

VI NAMING & NECESSITY, LECTURE THREE

Metaphysical Possibility and Epistemic Possibility

A statement is metaphysically possible iff there is a possible world in which it is true. A statement is epistemically possible iff there is a world in which, as far as our experiences go, words seem to be used the same way, but in which an utterance of the sentence that expressed that statement would express a true statement (that's rough; but the idea is that there are worlds in which an utterance of the sentence 'Hesperus is Phosphorous' would express a truth). Although identity statements involving rigid terms are, if true, metaphysically necessary (i.e. their denial is not metaphysically possible) they need not be epistemically necessary. We often mark our talk of epistemic possibility by the locution 'It might have turned out that ...' Apparent counterexamples to the necessity of identity are often cases of epistemic possibility. ('Elizabeth II might have turned out to be the daughter of the Trumans.')

Natural Kind Terms

Terms like 'Gold' and 'Tiger' work like proper names. They are rigid designators (of kinds), and their reference is not fixed by description but by something like ostension. The descriptions we give of them could be radically wrong. Cf. Putnam: 'Meanings ain't in the head'. The H₂O/XYZ example. The linguistic division of labor. The indexical element in natural kind terms.

Non-Natural Kind Terms

'Yellow': a term whose reference is fixed as the physical property that gives rise to the visual impression of yellow. (Contrast with a pure dispositional view on which, in each possible world, the yellow things are those that look yellow.)

The Argument for Dualism

Contrast identity statements that contain rigid names ('Hesperus is Phosphorous) and those that contain a rigid name and a description ('Benjamin Franklin is the inventor of bifocals'). The former are necessary, but the latter are contingent (unless the description happens to be rigid); on the Russellian approach, they are not even centrally identity statements. If an identity statement is necessary, then there will be no possible world in which the entity named by the term on one side of the identity has a property that is not had by the entity named on the other side. According to Kripke, the identity theorist about mental states wants to affirm identities using rigid names. There are two kinds. The token-token theorist (pp. 145-8) wants to say that each individual pain is identical with a particular neural state; the type-type theorist (pp. 148-55) wants to make the stronger claim that every mental type is identical with a neural type ('Pain is identical with C-fiber firings'). Kripke argues that both fall to the same basic worry: there are possible worlds in which the neural type lacks the property of being painful; whereas it is an essential property of pain that it is painful.