

## THE INCONCLUSIVENESS OF KRIPKE'S ARGUMENT AGAINST THE IDENTITY THEORY

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In the widely-read papers 'Naming and Necessity'<sup>1</sup> and 'Identity and Necessity,'<sup>2</sup> Saul Kripke develops an argument against the mind-body identity theory, relying crucially on the doctrine of the essential painfulness of pains. In a reply Fred Feldman rejects Kripke's essentialism of the painfulness of pains view in favor of his own preferred essentialism of the physical.<sup>3</sup> In what follows I claim: (1) there is something plausible in both Kripke's and Feldman's brands of essentialism, (2) at the present stage of philosophizing on the mind-body problem there is no good reason to accept either essentialism at the expense of rejecting the other, and, therefore, (3) tentatively, anyway, we should leave open the possibility that both essentialisms are true, i.e., that pains both are essentially painful and essentially possess certain physical structures. If my argument is acceptable, it will show that Kripke's argument against the identity theory is at best inconclusive, that is, fails.

1. Since Kripke's technical terminology has become familiar, I will explicate only briefly some of the notions used in my paper. The distinction between 'rigid' and 'non-rigid' designators is the distinction between terms that refer to or have as extensions exactly the same individuals in all possible worlds (where they exist) and the terms whose reference or extension differs in possible worlds (where they exist). 'Benjamin Franklin' is a rigid designator picking out the same individual in all worlds in which he exists, while 'inventor of the bifocals' is a non-rigid designator picking out Benjamin Franklin in this world, but other individuals in 'possible worlds' where someone else invented bifocals. A correlative distinction is that between rigidly fixing the reference of a term by an essential property of the referent and non-rigidly fixing the reference by an accidental property. For instance, I can non-rigidly fix the reference (give myself to know to what I am referring) of 'Cicero' by Cicero's accidental property of being the denouncer of Cataline; I can also rigidly fix 'Cicero' by an essential property of Cicero, e.g. (with

Kripke) his biological origin from a particular egg and sperm.

Let me now state Kripke's argument against the identity theory, relying on Feldman's rendition:<sup>4</sup>

Let 'A' name a particular pain and 'B' the brain state that the identity theorist wishes to identify with it.

- (1) If  $x$  and  $y$  are rigid designators, if  $x = y$ , then necessarily  $x = y$ .
- (2) 'A' is a rigid designator.
- (3) 'B' is a rigid designator.
- (4) 'A = B' is not necessarily true.
- (5) Therefore,  $A \neq B$ .

It should be noted that although Kripke presents objections against three kinds of identity theories, viz., the identity of persons with their bodies, the identity of types of mental states with types of physical states, and the identity of particular mental events with particular physical events, I shall follow Feldman in restricting my rebuttal to the identity of particular events. This may involve a bit of tugging at Kripke's exposition to get it into line, but hopefully not much. I think my argument can be applied in an obvious way to deal with Kripke's objections to the other versions of the identity theory, but I shall not attempt that here.

For the purposes of this paper, I shall not question (1)-(3). This brings us to the crux of things, Kripke's claim that 'A = B' is not necessary. Kripke supports (4) by saying it seems logically possible that B should exist without A and A exist without B:

. . . it would seem that it is at least logically possible that B should have existed . . . without (the subject) feeling any pain at all, and thus without the presence of A.<sup>5</sup>

. . . just as it seems that the brain state could have existed without any pain, so it seems that the pain could have existed without the corresponding brain state.<sup>6</sup>

These two claims will hereafter be referred to as Kripke's 'Cartesian intuitions.'

At this point let us consider Feldman's objection. It is significant that Feldman does not deny Kripke's claim that it is possible that B occur without there being any pain. Feldman insists, however, that this occurrence would not entail that B occurs without A:

If A, which is a pain in the actual world, can occur in other worlds without being a pain in those worlds, then it is still possible that A occurs wherever B occurs. Thus for all Kripke has shown, it may be necessarily true that A is identical with B.<sup>7</sup>

Feldman's view is that those particular events that we recognize as pains and that identity theorists wish to identify with brain states may, in other 'possible worlds' be tickles, or itches, or perhaps not even sensations at all: it is only a contingent fact that these events are pains. Whatever particular phenomenal property these events have is extrinsic to their identity, in that they would be the same events even with different phenomenal properties, that is, were different sensations. The phenomenal property of painfulness (or, with Kripke and Feldman, the property of being a pain) is not an essential property of the events that are pains in the real world. In another world these events may not be pains. (It is perhaps worth pointing out that although Feldman correctly labels Kripke's doctrine 'essentialist,' Feldman too has opted for a brand of essentialism--an essentialism of the physical. For Feldman it is the physical structure of B that is the essential property of B and the criterion of identification of B in possible worlds where B may be another sensation (or no sensation at all).)

