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## A Distinction between Two Styles of Rigid Designation

In *Naming and Necessity*, Saul Kripke introduces the notion of a rigid designator. A rigid designator is a term that denotes the same object in every possible world, or else fails to denote. Contemporary philosophers such as Donnellan, Kaplan, Kripke, and Putnam defend a “new theory of direct reference” for proper names and certain sorts of scientific and natural kind terms. They reject the view that these terms have senses or, in some cases, senses that alone determine their referents. In their view, the referents of names and certain other sorts of terms are determined directly without the mediation of a “sense.” Kripke includes such terms among those he calls “rigid designators,” since they may be said to “rigidly” pick out the same object as their referents in every possible world in which the object exists.

In this chapter, I first introduce a distinction between two ways in which referents of rigid designator terms are determined. I show that one way rests on the intentional notion that I call “focusing”; the other rests on the semantic notion I call “satisfying-a-given-condition.”

The “causal” view, following Kripke, breaks down the process of reference determination into an initial baptism or “dubbing,” which provides the term with a reference, and the subsequent transmission of that reference. Transmission takes place by means of a historical chain of speakers’ intentions to use a term to refer to what some previous speaker in the chain referred to by using that term. If we trace back the reference of a term, we arrive eventually at the baptismal step, where the rigid designator term first came to be used to refer to the particular object. The object baptized, or dubbed, at this initial step is the referent of the term.

This chapter has been highly influenced by Frederic Sommers, *The Logic of Natural Language* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), chapter 5.

## 1.1 F-Style Rigid Designation

In *Naming and Necessity*, Kripke mentions two ways in which an object may be initially baptized. “[T]he object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by a **description**.”<sup>1</sup> Kripke adds (in a footnote): “[u]sually a baptizer is *acquainted* in some sense with the object he names and is able to name it ostensively” (my emphasis).

Let us consider, first, the fixing of the referent of a name by ostension. For example, we may name an object by pointing to the heavens and uttering “let that star be called ‘Hesperus’” or by pointing to a baby and uttering “let this baby be **called ‘Cicero’**.”<sup>2</sup>

Now in my view, ostension itself typically involves two aspects. First, the baptizer attends to or, as I say, *focuses* on a particular thing (or things). Second, the baptizer generally at the same time employs a description—but a description used *referentially*, or *ascriptively*—not attributively. That is, to use a description ascriptively is to attribute to an object a description that may not apply to it. The baptizer *ascribes* a certain property to that object, or *takes* the object to have that property even if the baptizer is mistaken, and the description does not apply to the object.

This is not to say that the act of baptizing an object by means of focusing necessarily requires perceptual access (or informational **linkage**<sup>3</sup>) during the act of dubbing. It is compatible with my notion of *dubbing an object by means of focusing* that a speaker may do so—even in the absence of the object—provided the speaker had *previously* focused on the object and is now offering a description (used ascriptively) of the object. What is central about this means of fixing the reference of a term is that its referent is in one way or another being determined by perceptual encounters with the referent.

It should be noted that in using a description ascriptively, the baptizer may of course be mistaken. Nevertheless, the name the reference of which

1. Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980), 96.

2. Of course, I am not claiming that the planet Venus was named ‘Hesperus’ that way or that the person who denounced Cataline was named ‘Cicero’ that way. These are only meant as illustrations of how demonstrative pronouns are required to fix the reference of a proper name by ostension.

3. For an interesting discussion on informational linkage, see Gareth Evans, *The Varieties of Reference* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982).

becomes fixed by ostension refers to the particular thing (or things) that is (or are) taken to have that property. Thus when we say “There is a very bright star out tonight. Let that star be called ‘Hesperus’,” the term ‘Hesperus’ refers to the thing taken to be a star whether the thing in question is or is not a star.

Now it is the *focusing* on an object, as distinguished from *taking something as having a certain property*, that generally plays the principal role in fixing reference by ostension. The ascribing of some property to the thing usually serves only to indicate or draw attention to the thing the speaker wishes to focus on.<sup>4</sup>

A speaker may be aware of several descriptions that are taken to apply to the thing focused on, any one of which may serve to draw attention to the thing. Later speakers may never be aware of what properties were previously ascribed to the referent; yet as long as they know which object was focused on in fixing the reference of this term, they know which object the term refers to. They may not know whether, at the time the planet Venus was baptized with the name ‘Hesperus’, the property ascribed to it was the property of being the star first seen in the evening or that of being the star that can be seen at the latest time of the morning, or whether what occurred was merely a pointing to a certain region of the sky and the uttering of “that star.” As long as they know that Venus is the object the community focused on in fixing the reference of the term, they know the term refers to Venus.

