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Names Over Time

This essay will first describe Saul Kripke's *Causal View* of proper names. It will then critique the view, focusing on the 'Madagascar' case proposed by Gareth Evans. Afterwards, it will present Evans' *Dominant Causal Source View*, which he takes to ameliorate the problems of the *Causal View.* Finally, it will propose a response that a proponent of the *Causal View* might give to Evans. Namely, that what we take to be changes in denotation of a name are in fact hidden baptisms. It will conclude by evaluating what each view reveals about the dynamics of proper names.

In Naming and Necessity, Kripke provides his picture of reference for proper names. Dubbed the *Causal View*, it suggests a causal process by which a name comes to refer to an entity. Moreover, it provides an explanation of the successful use of this name by speakers not acquainted with the entity, nor involved in its naming. The view can be summarized as follows. First, the originators of the name fix its reference to a thing in the world (Kripke, 1980/2019: 96). This can be done by description, i.e., "a 'meter' is the length of the stick in Paris" (Kripke, 1980/2019: 55). It can also be done by ostension, i.e., "Let us call *this* guy 'Bob'". On Kripke's view, this fixing event is called an 'initial baptism' (96). Once a name is baptized, speakers not involved in the baptism can use the name to refer to the entity. However, they can do so only if there is a causal chain linking their use back to the initial baptism (Kripke, 1980/2019: 96). The speaker's use of the term is part of this causal chain *iff* they intend to refer to the same entity as the speaker they learned it from (Kripke, 1980/2019: 96). For example, suppose I hear the name 'Napoleon' in a conversation that I know is about Napoleon Bonaparte. Suppose further that I then go on to call my pet 'Napoleon'. In this case, I no longer intend to use the name to refer to the French general (Kripke, 1980/2019: 96). Thus, this causal chain is broken, and my use of the name 'Napoleon' does not refer to the general (Kripke, 1980/2019: 96). Rather, it would refer to my pet.

In challenging this view, Evans asks us to consider certain examples. Suppose you are in a bar and overhear a conversation about a man named Louis (Evans, 1973: 192). Unbeknownst to you, the man being referred to is Louis XIII (Evans, 1973: 192). According to the *Causal View*, your use of the name in the conversation allows you to refer to Louis XIII (Evans, 1973: 192). However, the *Causal View* also takes your use of that name in the future to refer to Louis XIII (Evans, 1973: 192). That is, so long as your use is causally related to the conversation in some way (Evans, 1973: 192). However, there is no reason to think that this is the case, says Evans (192). There is no reason to think that when saying 'Louis was an athlete', you mean to denote Louis XIII (Evans, 1973: 193). Thus, the conditions set out by the *Causal View* are not sufficient to guarantee the successful use of the name (Evans, 1973: 191).

Or take the case of the Wagera Indians. As Evans remarks, their naming tradition abides by strict rules (195). Children are given their names based on their order of birth, and their ancestor's names (Evans, 1973: 195). As a result, one could deduce the name of a child and use it to refer to that person (Evans, 1973: 195). Therefore, one would successfully refer to an individual without any causal connection to other speakers' use of the name (Evans, 1973: 195). Thus, the conditions set out by the *Causal View* are not necessary for the proper use of a name (Evans, 1973: 195).

These issues come to the fore in Evans' 'Madagascar' example. According to Evans (via Isaac Taylor), Marco Polo was originally mistaken about the referent of the name 'Madagascar' (196). At the time, the name was used by speakers to refer to part of the African mainland (Evans, 1973: 196). However, some miscommunication caused Marco Polo to assign a version of the name he heard to the African island instead (Evans, 1973: 196). This case elucidates the shortcomings of the *Causal View*. Firstly, it shows that the conditions of the view are not sufficient for a speaker's proper use of a name. As in the Louis case, Marco Polo satisfies the conditions for referring to the mainland when using the term 'Madagascar'. He *intends* to use the term like the speakers he acquired it from. Despite this, he plainly fails to refer to the mainland through his use of the name. Moreover, as in the Wagera case, it shows that the conditions of the *Causal View* are not necessary. There is no initial baptism of the island as 'Madagascar' by any of the previous users of the name. Nor does Marco Polo explicitly dub the island 'Madagascar', since he thinks he uses the term like the sailors do. Despite this, Marco Polo still manages to

refer to the island via the name ‘Madagascar’. Thus, for Evans, cases of change in denotation in general present a counter to the *Causal View* (195).

Given these considerations, Evans aims to provide a theory of proper names that allows for their changing of denotation (198). In doing so, he agrees with Kripke that a speaker’s using a name to refer does involve a causal relation (Evans, 1973: 197). However, Evans disagrees that this causal relation is between the baptism and the speaker’s use (197). Rather, Evans locates the causal relation as between the referent and the information the speaker has about it (197). Specifically, a speaker’s use of a name refers to the *dominant causal source* of the information they associate with it (199).

Evans takes an entity’s being a *causal source* of the information expressed in an utterance to mean the following. Something is the *causal source* of a speaker’s belief if said belief was caused by it, in the right way. Namely, in such a way that is generally knowledge producing about the entity (Evans, 1973: 199-200). Notably, this information could be derived both by interaction, and purely from description. For example, one need not meet the tallest man in the world to be able to refer to that individual (Evans, 1973: 200). The description, here, is sufficient (Evans, 1973: 200). Through this source condition, Evans can explain Kripke’s Gödel & Schmidt scenario. It may be that Schmidt was responsible for the incompleteness theorem. However, Gödel is the source of people’s beliefs about the proof. Thus, speakers can successfully refer to Gödel in utterances regarding Gödel’s authorship of the theorem (Evans, 1973: 200).