Feldman distinguishes between two claims: the first, that it is necessary that if something is a pain, then it has the property of being a pain; and the second, that if something is a pain, then the property of being a pain is a necessary property of that thing. This distinction is the one between necessity de dicto and de re:

de dicto:  $\Box (x) (x \text{ is a pain} \supset x \text{ has the property of } \underline{\text{being a pain}})$

de re:  $(x) (x \text{ is a pain} \supset \Box x \text{ has the property of } \underline{\text{being a pain}})$

Feldman says that although the de dicto claim is acceptable, it is insufficient to defend Kripke's premise (4) against his objection; and although the de re claim is strong enough, it is dubious.

Kripke anticipated this objection in 'Naming and Necessity,' and argued for the de re claim:

Can any case of essence be more obvious than the fact that being a pain is a necessary property of each pain? . . . Consider a particular pain, or

other sensation that you once had. Do you find it at all plausible that that very sensation could have existed without being a sensation the way a certain inventor (Franklin) could have existed without being an inventor?<sup>8</sup>

Kripke's point seems well-taken. Denying Kripke's de re claim implies the possibility of, e.g., pains in the real world being tickles in possible world 2, and this certainly looks uncanny, at first blush anyway. It doesn't seem possible that a pain might have been a tickle in the way Nixon might have belonged to the SDS. (Though this is perhaps a little uncanny, too.) One wonders, how could a pain have been a tickle or no sensation at all? For we are not being asked to imagine different sensations merely getting correlated with the same brain state in various possible worlds; this could happen due to different neural 'wiring.' We are being asked to imagine the possibility of this sensation being another sensation, and all the while identical to the same brain state. I conclude from the strangeness of this possibility that Kripke's essentialism of the phenomenal claim is at least *prima facie* plausible and, if possible, should be accepted.

We have seen that Feldman accommodates Kripke's claim to be able to imagine B existing without being a pain, by claiming that being a pain is only a nonessential property of B. But Feldman does not accept Kripke's claim that this implies he is imagining B apart from A--Feldman denies Kripke is justified in moving from the former to the latter claim. That is, Feldman points out that Kripke may be mistaking the exact description he gives to his Cartesian intuition. The same point is clear if we look at what reply Feldman is constrained to make to the second half of the Cartesian intuitions, Kripke's belief that it is logically possible for A to exist without being B. Feldman must say: The case you have imagined is simply one where some pain or other is not identical to B, and surely this is possible. But you are not justified in claiming the pain you have imagined is A. Nor are you justified in claiming any other sensation you can imagine apart from B really is A either.<sup>9</sup> You see, if A is necessarily B, you cannot imagine A existing without being B. You may be imagining some other sensation and mistaking it for A.

My proposal is that we allow Kripke's essentialism of the phenomenal, while leaving open the possibility that the identity theory is correct. We can have the best of Kripke (the de re claim) and Feldman (the identity theory) at the cost of extending somewhat Feldman's reply to Kripke that Kripke may be mistaking the exact nature of his Cartesian intuitions.

Let us consider this proposed compromise position. First it shares a feature with (and I claim, is no worse off than) Feldman's tack, i.e., they both dispute the exact characterization of what Kripke claims to imagine. Feldman says Kripke is not justified in characterizing his (true) intuition of B existing not identical to pain as B existing not identical to A; I claim Kripke is not justified in characterizing his intuition as one of B existing not identical to pain, rather than some B-like thing not identical to pain. Second, my position has the advantage over Feldman's of not denying the common sensical essentialism of the phenomenal doctrine. Third, my position derives support from whatever pragmatic considerations that provide support for Feldman's view. That is, it is not obvious that pains cannot have physical structures for essential properties; if the identity theory is correct, then they do; and if it is a 'framework feature' of pains that they do not, then we may supercede that framework when considering the mind-body question.