According to the historical chain view, then, for any term the referent of which was *focused* on when the object was dubbed with the term, we can determine the reference by means of a historical chain. The chain goes back to the initial dubbing of the referent focused on. And the links in the chain are speakers’ intentions, when using the term, to corefer, that is, to use the term with the same reference as the person from whom the speaker acquired the term.<sup>5</sup> It is not required that a speaker, when transmitting the reference of a term, focus on or could ever have focused on the referent of the term. Further, the speaker need neither know what descriptions were originally used nor be aware of which object was focused on in fixing the reference in order to succeed in referring with the term. Thus reference

4. See chapter 2 for further refinements concerning fixing the reference of a term by means of focusing.

5. See Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 96.

determination for this sort of term requires only that the reference of the term is fixed by means of a focusing.

Any term whose reference for a given linguistic community is determined by *focusing* on a thing taken as having one or another property I call an *F-type term*. The process of determining reference in this manner I call *F-style rigid designation*.

This notion of F-type term does not require, however, that the reference of an F-type term must have been initially fixed by means of focusing. Later, we will see that certain terms initially fixed by description may later have their reference fixed for a linguistic community by means of focusing. These terms are thus F-type terms, even though initially they were not.

Every F-type term is linked to one or more background statements by a historical chain of intentions to corefer. These background statements play a central role in initially determining the term's reference. In the previous example, such statements are "There is (something taken to be) a very bright star out tonight" and "Let that star be called 'Hesperus'." Statements of this sort I call *anaphoric background statements*, and the anaphoric background statements of an F-type term I call the A-B-F statements of that term. So much for F-style rigid designation.

Naming an object by means of focusing on it usually involves certain presuppositions. For example, often we assume that we are focusing on a certain kind of entity, say a human being or *our* child. Consider the case of a doctor who confuses two babies and brings the wrong baby to each of the two pairs of parents. The parents, believing that they are looking at *their* babies, decide to name the baby in front of them, say, "Mary" and "Barbara," respectively. Suppose the error on the part of the doctor is soon discovered. Thereafter each pair of parents applies the name not to the baby they initially focused on, but to *their* baby. Thus if these presuppositions are violated, the act of naming by means of focusing may be annulled.

## 1.2 S-Style Rigid Designation

The second style, which I call *S-style rigid designation*, employs descriptions used *attributively*—Kripke's second way to fix the reference of a name.

When a description is used attributively to fix the reference, the referent of the description is whatever object actually satisfies that description. For example, the expression 'the actual murderer, whoever that person may

be, of the shortest Soviet spy' refers to whoever actually murdered the shortest Soviet spy. Now in such a case, we may have no knowledge, not even a clue, as to who this murderer is. Still we may give a name to the murderer as follows: "let us call the (actual) murderer of the shortest Soviet spy 'John Doe'." If we assume that the context of this utterance is the actual world, 'John Doe' rigidly denotes whoever actually satisfies that description. For even if we say counterfactually "Had John Doe been bought off by the Soviet Union, he would not have murdered the shortest Soviet spy," still 'John Doe' refers to the actual murderer if there is one.

Kripke uses the case of 'Neptune' to illustrate how the reference of a name may be fixed by an attributive use of a definite description. Neptune was hypothesized as the planet that caused such-and-such discrepancies in the orbits of certain other planets. To quote Kripke, "If Leverrier indeed gave the name 'Neptune' to the planet before it was ever seen, then he fixed the reference of 'Neptune' by means of the description just mentioned."<sup>6</sup> For at that time, there was no heavenly body that could be seen (even with a telescope) or taken to satisfy the description. In other words, F-style rigid designation would not have been possible at that time.

Thus it is necessary to recognize that there are cases in which the fixing of a term's reference is based on what in fact satisfies the given description rather than on any ostension or focusing. In these cases, the reference of the term is not fixed by focusing on a particular object or on "ostending" that object. We are not focusing on some thing as the referent of a description and then naming it (while taking it to satisfy the description regardless of whether it does in fact satisfy the description).

