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Reply to Fernandez Moreno

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Reply to Fernandez Moreno

There are, I maintain, three distinct notions of rigidity in the literature.

- The strongest notion is that in terms of which proper names (and indexicals) can be squarely contrasted with definite descriptions. Proper names are rigid in the sense of 'directly referential' (Kaplan 1989) ; definite descriptions are not.
- Kripke's official notion of rigidity is weaker, and it is not sufficient to distinguish referential terms from definite descriptions. Certain descriptions — namely, those where the property that is the content of the description is necessary rather than contingent — are rigid in Kripke's official sense : they denote the same object in every possible world in which that object exists.
- The weakest notion of rigidity also applies to some descriptions which exploit contingent properties of the denotatum. Such a description is rigid (in the weakest sense) if and only if, in a modal context, it takes wide scope.

The weaker the notion of rigidity one assumes for proper names, the less sharp the contrast one gets between names and descriptions. This gives rise to various descriptivist strategies, i.e. strategies for reducing names (and other referential expressions) to descriptions.

A common descriptivist strategy is based upon the idea that rigidity is a matter of scope. It says that the only difference between a name and a description is that a name always (or, perhaps, usually) takes wide scope, while a description may take either wide scope or narrow scope. This view raises an obvious objection : if rigidity was merely a matter of scope, the notion would not apply to referential expressions as they occur in simple sentences. But it does. As Kripke says, rigidity is a matter of truth-conditions, and it concerns simple sentences as well as complex sentences.

In *Direct Reference* I put forward another argument against that descriptivist strategy. A wide scope description, I claimed, is not rigid, appearances notwithstanding. Consider 'The French President might have been a philosopher'. On the wide scope reading, it says of the President that he might have been a philosopher (had his life been different) ; on the narrow scope reading it says that a philosopher might have been President. Let us focus on the wide scope reading. The description, on that reading, refers to whoever is the President in the circumstance relative to which the complex sentence is evaluated. But that need not be the same person in all circumstances of evaluation. It follows that even a wide-scope description is not rigid in Kripke's official sense.¹

Fernandez Moreno claims that the descriptivist has a way out. To say that a description takes wide scope is to say that its reference is picked out in the actual world rather than in the world or worlds introduced by the modal operator. If we opt for a relative, indexical view of actuality, according to which every world is actual with respect to itself, then the reference of a wide scope description will be seen as nonrigidly shifting as we shift the world of evaluation for the complex sentence. But if we opt for an absolute, Kripkean notion of actuality, then, Fernandez Moreno says, we can maintain that a wide scope description is rigid : its reference is picked out in the actual world, and « there is a unique actual world » : so the reference of the description is not liable to vary, even if we vary the world of evaluation.

¹ That argument was anticipated by Stephen Schiffer (1977 : 31).

I agree with Fernandez Moreno that there is an 'absolute' notion of actuality alongside the relative, indexical notion. But I maintain that a wide scope description is *not* a description that is evaluated with respect to the actual world in that absolute sense. A wide scope description is a description whose denotation is picked out in the world of evaluation for the complex sentence, rather than in the world(s) introduced by the modal operator for the evaluation of the simple sentence in its scope. Any world can serve as the world of evaluation for the complex sentence, and there is no guarantee that the description's denotation will not shift as we shift the world of evaluation.

Can we not introduce, besides wide scope descriptions, another sort of description, namely *rigidified* descriptions, by stipulating that such a description picks out its reference in the actual world understood in the absolute sense? Indeed we can. This, Fernandez Moreno says, suggests another way of implementing the descriptivist strategy: a proper name (or a referential term more generally) can be equated to a rigidified description 'the x such that x is actually F'. Such a description will be rigid in Kripke's official sense, even if the property F is contingent; for the property of being actually F is necessary: the object (if any) which is actually F is the same with respect to every world w, on the absolute understanding of 'actually'.

Fernandez Moreno notes that I do not discuss this proposal. (He also notes that both Kripke and Putnam have implicitly appealed to rigidified descriptions to handle cases in which the reference of a referential term is fixed by a definite description.) I am grateful to him for providing me with an opportunity to say something about it.

To put it bluntly: I have no objection whatever to the claim that referential terms, or at least some of them, can be construed as rigidified descriptions. Indeed that is very close to what I myself propose for indexicals. Indexicals have a descriptive content; thus an occurrence of 'I' presents its reference as the speaker of that occurrence. That mode of presentation is truth-conditionally irrelevant, and its truth-conditional irrelevance is imposed at the lexical level by the feature REF. As I say in *Direct Reference*, « REF does exactly the same job as [Kaplan's] DTHAT; the difference between them is simply that I take REF to be a semantic feature of natural language, while DTHAT is an operator in an artificial language » (p. 31). Now DTHAT is a rigidifying operator. As Stalnaker puts it, it « turns any singular term into a rigid designator for the thing that is the actual referent of that term » (Stalnaker 2003: 197). It follows that on my analysis, an indexical is like a rigidified description since its meaning consists of (i) a descriptive content or mode of presentation, and (ii) the rigidifying operator carried by the feature REF. The same analysis applies to proper names insofar as, in my framework, they are treated as a special sort of indexical.