Regarding the condition of *dominance,* Evans says the following. One’s dossier of information can be dominantly about something, despite some information being contained whose source is *not* that thing (Evans, 1973: 200). For example, I might have a dossier about Salmon, which is dominated by information from experiences of Salmon. However, some of the information in that dossier could be caused by an experience I had with Rainbow Trout. Moreover, Evans argues a key feature of *dominance* is that it is liable to change (200). To support this claim, Evans gives the example of the twin case. Suppose, unbeknownst to you, your acquaintance’s twin takes over his life. Over time, you then get to know this twin quite well. Eventually, Evans argues, your beliefs about your acquaintance would come to be dominated by their twin (201). At the beginning, you would have false beliefs about who you were talking to (Evans, 1973: 201). But by the end, you would have false beliefs about when you first met (the twin) (Evans, 1973: 201). The notion of *dominance* models this dynamic (Evans, 1973: 201).

In light of this, let us return to the 'Madagascar' case. The sailors, when transmitting the term, use it to refer to the mainland. The mainland is thus the dominant causal source of their beliefs about the entity 'Madagascar'. However, Marco Polo's dossier is dominated by a different entity. When Marco Polo learns of the word, he associates it with a set of beliefs dominated by the island. He succeeds in referring to the island because it is the dominant source of the beliefs he denotes by 'Madagascar'. Thus, the *Dominant Causal Source View* provides a framework to capture changes in the denotation of names.

However, a proponent of the *Causal View* might respond to Evans by offering a different gloss of the 'Madagascar' case. In this, they would deny the premise that Marco Polo does not meet the conditions set out by the *Causal View.* Specifically, they would challenge the claim that Marco Polo does not baptize the island as 'Madagascar'. Ostensibly, in his notes he defines Madagascar as (something like) the great island near the Southeast coast of Africa. In doing so, he fixes the reference of the name 'Madagascar' by description. And he does so specifically because the description he uses denotes an essentially different entity; something cannot be both an island and the mainland. However, the sailors continue to use 'Madagascar', or some form of it, to refer to the mainland. Indeed, Marco Polo *intends* to continue the chain of reference. However, he also satisfies the condition of baptising the island with the name 'Madagascar'. Although, he may not have done so knowingly or willingly. We now have two causal networks: the original, in which 'Madagascar' refers to the mainland, and Marco Polo's, where it refers to the island. The surprising aspect of this situation is that the chain originating with Marco Polo's baptism managed to overtake the original. Whatever the original name of the island, we now call it 'Madagascar'. Thus, we succeed in referring to the island by using the term as Marco Polo intended.

This possibility means that we need a way to decide whether a case is a baptism or a continuation. A Causal Theorist might propose that baptisms are not rare events. In fact, they happen whenever someone connects a name they have heard with essentially incorrect information about it. The same entity cannot, as in our example, be both an island and part of the mainland. However, the frequency of baptism is matched, in general, by the propensity of new chains to die out. It is possible that we make the kind of mistake Marco Polo made quite regularly. However, it is unlikely that some critical mass of people would ever use the word in this way. They would rather use it in the way some authority on the matter intended. Moreover,

once we recognize our mistake, we are apt to join the causal chain started by that authority. Marco Polo's case is rare, since his naming of entities around the world was taken as authoritative by other speakers. Thus, his correct reporting of the names of places brought these names to his audience, us. We use these names in the way he intended, and because he got it right, the way the original speakers intended. However, in cases where he gets it wrong, such as 'Madagascar', there is a struggle between two causal chains. After some point, the original causal chain was overtaken by the one started by Marco Polo.

Thus, the *Causal View* can handle these cases of change in denotation with the supposition that what occurs is a hidden baptism. Therefore, they are not actually changes in denotation of a name, but instances of the production of new names. And they seem to be more common than suspected. Moreover, this reply offers an explanation as to why it seems Marco Polo does something *wrong* in a moral sense. The naming of places, homes, is something we think should be reserved for the inhabitants of that place. By initiating this causal chain, given his authoritative role, he expropriates the naming privileges of the inhabitants of the island.

Proper names are meant to pick out a specific entity. Given this, one might imagine that this process is regimented and robust. The upshot of this discussion is that there is some real uncertainty involved in proper names. Specifically, in the way names evolve over time. The 'Madagascar' case exposes this fact in the Causal View. While the view may be able to explain the case, it requires a dynamic conception of the causal chains involved. It requires an ontology of competing causal chains, some stemming from baptisms that are unknown to the baptizer. Evans' view, by emphasising the dominant source of the information associated with the name, requires a similar dynamism. It requires that the denotation of a name change over time if there is a change in this source. Thus, what a name refers to at any specific time is not guaranteed by its reference at a previous time. The *Causal View* results in a proliferation of names, while the *Dominant Causal Source View* results in unstable names. Regardless of the path chosen, we arrive at the result that proper names are not static entities. What the name refers to depends crucially either on their history, or on the mental states of the individual using it at the time.

Works Cited:

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