What is important about fixing the reference of rigid designators by the attributive use of definite descriptions is that the terms so introduced rigidly denote *whatever objects actually turn out to satisfy the descriptions* (in a given context of use). Such terms may be thought of as designating or referring to the satisfier of the open sentence formed by removing the quantifier that binds the variable in the description in the sentence **containing it**.<sup>7</sup> For example, suppose a speaker says that some woman (or other) will be the forty-fifth president of the United States, and continues with "She will be a Democrat. Let that woman—whoever she may be—be

6. See Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 79n.33.

7. For details, see chapter 8, which presents a formal semantics for these terms.

called ‘Alice’.” The pronoun ‘she’ in this context does not refer to any particular person being focused on or taken under consideration. Yet the pronoun does act as a rigid designator referring to the *satisfier* of the matrix of the following bound variable sentence:

$(\exists!x)A(x \text{ is a woman} \ \& \ x = 45\text{th president of the United States} \ \& \ (x \text{ is a Democrat}))$ ,

where ‘A’ stands for the actuality operator (to be read “it is actually the case that”).<sup>8</sup>

In the case of terms of this sort, a speaker may never be aware of what actual description, attributively used, was initially employed to fix the reference. A speaker may not know, for example, what description was initially given in fixing the reference of ‘Neptune’. Nonetheless, if the reference of the term is fixed by the original description, its reference is grounded in, or rests on, a description used attributively.

Any term whose reference is obtained by letting the referent be whatever actually satisfies a given description, I call an *S-type term*. This manner of determining the reference of a term I call *S-style rigid designation*. The anaphoric background statements that play a central role in initially determining the reference of an S-type term I call its A-B-S statements. In the previous example, “Some woman will be the forty-fifth president of the United States” and “Let that woman—whoever she may be—be called ‘Alice’” are the A-B-S statements.

### 1.3 F-Type and S-Type General Terms

In developing the distinction between F-type and S-type terms, I have used as examples chiefly singular terms, such as ‘Hesperus’ and ‘Cicero’. It is my contention, however, that the distinction also applies to general terms, such as ‘mass’. Many general terms name kinds, and although we cannot *focus* on a kind, we can and do focus on things or samples that instantiate it. This, in fact, is what we do in the case of F-type general terms. Examples of F-type general terms include ‘water’, ‘gold’, ‘cat’, and ‘tiger’. Examples of S-type general terms include ‘H<sub>2</sub>O’, ‘Au<sub>79</sub>’, and ‘mass’.

8. For purposes of the present discussion, I formalize the rigidity of the variable with an actuality operator, but I do not consider this strictly correct. See chapters 3 and 8 for detail.

This distinction between F-type and S-type terms, however, does seem to run into certain problems when it comes to general terms. Here I wish to discuss two particular difficulties.

First, recall that in introducing F-type *singular* terms, we often use descriptions (or sortals). But as we saw earlier, these descriptions are used *ascriptively* or *referentially*. Now we also use descriptions in introducing rigid *general* terms. Here it might be supposed that not only do we always use descriptions when introducing a general term, but also these descriptions are used *attributively*. Now if this is the case, then general terms can only be S-type and not F-type. Various philosophers, such as John Searle and Alvin Plantinga, hold to this “descriptivist” view for **general terms**.<sup>9</sup> A descriptivist might claim that the term ‘water’, for example, refers to the kind that is instantiated by typical samples of the clear liquid that actually is in the lakes, rivers, and oceans that we bathe in and drink from. If the descriptivist is correct, then general terms that denote kinds are all S-type.

My claim is that there are general terms such that whatever descriptions may be used in introducing them, these descriptions are used *ascriptively* (or *referentially*), not *attributively*. Such general terms are F-type.

Consider some of the ways in which we may introduce certain general terms with the aid of a description. We may use a description in introducing certain general terms by describing a stereotypical member or sample of the *kind* that the general term is to denote. In this case, however, my contention is that one’s description of the stereotype invariably derives from some past or present *perceptual acquaintance* with an object that instantiates the description. The introduction and transmission of the term must involve a *focusing* on a member or sample. For example, in introducing the general term ‘dog’, we are not simply specifying some satisfaction condition independently of past or present perceptual acquaintance that a stereotypical member of the species *dog* must meet, such as having a certain color, size, and shape, making certain sounds, and the like. (Further, any claim that the term is introduced and transmitted by means of a description of a stereotypic dog-like gestalt is very dubious. For a stereotype

