

14 Kripke on Modality and Transworld Identity

Here are some of the main themes of Kripke's "Identity and Necessity."

- Names are rigid designators.
- Identity statements between names are necessarily true if true at all. (Suggests that contingent identity statements only possible with descriptions, and then, because they're not really of the form $t = s$.)
- Need to distinguish epistemological issues from metaphysical ones.
- "Hesperus = Phosphorus" may have been known *a posteriori*, but this does not mean that it isn't necessarily true (given that it actually is true).
- Does not here discuss here whether rigidity can be captured with a description theory of names by requiring that such descriptions always be treated as having wide scope (*de re*), but does discuss the issue in other contexts.
- Very idea of a rigid designator seems to presuppose that there can be transworld identity.

Kripke's reaction to the issue of "transworld identity".

- Believes resistance to it comes from taking the need for *criteria* of identity across worlds too seriously, and generally thinking of possible worlds in the wrong way.
- Possible worlds need not be described in purely qualitative ways.
- Possible worlds are not like foreign countries we view through the Jules Verne-o-scope, but things we may stipulate; we can simply stipulate that a certain entity in a described possible world is to be Nixon.
- Might be less tempted into mistakes if we call them "counterfactual situations" or "possible states of the world" rather than "possible worlds".
- Notice that no one worries about whether something is the same quality in some other world.

A useful quotation from the 1980 Preface to the standalone publication of *Naming and Necessity* (pp. 16–17):

An analogy from school—in fact, it is not merely an analogy—will help to clarify my view. Two ordinary dice (call them die A and die B) are thrown, displaying two numbers face up. For each there are six possible results. Hence there are thirty-six possible states of the pair of dice . . .

. . . The thirty-six possible states of the dice are literally thirty-six 'possible worlds', as long as we (fictively) ignore everything about the world except the two dice and what they show . . . Now the 'actual world' in this case is the *state* of the dice that is actually realized. *Another* entity, more 'concrete' than this state, is the Lesniewskian–Goodmanian physical entity which is the 'sum' of the two dice. . . . But when we talk in school of thirty-six possibilities, in no way do we need to posit that there are some thirty-five *other* entities, existent in some never-never land, corresponding to the physical object before me. Nor need we ask whether these phantom entities are composed of (phantom) 'counterparts' of the actual individual dice, or are somehow composed of the same individual dice themselves but in 'another dimension'. The thirty-six possibilities, the one that is actual included, are (abstract) *states* of the dice, not complex physical entities. Nor should any school pupil receive high marks for the question 'How do we know, in the state where die A is six and die B is five, whether it is die A or die B which is six? Don't we need a "criterion of transstate identity" to identify the die with a six—not with a five—with our die A?' The answer is, of course, that the state (die A, 6; die B, 5) is *given* as such (and distinguished from the state (die B, 6; die A, 5)). The demand for some further 'criterion of transstate identity' is so confused that no competent schoolchild would be so perversely philosophical as to make it. The 'possibilities' simply are not given purely qualitatively (as in: one die, 6, the other die, 5). If they had been, there would have been just twenty-one distinct possibilities, not thirty-six. And the states are not

phantom dice-pairs, viewed from afar, about which we can raise epistemically meaningful questions of the form, “Which die is that?” Nor, when we regard such qualitatively identical states as (A: 6; B: 5) and (A, 5; B: 6) as distinct, need we suppose that A and B are qualitatively distinguishable in some other respect, say color.

Reaction to Lewis’s counterpart theory:

- Views it as a particularly bad example of taking transworld identity as problematic.
- Some man, other than Nixon, getting some judge, other than Carswell through, is hardly a reason for Nixon to kick himself.
- A result of confusing epistemological and metaphysical issues.

Kripke on essences:

- Rejection of transworld identity have taken many to deny intelligibility of essential properties. (Quine)
- Essences cannot be known *a priori*.
- Kripke suggests that the essence of a concrete object has to do with its original material constitution.
- There could be a table here looking a lot like this one made of ice, but *this* table could not have been made of ice.
- One could be in same epistemological situation but with a table made of ice; we could call that its counterpart, but this not relevant to the modal status of *this* table (footnote 15).
- Necessary that you have the parents you in fact have. The Trumans might have had a daughter a lot like Elizabeth who somehow became Queen of England, but that’s not a world in which Elizabeth herself had different parents.
- Does this theory of essence solve the problem or oddity of there being two separate worlds that differ only with regard to which entity at those worlds are which?
- For example, consider a series of worlds: one in which I’m a little more like my brother, and he a little more like me, and then another one in

which I’m even more like him, and he even more like me, all the way until he’s indistinguishable from the actual him, and he’s indistinguishable from the actual me. Is that world distinct from the actual world just by a bare difference in identity? Or does Kripke’s view of essences block it?

- Harder question: does this also block worries about the transitivity of transworld identity? (We normally think that something with parts would be the same object even if we replaced a part. Then A bike with parts A+B+C in the actual world might be the same as a bike with parts A+B+D in another world, and that one, in turn with one consisting of A+E+D in a third world. But that one might be the same object as the one consisting of F+E+D in the actual world...)

Kripke’s overall attitude towards modality is perhaps best summarized by this footnote, also from the 1980 Preface to *Naming and Necessity* (p. 19):

I do not think of ‘possible worlds’ as providing a *reductive* analysis in any philosophically significant sense, that is, as uncovering the ultimate nature, from either an epistemological or metaphysical point of view, of modal operators, propositions, etc., or as ‘explicating’ them. In the actual development of our thought, judgments involving directly expressed modal locutions (‘it might have been the case that’) certainly come earlier. The notion of a ‘possible world’, thought it has its roots in various ordinary ideas of ways the world might have been, comes at a much greater, and subsequent, level of abstraction. In practice, no one who cannot understand the idea of possibility is likely to understand that of a ‘possible world’ either. Philosophically, we by no means need to assume that one type of discourse is ‘prior to’ the other, independently of the purposes at hand. The main and the original motivation for the ‘possible worlds analysis’—and the way it is clarified in modal logic—was that it enabled modal logic to be treated by the same set theoretic techniques of model theory that proved so successful when applied to extensional logic.

Question: is such a non-reductive but neither-is-more-fundamental view tenable?