

50 Years of Naming and Necessity

The Saul Kripke Center & The CUNY Graduate Center
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Book of Abstracts

Speaker: Katalin Balog (Rutgers University – Newark)

Title: Indeterminacy and the Mind-Body Problem

Abstract: During the last half century, work on the semantics of modality and referring expressions, inspired in large part by Kripke's seminal *Naming and Necessity*, has clarified the relationship between conceptual and metaphysical modality which led to a revival of interest in the so-called conceivability arguments. These arguments that start with an epistemic or conceptual gap between the mental and the physical and concludes that these are distinct realms. This paper is an examination of the dialectic between recent conceivability arguments and physicalist responses. My proposal is to look at this dialectic not as a disagreement of fact but as a deep terminological disagreement. Surveying the dialectic of argument and counter-argument, a puzzling symmetry between the two strategies emerges. Each position can be developed in a way to defend itself from attacks from the other position. My suggestion is that the reason for the seeming unresolvability of the problem is not that we are incapable of finding out which account is true; it is rather that they appeal to different notions of law, property, modality, without describing a different reality.

Speaker: Imogen Dickie (University of Toronto)

Title: Underground Chains

Abstract: I'll argue that, though Kripkean causal chains play a central role in a right account of proper-name-using practices, we have all been very wrong about what this role is.

Speakers: Anandi Hattiangadi (Stockholm University) and Alex Moran (Trinity College Dublin)

Title: Zombies & Essence

Abstract: In the last few pages of *Naming & Necessity*, Kripke presents an argument against the thesis that mental properties are identical to physical properties. This argument crucially involves the claim that it is metaphysically possible for the physical realizers of conscious states to exist without being accompanied by any conscious experience (Kripke 1972, p. 146). That is to say, Kripke defends the metaphysical possibility of zombies, physical duplicates of conscious beings who lack consciousness (Chalmers 1996). Thus, his argument tells against not just the mind-brain identity theory, but the thesis that the mental supervenes on the physical, which is accepted by most physicalists. Though there are many ways to cash out supervenience, most physicalists are committed at least to the view that any metaphysically possible world that is a duplicate of our world in physical respects (and contains no non-physical 'extras') is a mental duplicate of it. Unfortunately, Kripke says less than one might like to justify the claim that zombies are metaphysically possible. One well-known way to argue for the possibility of zombies is to appeal to their conceivability (Chalmers 1996). We adopt a different albeit compatible approach, taking as our starting point Kripke's claims about the essence of pain together with a framework involving an essentialist approach to metaphysical modality and an essence-first approach to modal knowledge. After providing some motivation for adopting this framework, we argue from within it that zombies are metaphysically possible because they are logically compatible with all of the facts about essence, and hence that the mental does not supervene on the physical.

Speaker: Allen Hazen (University of Alberta)

Title: Mind, Body, and the Third Lecture

Abstract: One of the most discussed topics in the philosophy of mind in the 1960s and 1970s was the Mind-Body Identity Theory: in the words of the title of an influential paper by Ullin Place, "Is consciousness a brain process?" Kripke's Princeton colleague David Lewis was a strong proponent (see his paper, "An argument for the identity thesis"), but Kripke, in *Naming and Necessity*, gave an argument against it which has influenced many philosophers since. I will try to find an interesting version of the Identity Theory: strong enough to be worth refuting, but not so strong as to *easily* refutable, and then try to say what Kripke's argument added to the discussion (and maybe evaluate it). As those familiar with the scholastic and analytic traditions in philosophy will anticipate, distinctions will be drawn.

Speaker: Janet Levin (University of Southern California)

Title: Kripke on intuitions and thought experiments

Abstract: In *Naming and Necessity* Kripke suggests that it follows from his theory of reference that there can be necessary truths that are known a posteriori and contingent truths that are known a priori. But in later work he seems to have second thoughts. In this paper I will look at two strands of Kripke's views about what counts as a priori knowledge, and their consequences for the sort of thought experiments that he marshals so memorably, in Lecture III of *Naming and Necessity*, for (and against) various claims about identity and essence.

Speakers: Genoveva Martí (ICREA/University of Barcelona) and José Martínez-Fernández (University of Barcelona)

Title: On the denotationist approach to the rigidity of kind terms

Abstract: The denotationist approach to rigidity postulates that a term is rigid if it designates the same thing in every possible world. For kind terms this is usually interpreted as sameness of designation of the same species, property or abstract entity in every possible world. The denotationist approach has been criticized, originally by Scott Soames, who regarded the extension of the notion of rigidity to general terms as hopeless, and more recently by defenders of an essentialist interpretation of rigidity, according to which a general term is rigid if it applies necessarily to the things it applies to. In this paper we defend the denotationist approach to rigidity from old and new criticisms.

