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IDENTITY AS NECESSITY : NOZICK'S OBJECTION – KRIPKE REPLIES

Robert Nozick [1] attacks the principle of identity $(a = b) \rightarrow \Box(a = b)$. In other words he thinks that if a is identitical with b, it is *not* necessary that it is necessarily so. That is tantamount to saying that it is purely contingent whether $(a = b)$. That fact cannot be extended, Nozick thinks, to an identity in all possible worlds without referring to other relevant (or interfering) facts which may have bearing on settling the issue. The upshot of his argument is that

$$P \quad (a = b) \not\rightarrow L\,(a = b)$$

To establish P Nozick refers to two principles on which B. Williams [2] has to depend on for his account of personal identity. The principles in short are : (1) 'that identity cannot depend upon whether there is or isn't another thing of a certain sort'; and (2) 'that if there could be another thing so that then there would not be identity, then there is not identity, even if that other thing does not acually exist'. Both of these principles, Nozick claims, are false. Therefore he concludes that identity is contingent and cannot be necessary. For showing the relevance of other facts (on epistemic ground) in determining identity he uses the example of the Vienna Circle. This is not a case of personal identity in the strict sense but identity in general.

The imagined case runs like this : suppose (which was in fact the case) the original Vienna Circle was driven out from Austria

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and Germany by the Nazis. Of the original twenty members only three members found themselves landed in Istanbul to be the only survivors (to their knowledge) of the Circle. These three keep on discussing philosophy in the original line of the Circle, and know that the rest are dead. So they conclude that *they are the Vienna Circle.* A few years later, however, they have found to their dismay that nine other members of the Circle had gotten to America where they continued to meet, discuss philosophy and so on. That group in the U.S.A. therefore is the Vienna Circle in exile; the group in Istanbul is *not* the Vienna Circle but its Istanbul offshoot.

The moral from this case seems to be, at least Nozick thinks so, that the question whether the Istanbul group is Vienna Circle or not cannot be settled without reference to the fact of discovery of the U. S group. Before the discovery, the Istanbul group was the closest continuer, but *after* the discovery it ceases to be the closest continuer, because a closer one is found to exist between it and the original Circle. Therefore the U. S. group is the 'continuing entity' as the Vienna Circle aud we cannot say that the 'closest continuer' depends only upon relationship between the two, and not on whether anything else of a certain sort exists. The question whether the Istanbul group *is* the Vienna Circle or not can only be answered by reference to other group. If there is any closer one that exists then it is not, if not then it is. Nozick argues from this result that identity is not a necessary relation. (a=b) does not entail the truth of L (a=b). This is in brief the bone of contention of one of the arguments of Nozick to rebut the thesis of identity as necessity, advocated by Kripke.

Kripke has anticipated some such objections against his theory and his main line of argument to reply would be with reference to his theory of direct reference. Kripke has tried to

derive an account of identity as a necessary relation from philosophy of language. To do that he introduces the notion of rigid designator. In this connection Frege's puzzle about 'Hesperus' and 'Phosporus' has been treated in a different way by Kripke. According to the descriptivist view identity statements like 'Hesperus=Phosporus' are contingent because it is only by empirical discovery that they gre found to be referring to the same object, but they might have turned out to be different. 'Venus=Venus', on the other hand, is necessary because no possible empirical discovery can make it false. In other words the proposition 'V=V' is necessarily true (that is, true in all counter-factual stiuations) whereas 'H=P' is contingently true– that is true only in the actual world, but might have been otherwise.

One possible moral to be drawn from this position is that identity statements involving names like 'Hesperus' and 'Phosperus' are necessary, because proper names like 'H' or 'P', 'Cicero' or 'Tully' are not pure proper names (i.e., only 'tags' used for reference) but 'abbreviated descriptions' as called by Russell. For him demonstrative names like 'that' can only guarantee necessity of identity. All other kinds of identity statements (involving names like 'H' & 'P' or 'Cicero' and 'Tully') are contingent. Other examples of identity statements are 'Heat is the molecular motion' or 'The atomic number of Gold is 79' which are discovered by empirical sciences. Intuitively these statements appear to be contigent.

But Kripke does not think so. He said : 'I think that in both cases, the case of names and the case of the theoretical identifications, the identity statements are necessary and not contingent. That is to say, they are necessary if true.'[3]

What does he exactly mean by 'necessary if *true*'? The explication of that needs a further explication of his 'rigid' and

'non-rigid designator'. That will hopefully give an answer to our present problem of identity which Nozick has raised A rigid designator, following Kripke, is that which designates the same object in all possible worlds in which it exists, whereas a not-rigid designator is accidental and it does not do so. 'Benjamin Franklin' is rigid because it designates the same person in all possible worlds in which he exists. But 'the inventor of bifocal' is not. What he means is that in our language once the 'tagging' of a person as 'Benjamin Franklin' is fixed, the use of the word is also fixed; that means it will refer to the same person (or object) in all counter-factual situations.

To make it clear Kripke offers an intuitive test for 'rigid' and 'non-rigid' designator.