To get an idea of what I mean by 'pragmatic considerations,' let us look at a passage from Richard Rorty where he asks us to consider Pains instead of pains:

. . .it is of the essence of Pain (a natural kind which turns up in any world in which there are stimulated C-fibers) to be a stimulation of C-fibers, but it is contingent that in this world . . .it comes on with a certain phenomenological quality. . .[Kripke] wants us to consider the immediate phenomenological awfulness as of the essence, but what gets to be of the essence is . . .determined. . .by looking at the context of discourse about the thing in question. The identity theorist is suggesting a new context, which, he thinks puts the whole matter in a new light, and which has various philosophical advantages.<sup>10</sup> [italics mine]

Rorty considers the objection that although Pains may provide a way of defeating Kripke's premise (ii), he has changed the subject from pains to Pains. Rorty admits that though this is true, "one man's changed subject is another's metaphysical discovery."<sup>11</sup>

The most obvious moral one might wish to draw from Rorty's example is that Kripke's de re claim is not forever immune from overthrow, given various possible alternative ways of 'carving up' (insights into?) natural kinds. For my part, I wish to rely on a

weaker claim that underlies Rorty's view: even in the realm of the mental we cannot exhaustively determine the essential properties of things simply by ratio-cination. In particular, we cannot justifiably 'intuit' what the sum of the essential properties of pain are. Other empirical and philosophical considerations are relevant to such a judgment. Such considerations could conceivably make it reasonable to add to our concept of pain another essential property--that of having a certain physical structure. Perhaps, sometime, it will be reasonable to ascribe to pains an essential property we do not now. Perhaps not. But we should not fore-close the possibility by overestimating the value of our present intuitions on mind-body identity.

2. So far, I have accepted Kripke's essentialism of the phenomenal, and conceded that we do not ordinarily regard essentialism of the physical regarding pains as at all plausible. Further, I have claimed that Kripke has correctly interpreted his Cartesian intuitions if and only if the identity theory is wrong, and that at this time we have no way of knowing whether Kripke or the identity theory is right.

Let us make one last try at seeing whether Kripke's Cartesian intuitions are inconclusive as I claim. Kripke seems to think that the burden of proof is on the identity theorist to 'explain away' the Cartesian intuitions; and if he cannot, the identity theory is refuted:

Someone who wishes to maintain an identity thesis cannot (accept) the Cartesian intuitions that A can exist without B, that B can exist without A. . . He must explain these intuitions away, showing how they are illusory.<sup>12</sup> [*my italics*]

Kripke then argues that the identity theorist cannot 'explain away' the Cartesian intuitions.

- (I) The only plausible means to explain away counter-examples to identity statements is by arguing we are in illusion because we fixed the reference of at least one of the rigid designators by an accidental property such that it is a contingent fact that the referent possess that contingent property.
- (II) In the case of A and B we cannot argue this way since we fix the reference of A and B by their essential properties.

Kripke concludes from (I) and (II), plus his burden of proof principle (If you cannot explain away the example, it refutes the identity claim) that the identity theory is probably wrong.

We can see the idea behind (I) and (II) in the contrast Kripke draws between trying to defeat the (presumably faulty) objection that there is a possible world where heat is not molecular motion and the Cartesian objection to the identity theory. According to Kripke, the reason we falsely think we can imagine molecular motion and heat occurring apart is that we fix the reference of 'heat' by its accidental property of causing the sensation of heat. This is an in-essential property because had our neurological systems been different we might have felt nothing at all on exposure to molecular movement. What we are really imagining, says Kripke, is merely a situation where the cause of sensations of heat is not molecular motion. Of course, this is possible, but it does not refute the identity claim, since the property of causing the sensation of heat is a property heat may possess in some worlds and lack in others. When we fix the reference of heat rigidly, e.g., heat itself, rather than non-rigidly, we see that it is not possible that heat be anything other than what it really is--molecular motion.