9. See Alvin Plantinga’s *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1974), and “The Boethian Compromise,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (April 1978): 129–138, and see John Searle’s *Intentionality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983). They would also make this claim for singular terms as well. However, their arguments are less convincing for singular terms.

can vary from person to person as widely as the range of variation among the members of the species. An individual familiar only with Great Danes will have a very different stereotype of a dog than an individual familiar only with *dachshunds*.)<sup>10</sup>

Descriptions used in introducing general terms often include some phrase such as “a typical sample” or “under normal conditions.” But such descriptions can never fully specify in purely qualitative terms (or in any terms, for that matter) a satisfaction condition that members or samples of the kind must meet—a condition that avoids dependence either on a focusing or on the making of a new scientific discovery that specifies what may count as a “typical sample” or a “normal condition.” Thus such descriptions fail to fix the reference of the term attributively. For example, in introducing the term ‘water’, the only way we can specify what is to count as a typical sample is by focusing on such a sample or by awaiting the scientific discovery that a typical sample must be H<sub>2</sub>O. In either case, the phrase “typical sample” when used with a description introducing a general term cannot be used attributively.

Finally, certain cases in which the claim is made that descriptions are being used attributively in the introduction of general terms turn out on examination to involve a circularity. For example, the claim may be made that in introducing the term ‘water’, the description ‘typical sample of the clear liquid found in the lakes, rivers, oceans, and the like’ is being used attributively. But in order to accept the description as attributive, we must first have introduced the general terms ‘lake’, ‘river’, and ‘ocean’. But these general terms must either have been introduced as F-type terms or depend for their introduction on the very term ‘water’ that they are now being used to introduce. Thus *Webster’s New Collegiate Dictionary* defines the term ‘river’ as “a natural stream of *water* of considerable volume” (my emphasis).

The second difficulty that I wish to discuss is the following: It can be argued that sometimes the initial samples that we focus on in naming a kind may not actually be instantiations of the kind *k* that is the referent of the general term whose reference we are fixing with the aid of these samples. But if the *initial* samples can turn out not to be instantiations of the kind *k*

10. See Hilary Putnam’s *Representation and Reality* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988) for an analogous point regarding whether stereotypes can serve as the mental content that fixes the reference of natural kind terms.



that we name in focusing on these samples (and assuming, of course, that there is no change in the reference of the term), then seemingly this would be possible only if these samples failed to *satisfy* certain descriptive criteria we have for an object's or sample's being an instantiation of *k*. That is, the description in introducing the general term would have been used attributively, in which case the general term would really be S-type and not F-type.

Concerning this objection, recall that in the case of a general term we cannot focus on the kind that we are naming. We can only focus on things or samples that instantiate the kind. Hence, in focusing on initial samples, we could be mistaken in *taking* them to be samples of the kind. This may occur, as in our example of the baby mixup case, when any of the suppositions that underlie the naming a kind *fails to be met*.<sup>11</sup> For example, the initial samples may not belong to one uniform kind, the kind may have been *already named*,<sup>12</sup> or the initial samples may fail to be "typical members" of the class typical members of which we would be prepared to accept as samples of that kind. To illustrate, we may think that in introducing the term 'water', we are focusing on typical samples of the clear liquid found in the lakes, rivers, oceans, and the like with which we have had perceptual encounters. But it may then turn out that these particular samples all happen to be a clear liquid other than water, not identical to H<sub>2</sub>O.

When the underlying suppositions *for naming*<sup>13</sup> fail to be met, various social factors determine whether the term still succeeds in naming and whether these initial samples are to count as belonging to the kind we are naming. Such factors include how much time has elapsed from the initial naming of the kind, our interest in what we currently focus on when we use the name for the kind, and how strong the original intention still is to name the kind. I have more to say about these factors in chapter 2, where I present an account of reference change. The important point for now is that the initial samples used in fixing the reference of a general term may not be members of the kind named by that term, and yet we needn't claim

11. I owe to Sidney Morgenbesser this general view that there are suppositions that underlie naming.

12. See Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, 136, for details of how this can come about.

13. We leave open whether there is a priori knowledge connecting the term being introduced with its underlying suppositions.

that the description or sortal used in introducing the term is used attributively, in which case the general term would really be S-type and not F-type.

The central difference between an F-type and an S-type natural kind term is that in the case of an F-type term, the kind that is being referred to by the term is in one way or another being determined by perceptual encounters with members of that kind. I make further refinements of the distinction between F-type and S-type terms throughout the book, especially in chapters 2 and 3.