Does this mean that I am a descriptivist? Not at all! I maintain that there is a sharp contrast between directly referential terms (proper names and indexicals) and definite descriptions. Directly referential terms are rigid in virtue of their linguistic meaning (viz. in virtue of the feature REF); descriptions are not. If a description is rigid, it is so only 'de facto', either because the property in terms of which the denotation is described happens to be necessary, or because the speaker uses the description referentially. In the latter type of case, the description is rigidified, but the rigidifying operator which is contributed in virtue of the speaker's intention is not linguistically articulated; it is not part of the lexical meaning of the description.

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What about natural kind terms, the focus of Fernandez Moreno's enquiry? Before answering this question, I must first say something more about names and

indexicals. It is possible to treat names as indexicals, as I do ; but there is an alternative treatment which construes them as Millian tags. Consider, for example, a descriptive name such as Evans's 'Julius'. Even though the reference of the name is fixed via the description 'the inventor of the zip', still, on the Millian view, that description is not part of the meaning of the name. Instead of construing the meaning of the name as consisting of a description ('the inventor of the zip') and a rigidifying operator, the Millian view takes the reference-fixing description to play a *presemantic* role : it fixes the meaning of the name, which meaning is its reference — period. On this view, the difference between names and indexicals is that indexicals have a two-dimensional semantics, while names (like descriptions) have a one-dimensional semantics (Stalnaker 2003 : chapter 10). Indexicals have both a 'character' and a 'content'. Their character is a mode of presentation which, evaluated in the context, yields an object as value, which object goes into the content to be evaluated with respect to a circumstance. The rigidifying operator is there to guarantee that the object, not the mode of presentation, goes into the truth-conditional content of the utterance. With descriptions, the mode of presentation goes into the truth-conditional content (unless the description is used referentially) ; with proper names, on the Millian view, the meaning is, from the very start, an object, and that object is the name's contribution to truth-conditional content. It is only in the case of indexicals that we have two distinct levels : a meaning that is, in part, descriptive, and a content that results from evaluating the descriptive meaning in the context, with the rigidifying operator constraining the content to be the object resulting from the prior evaluation of the descriptive meaning in context and not the descriptive meaning itself.

The reason why I have just introduced the Millian option for proper names, even though I myself favour a unified, two-dimensional approach to referential terms, is that the same two options (the indexical view, and the Millian view) are available for natural kind terms. Either we say that the meaning of a natural kind term is the natural kind it names, period ; or we say that a natural kind term is like an indexical : it has a first level meaning which consists of a superficial property or complex of properties (the stereotype), and a second level meaning (the content) which is the 'deep' natural kind rather than the superficial property serving as its 'mode of presentation'. I take it that Kripke and Burge advocate the Millian view, while Putnam and Donnellan favour the indexical view. I myself, unsurprisingly, favour the indexical view.

How can the indexical view be implemented, in the case of natural kind terms ? A first difficulty is that, when we evaluate the stereotypical property (or complex of properties) in context, i.e. when we look for something that satisfies the property, what we get is an ordinary object or, rather, a set of such objects. Evaluating the stereotype of tigers in context gives us the set of objects that, in the context, look or behave like stereotypical tigers. Those objects which actually satisfy the stereotype are not the objects we want to get into the content of natural kind terms ; for we want the content to be the kind or the deep property, not the objects which satisfy the superficial property ! So applying a rigidifying operator to the stereotype construed as mode of presentation does not yield the right results. A second difficulty is due to the fact that we want to contrast natural kind terms with other general terms such as 'rectangle' ; but all natural kind terms rigidly contribute the 'property' which is their semantic value. How, then, can rigidity be the distinguishing characteristics of natural kind terms, which makes them similar to referential terms in the singular domain ?

The solution consists in making the picture slightly more complex than for

indexicals. Like indexicals, natural kind terms are evaluated in two stages : they are associated with a stereotype which is evaluated in context, and which is distinct from their content (the natural kind) ; but their content is *not* the contextual value of the stereotype. The value of the stereotype is a set of objects, which is mapped to the natural kind by an abstractive function.

I think an analogy can be useful here. Sometimes we express a property through an act of demonstrative reference to an instance of the property. So we can say : 'The wall is that colour', where 'that colour' (i) demonstrates a particular colour sample, and (ii) semantically contributes the colour property which that sample instantiates. In such a case, a function abs_{colour} takes us from the instance to the colour property it instantiates. I suggest that some such abstractive function is operative in the case of natural kind terms. The stereotype associated with the term is evaluated in context, yielding the local exemplars that satisfy the stereotype ; those exemplars serve as argument to a function abs_{nk} whose value is the natural kind which the exemplars instantiate. A natural kind term, therefore, involves (i) a rigidified description denoting the exemplars which satisfy the stereotype in the local context, and (ii) a function abs_{nk} taking us from those exemplars to the kind they instantiate. On this view what distinguishes natural kind terms from other general terms is not the fact that they rigidly contribute a property (all general terms do), but the fact that that property is reached via a form of indexical reference to the local exemplars.

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