'D' is not rigid iff $M\ (D \neq D)$

'D' is rigid iff $L\ (D = D)$

Applying this test to 'B. Franklin' we can see that

1) $L\ (BF = BF)$ and it is false that $M\ (BF \neq BF)$

On the other hand

2) (The inventor of bifocal $\neq$ the inventor of bifocal) since anyone else may have been the inventor of bifocal and it is only accidental that B. Franklin has actually been the one.

But there is still an ambiguity in the reading of (2) because someone may argue that 'the inventor of bifocal' may be used only to refer to the actual inventor and not all possible ones. But no such ambiguity is there in the reading of 'BF=BF' or 'V=V'. What these statements state is that no matter what other facts are there, the identity stated is necessarily true if it is true (thus excluding false identity statements) in all possible worlds in which the person or the particular planet exists. In

short, the kind of identity stated by statements containing rigid designators is necessary.

How would this position respond to Nozick–type situation ? If 'Vienna Circle' is a rigid designator, i.e., a proper name given to a body of people on some occasion then its reference is fixed on that 'baptising' ceremony. Kripke would not find any difficulty like Nozick, when confronted with two different groups of people belonging to the original 'circle'. His general line of reply would be that 'V=V' no matter whether 'I=V' or U=V'. Of course the example of 'Vienna Circle' is an unfortunate one, because it is not clear why the 'U' is the 'closer continuer' and 'I' is not. Only because 'U' has eight members and 'I' has three ? Surely this seems to be arbitrary. Moreover, the epistemic consideration Nozick has brought into the discussion is not new; it has already been thought of before by the descriptivists and Quine. Kripke has successfully replied to that. The fact that 'V=U', or 'H=P' is discovered or known to be true by experience. But once it is found (by whatever method–by experience or by a priori methods) to be true, it will be true in all possible worlds. In other words the identity is necessary. Nozick may reply that if the 'U' is not discovered, 'V=I' would have remained true as the closest continuer. Therefore, the knowledge of 'U' is relevant for the truth, and the identity here is not necessary.

Now there is a problem in Kripke's theory of rigid designator and Nozick's woolly example points towards it. Kripke mentions two types of rigid designators :

(1) Singular terms (proper names) and (2) some definite descriptions like mathematical descriptions such as 'the square root of twenty five'.

(2) is much more clear than the (1). Definite descriptions like 'the square root of twenty five' speaks of an essential property by which the transworld identity of a number or an object can be understood. But how can names like B. Franklin (which are unmeaning marks) refer to the same person needs further philosophical argument to account for the acclaimed 'necessity' or identity across possible worlds. In our present context, however, the question is : how do we understand the name 'Vienna Circle'? I think the best Kripkean move would be to take it as a definite description whose reference is fixed (not arbitrarily) by very clear specification of the essential qualitative marks of it; for example, the common philosophical outlook, each particular member being named, with all the details enumerated so that it can be satisfied by one and *only one* group of people, exactly in the same way as 'square root of twenty five' refers to only one number—no. '5'. In that way the name can refer rigidly—referring to the only group in all possible worlds in which it exists. No matter what group with whatever number of people appears in whatever world. This solution would be more like the extension of rigid designators to natural kinds rather than singular terms. Natural kind like 'cats' refers to whatever satisfies the essential property of being a 'cat'. Similarly 'V=V' is true in all possible worlds where the original baptisimal requirements are met. It does not depend on any empirical discovery as Nozick claims. Nozick's none too clear example of Vienna Circle thus may open up (although unintentionally) a possible further extension of the direct reference theory to other than singular terms and natural kind terms.

But still there remains a problem in Nozick's counterexample which is not fully explained by Kripkean theory. If we regard 'V' as a rigid designator (either as a singular term or as a natural kind term), which group is identical with it? 'I' or

'U'? The Kripkean theory cannot fully account for it. Does the 'U' stand for the referent or the 'I'? Or neither of them? It is difficult to decide; because although both of them have the other essential properties of 'V', they do not have the original twenty members. Nozick at least has a criterion (however arbitrary), namely 'closest continuer' to justify his claim of saying 'U' = 'V', rather than 'I' = 'V'. But Kripke's present theory (unaided by some other stipulation) cannot solve the problem which one is identical with 'V'. There is a strong intuitive temptation to call both 'I' and 'U' as identical with 'V', but I am not sure whether Kripke would like this consequence.

399 A Jodhpur Park **MAHASWETA CHAUDHURY**
CALCUTTA–700 068

NOTES

1. Robert Nozick; *Philosophical Explanations*, Chapt. I, pp. 29–114, Harvard University Press, 1981.

2. See, B. Williams, 'Personal Identity and Individuation' and 'Bodily Continuity and Personal Identity', both reprinted in his *Problems of the Self*, O. U. Press, Oxford, 1973.

3. Kripke, Saul; 'Identity and Necessity' *Naming, Necessity and Natural Kinds*, ed. by Stephen P. Schwartz, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca & London : 1977), p. 77.

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Contact : The Editor,
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