b) **Cases:** Kripke's examples.
- (c) **The Illusion of Contingency:** When something seems possible that isn't.
 - i. **The Problem Stated:** Some of Kripke's claims of necessity don't seem correct. For instance, it seems possible that there be heat without there being molecular motion; the claim 'heat = the motion of molecules' seems to be only contingently true.
 - ii. **Kripke's Defense by Diagnosis:** Kripke attempts to solve the problem by diagnosing the appearance of contingency as the result of a simple, but very tempting, error.
 - iii. **A Test Case: the Necessity of Origin:** Kripke argues that Elizabeth Windsor's origins are necessary for her: she could not have had different biological parents. Is his diagnosis plausible in this case?

X. **Arguing for the Necessity of Origin [OPTIONAL]:** Why should we think in the first place that Windsor could not have had different biological parents?

- (a) **The Humean Background:** Hume: no necessary connections between distinct existences.
- (b) **The Sufficiency Argument:** Kripke's argument of footnote 67.

(c) **The Branching Times Argument:** Kripke's argument of footnote 68.

XI. **The Cartesian Argument:** Kripke's argument for the real distinction between the mind and the body.

(a) **The Argument Stated**

(b) **Defending the Main Premise:** The main premise of Kripke's argument is: that it is possible that someone be in pain, even though she is not in any relevant brain-state (like "C-fibers' firing").

i. **The Argument from Intuition:** "It seems possible for there to be pain without C-fibers' firing."

ii. **Defense by Diagnosis?:** Is the intuition diagnosable using Kripke's techniques?

iii. **The Disanalogy with Heat:** Kripke: "No, no diagnosis works for 'pain = C-fibers' firing' in the same way that it works for 'heat = the motion of molecules'."

iv. **Kripke's Phenomenal Theory of Pain:** According to Kripke, something is pain only if it feels a certain way (*i.e.* only if it hurts).

v. **Diagnosing on the Physical Side:** Will the diagnosis work for C-fibers firing?

(c) **The Argument from the Phenomenal Nature of Pain:** A new argument for dualism, using Kripke's phenomenal theory of pain.