

Scott Soames, *Beyond Rigidity, The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002, ix + 379 pp.

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Saul Kripke's book *Naming and Necessity* (which first appeared in 1972 as a paper within a volume on natural language semantics¹) is felt, by many linguists and philosophers, as a milestone of the semantic analysis of natural language. Prior to it, many semanticists took for granted that the meaning of any expression must be a two-level matter, consisting of something of the kind of what Frege called *Sinn* and *Bedeutung* or what Carnap christened as *intension* and *extension*. The first of the components is what the speaker knows when she understands the expression (and the knowledge of which is independent of any knowledge of facts external to the language in question), while the second amounts to some kind of chunk of the real world which gets denoted or referred to by the expression. Thus, the intension of *the king of France* is what you get to know as soon as you come to understand the phrase, and the extension is what (if anything) happens to be picked out by the intension in the actual world in the actual moment. This is to say that an expression gets to into the contact with its extension only via the intension (which we can imagine also as a kind of a criterion for picking up the thing). Intension, then, is what amounts to the *meaning* of the expression in the intuitive sense of the word².

Now Kripke's considerations challenged this very two-level structure of meaning: he argued that especially proper names get their semantics via a direct, immediated contact with the world – that their meaning does not mediate their contact with a thing, but directly *is* the thing. This may be not so surprising in case of proper names (after all, it is even disputable whether they can be counted to the *language* – for you cannot find them in dictionaries), but Kripke went on to argue that the same holds also for some other expressions, especially natural kind terms such as “cow” or “water”.

Kripke's argumentation is concise and flattening; and it has been provoking a lot of discussions. However, the relatively sparse *Naming and Necessity* did not address everything connected with proper names, natural kind terms and their rigidity with the desirable explicitness, and Kripke has never come back to it to elaborate on it. Scott Soames, in the present book, undertakes this very task, namely to investigate the matter in greater detail, to fill the gaps of Kripke's original exposition, and possibly also to correct inconsistencies of Kripke's approach. And we can say that his book, several times more voluminous than Kripke's one, comes to be a successful follow-up to Kripke's work.

Soames concentrates especially on two themes which he does not take to be exhaustively treated by Kripke himself, one concerning proper names and the other natural kind terms. In case of proper names he feels that Kripke did not manage to explain quite satisfactorily how, if names rigidly denote their bearers, there can be informative claims putting the equality sign between two names. If *morning star* and *evening star* are (*pace* Frege) rigid designators, how can it be that *Morning star is evening star* can convey something nontrivial to us?

¹ In *Semantics of Natural Language* (eds. Davidson, D. & Harman, G.), Reidel, Dordrecht, 253-355.

² Let us disregard the fact that many intensional semanticists found intensions not enough fine-grained for the purpose of explicating meanings, and switched to kinds of ‘hyperintensional’ theories.

Soames' answer to this question invokes the distinction between semantics and pragmatics: though such sentences do not *mean* anything nontrivial, they can be *used to say* something nontrivial. In particular, he claims that (p. 242)

on a proper conception of semantic content there is a principled distinction between the vast majority of ordinary, linguistically simple proper names, the semantic contents of which are simply their referents, and the special, but still quite extensive, category of partially descriptive names, which are often syntactically complex expressions, and which have semantic contents that include both their referents and certain descriptive information, conventionally associated with them by speakers. In the former case, substitution of one member of a pair of coreferential proper names for another does not change the proposition semantically expressed – even though it may change the proposition asserted, believed or attributed to others as one of their assertions or beliefs. In the latter case – involving partially descriptive names – even the propositions semantically expressed may change.

The other major problem of Kripke's doctrine thematized by Soames concerns natural kind terms. Soames points out that while it is quite clear what does it take for a *name* to be rigid, this is far from so in case of natural kind terms. What does it take for a term such as "cow" to be rigid? To be associated with an individual in the very same sense as a proper name is associated with its bearer? But which kind of individual? The set of all cows existing at the moment of the initial baptism? But this would appear to imply that the word does not apply to our present set of cows, which is surely different from the original one. The property of *being a cow*? But as every term, natural kind or not, can be seen as associated with a property, this would seem to render *every* term rigid. Hence a mereological sum of bovine spatiotemporal regions, which somehow manages to keep its identity across shrinking and expanding? Or to some primordial cow and, thereby, to everything which is 'just like it'?

Soames proposes that it would be better to see the characteristic mark which natural kind terms have in common with proper names not in rigidity, but in *non-descriptivity*: the feature that "the referent ... at a world is not semantically determined by the satisfaction of any descriptive condition at that world" (264). This shift of focus allows us to concentrate on *how* do natural kind terms designate, rather than *what* exact kind of entity they designate.

The solution Soames then envisages consist in maintaining that (277)

natural kinds should not be identified with properties after all – where properties are those sorts of things that are the meanings of arbitrary predicates. Instead of taking natural kinds to be properties, I propose that we identify them with intensions – that is functions from worlds to extensions.

In this way, the analogy between proper names and natural kind terms comes to be explicated as consisting in the fact that just like a bearer of a name may be determined by a description without the description becoming the meaning of the name, a natural kind may be determined by a 'property' without the property becoming the meaning of the natural kind term.

I think Soames is very right in pointing out that this is a highly nontrivial problem which Kripke and his followers mostly fail to reflect. However, it seems to me that this, second part of his book is slightly inferior to the first one, as if the author did not have enough patience to

develop to the perfection comparable to that of his discussion of proper names. In particular, it lacks a clear summarization of Soames' answer to the main question, namely *What does it take for a general term to be rigid?*

True, parts of the answer are scattered within Soames' exposition, but the view he maintains is not always optimally clear. In particular, it seems that he somehow glosses over the most basic presupposition of Kripke's extension of his theory of proper names to natural kind terms, namely the existence of *natural kinds* that are enough like individuals. Saying that natural kinds are intensions may help us cope with problems of the kind of the paradox of analysis, but it does not seem to be very helpful in the way of explaining what natural kinds are and why we should believe in them in the first place. Surely not every possible intension is a natural kind – hence *which* intensions should be seen as such, and especially why should we think that there are some such prominent intensions?

Despite this, Soames' careful examination of the big Kripkean themes succeeds in providing a more systematic and a more comprehensive exposition than the original Kripke's one. It points out where Kripke's theory may be seen as containing gaps, and provides a fruitful discussion of what it would take to fill them. Therefore it should not be missed by not only any Kripke scholar, but by any semantician who appreciates the significance of Kripke's attack on the two-level semantics.