Speaker: Brian Rabern (University of Edinburgh) and Anders Schoubye (Stockholm University)

Title: Naming and variability

Abstract: In this talk we will critically review the extent to which variabilism — the view that bare singular uses of proper names in argument position should be understood formally as variables — is compatible with the arguments and observations that Kripke made in *Naming and Necessity*. To do so we will first get clear on what the variabilist position is, while surveying some of its historical antecedents. We will then assess how variabilism fares in connection with Kripke's three canonical arguments (i.e. the semantic, epistemic, and modal arguments) plus his circularity constraint. We will also argue that the bound or anaphoric uses of names, while perhaps in tension with the adoption of a strictly Millian view, are not in tension with Kripke's key insights about rigidity. We will conclude by insisting that variabilism also fares well in light of Kripke's metasemantic picture involving historical chains of communication.

Speaker: Teresa Robertson Ishii (UC Santa Barbara) and Nathan Salmón (UC Santa Barbara)

Title: Modal Essence and Whatness Essence

Abstract: We investigate different uses of ‘essence’ in philosophical English: as a term for *modal essence* (*how* a thing metaphysically *must be*) and as a term for *quiddity* or *whatness essence* (*what* a thing *is*). In §I, we refute Kit Fine’s charge that modal metaphysics in the framework of Saul Kripke’s pathbreaking *Naming and Necessity* proffers an incorrect conceptual analysis of whatness essence. Indeed, for the most part, Kripkean metaphysics is not concerned with whatness. In §II, we raise questions concerning truth in virtue of whatness. In §III, we show that it is coherent to maintain that a material artifact’s modal essence could have been different than it is. In §IV, we argue that the claim that such an object’s whatness essence could have been different is of dubious coherence. In §V, we argue furthermore that the logic of metaphysical modality presents a formidable challenge to Fine’s thesis that modal essence is reducible to whatness essence.

Speaker: Sarah Sawyer (University of Sussex)

Title: Lessons Lost: Implicit Descriptivism in Conceptual Engineering

Abstract: At the heart of Kripke’s *Naming and Necessity* lies a rejection of descriptive theories of meaning and reference, both for proper names and for general terms. Just as the description an individual or group associates with the proper name ‘Aristotle’ may be an incomplete or false description of Aristotle (the referent of the name), the description an individual or group associates with the general term ‘tiger’ may be an incomplete or false description of tigers (the creatures that instantiate the property referred to by the general term). Kripke’s arguments against descriptive theories of meaning and reference have been widely accepted, and externalist theories of meaning and reference have, as a result, come to dominate the literature. But the recent literature on conceptual engineering stands out as an anomaly. In this paper, I focus specifically on general terms and I argue for three main claims. First, despite the explicit commitment to externalism in much of the literature on conceptual engineering, the characterisation of conceptual engineering, and the examples provided by way of illustration, often depend on the descriptivist assumption that the meaning of a term has changed if the description associated with it has changed. Second, Kripke’s arguments against descriptivism apply not only to natural kind terms, such as ‘tiger’ and ‘gold’, but also to social kind terms, such as ‘marriage’ and ‘criminal’. This becomes clear once we distinguish between the social kinds themselves on the one hand, and the conditions on membership of those social kinds on the other. Finally, this means that the tension between an explicit commitment to externalism and an implicit commitment to descriptivism cannot be avoided by simply restricting the scope of conceptual engineering to social terms. Instead, conceptual engineering should be reconceived in a way that pays heed to Kripke’s anti-descriptivist lessons.

Speaker: Jennifer Wang (Simon Fraser University)

Title: Fundamentality and Particularity

Abstract: Shamik Dasgupta has presented an argument with the surprising conclusion that fundamentally, there are no individuals. I explore a way to resist a key move in Dasgupta’s argument that turns on considerations in the metaphysics of modality. In particular, I argue that there are individualist theories that can resist this move. Showing how they do so clarifies the role of possible worlds in modal theorizing. In short, I think that Kripke was right that we do not need criteria of transworld identity to identify particular individuals in different possible worlds; however, with the help of counterpart theory, possible worlds allow us to explain *de re* modal attributions.

Speaker: Stephen Yablo (MIT)

Title: Sweet Spots in Modal Metaphysics

Abstract: A table could have been made originally of slightly different matter, Kripke proposes in N&N, but not very different matter. There ought to be the possibility, then, of tables at the end of their modal tether: the edge of their zone of tolerance. And yet we never seem to encounter any. Is there something special about actual, as opposed to counterfactual, tables that puts them at their modal sweet spot? Or are there modally off-balance tables in our world, too, eclipsed somehow by confrefres better answering to our modal preconceptions?