

RIGIDITY AND SCOPE

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Kripke writes: «Let's call something a *rigid designator* if in any possible world it designates the same object, a non-rigid ... designator if that is not the case.» [Kripke, pp. 269-270] On this informal account there are no rigid designators; since, for any expression 'E', it is a *contingent* truth that 'E' means E. That is, all metalinguistic propositions are contingent, and on Kripke's informal account, an expression is rigid iff it necessarily denotes whatever it denotes. So, on the informal account there are no rigid designators.

Kripke is not much exercised by this objection; not through any invalidity in the argument, but because his informal account is not quite accurate to his intent. In possible world talk, *that* could be given better expression by: a term is rigid iff it designates the same object in any possible world in which the use of bits of language is no different to our own. Or, avoiding possible worlds, a term 'E' is rigid iff it means E, and the *proposition* 'E might not have been E' is false.

Amongst the views which have been held about rigidity is the view that wherein primacy therein rigidity, i.e., that any expression which has been assigned primary scope in a sentence is the in a rigid designator. For example, Dummett writes: «Kripke's doctrine that proper names are rigid ... thus reduces to the claim that, within a modal context ... the scope of a proper name should always be taken to include [the modal operator].» [Dummett, p. 128] Linsky writes: «The key idea is that the scope operator may function to transform a description into a rigid designator.» [Linsky, p. 59] And finally, Brody argues: «... Kripke seems to be saying that a designator is used rigidly if and only if, when using it to talk about another possible world ... we use it to refer to the same object it refers to when we use it to talk about the actual world» [Brody, p. 67]; and then says «... it is unclear what rigid designation can mean over and above the description's lying outside the scope of the modal operator». [op. cit. p. 68, cf. Burge, p. 244]

The matter is of some importance: if the view were correct, then a proper name may be rigid whilst still being a disguised description.

I believe, however, that the view is mistaken. Consider

- α) The number of planets is necessarily the positive square root of 81

This proposition is *de re*, and is of opposite truth-value to the corresponding *de dicto* proposition. In its verbal expression 'the number of planets' is afforded primary scope. The most significant feature, however, with respect to the view that primary scope confers rigidity is that α) is *contingent*.

Four arguments reveal the contingency of α).

First, a conjunction of α) and the possible truth

- β) There are 7 planets

entails

- γ) 7 is necessarily the positive square root of 81

which is false. Thus, the conjunction of α) and β) is false. And, if, as is possible, β) were true, α) would be false. So there are possible circumstances in which α) is false.

Second, α) entails

- δ) There are 9 planets

since no other number than 9 necessarily has the property of being the positive square root of 81. But δ) is contingent; no necessary truth can entail a contingent one, and so α) is not necessary.

Third, β) does not entail α), since if they were conjointly true, then γ) would be true, which is absurd. Therefore, β) does not entail α), and since a necessary truth is entailed by *any* proposition, α) is not necessary.

Fourth γ) is *impossible*; thus if the conjunction of α) and β) entails γ), as I contend it does, a conjunction of α) and β) is impossible. A conjunction of a necessary truth and a possible truth is itself possible; β) is possible; therefore α) is not necessary.

Yet clearly, *if* a description with primary scope were rigid, then α) would be a necessary truth. For the description 'the number of planets' denotes 9, and it is not possible for 9 not to be the positive square root of 81. Hence, it is mistaken to suppose that primary scope confers rigidity.

Those who hold this view have confused what is true of an expression with primary scope, namely, that it is not assigned a new reference in each alternative possible world, but instead maintains the reference it has in the actual world⁽¹⁾, with what is true of a rigid expression, namely, that it has the same reference in *any* possible circumstance (except those in which it has a different meaning). But the second does not follow from the first. For a description with primary scope denotes that which satisfies it in the *actual* world and what the actual circumstances are, with respect to many descriptions – even supposing invariance of meaning – is a contingent matter. The same point holds against the sometimes held view that a description with the suffix 'in fact' is rigid. [e.g. Nute, p. 478] For just as, as Ramsey remarks, 'is true' is logically superfluous in many contexts [Ramsey, p. 45] so too is 'in fact'. Instead, it serves merely to indicate *that* the description it succeeds is to be treated as having primary scope.

It is those for which this is not a contingent matter that are rigid. The contingency of α) entails, with the appropriate metalinguistic premiss, that 'the number of planets' is not rigid. It's contingency derives from the possibility of something's numbering the planets and *not* being the positive square root of 81. And since whatever is the positive square root of 81 *necessarily* has that property, it follows that the contingency derives from the possibility of some other number than that which does numbering the planets.

Contrapositively, the *necessity* of

- ε) The whole number immediately succeeding 8 is necessarily the positive square root of 81

⁽¹⁾ The 'primacy confers rigidity' view is encouraged by giving some such definition of rigidity as: a term is rigid iff *with respect to* every possible world in which it designates it designates the same object. (e.g. Chandler, p. 366, Peacocke, p. 110). Such a definition is intended to replace Kripke's informal account whereby a term is rigid iff *in* every possible world in which it designates it designates the same object. (Kripke, p. 269) The replacement, unlike the original, sidesteps the contingent status of propositions of the form 'E' means E'. Employing this definition it may be reasoned that a description with primary scope has the same reference with respect to any counterfactual circumstance we consider. But if my arguments are correct this does not support the view.

entails, with the appropriate metalinguistic premiss, that 'the whole number immediately succeeding 8' is rigid. The necessity of ϵ) derives from the *impossibility* of something's being the whole number immediately succeeding 8 and *not* being the positive square root of 81. And since whatever has the latter property *necessarily* has it, it follows that the necessity derives from the impossibility of some other number than that which is being the whole number immediately succeeding 8.

From this we can infer: *in the case of number designators* 'the F' is rigid iff, it means the F, the proposition that the F is necessarily G *is a necessary truth*, and 'G' holds of at most one individual.

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