According to Kripke, the case is different in the Cartesian counter-example. When the Cartesian says he can imagine A and B occurring apart, he is not fixing the reference of either term by an accidental property. He is fixing the reference of 'A' rigidly by something like that which is associated with painful sensations and 'B' by some essential micro-structural property. Thus, according to Kripke, the Cartesian objection cannot be circumvented in the same way the heat-molecular movement objection was:

Because ['A' and 'B'] pick out their objects essentially, we cannot say the case where you seem to imagine the identity statement false is really an illusion like the illusion one gets in the case of heat and molecular motion, because that illusion depended on the fact that we pick out heat by a certain contingent property.<sup>13</sup>

To develop my reply let us consider Kripke's rebuttal to the objector who claims to imagine heat existing apparent from molecular motion. Kripke says the objector is mistaken because he is fixing 'heat' by the contingent property of producing the sensation of warmth, but if he fixed the reference of

'heat' by an essential property he could not imagine it apart from molecular motion.

But suppose the objector replies to Kripke: "Look, I am not making the simple-minded mistake you say I am when I claim to imagine heat that is not molecular motion. I am not merely being confused by the possibility that molecular motion might not cause the sensation of warmth. What I am claiming is that I can imagine this very phenomenon of heat which you claim to be identical to molecular motion existing in absence of molecular motion."

What could Kripke say? All he could say is that the objector's claim is false because heat is identical to molecular motion, and that's that. That is, whatever the objector is imagining, it is not heat; perhaps it is some heat-like phenomenon, but whatever it is it is not the phenomenon we were talking about when we identified heat with molecular motion. But if this is the only sort of reply Kripke can make when pushed by the persistent objector to 'heat = molecular motion,' then there is nothing wrong with replying in like fashion to Kripke's Cartesian intuitions.

My view is that regarding imaginability claims, 'pains = brain states' is in principle in the same boat with 'heat = molecular motion.' The actual difference between the two is that since we are more convinced the latter is true, we are quicker to reject dogmatically thought-examples that purport to show the contingency of the identity. But, I think, it is possible that someday 'pains = brain states' may assume for us the (relative) immunity from thought examples that we presently accord 'heat = molecular motion.'

One might object that the two identity statements are not analogous as regards imaginability challenges, because we can describe a coherent story about pains not being brain states while we cannot like tell a coherent story about heat not being molecular motion. I admit we can tell a coherent story about A existing without being identical to B if mind-body dualism is logically possible, and certainly we ordinarily suppose mind-body dualism is possible. But if a dualism of heat and molecular motion is logically possible, then we can also tell a coherent story about the non-identity of heat and molecular motion. And *prima facie* it seems that many of the traditional positions on the mind-body problem have analogues that are logically possible in the heat-molecular motion case. The difference between the two 'dualisms' is merely that, since we have already accepted the identity of heat and molecular

motion, we have opted to count as logically impossible a view that seemed prima facie logically possible--dualism of heat-molecular motion. But if we were to accept the identity in the mind-body case, then we would also conclude we cannot tell a coherent story about pains not being identical to brain states.

Imaginability claims are defeasible, and we have to know how much weight to accord them. In the case of the persistent objector to 'heat = molecular motion,' we reject his claim quickly. We are pretty sure that heat is molecular motion. But we are not nearly as sure that pains are brain states, so we are not so quick to reject the claim that the two can be imagined apart. But we should not accept the counter-example either, since acceptance of it, plus the necessity-of-identity principle implies a definite position of the mind-body relation. A cautious agnosticism is the best course.<sup>14</sup> \*

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In Davidson and Harman (eds.), Semantics of Natural Language, pp. 253-355.

<sup>2</sup>In Munitz (ed.), Identity and Individuation, pp. 135-164.

<sup>3</sup>"Kripke's Argument Against Materialism," Philosophical Studies, 1973, pp. 416-419.

<sup>4</sup>Feldman, p. 417.

<sup>5</sup>"Naming and Necessity," p. 335.

<sup>6</sup>"Naming and Necessity," p. 336.

<sup>7</sup>Feldman, pp. 417-418.

<sup>8</sup>"Naming and Necessity," p. 335.

<sup>9</sup>In Larry Stanton's felicitous Kripkian way of putting it, "You have imagined a situation qualitatively identical to A existing without being B, but it is an open question whether it really is that situation."

<sup>10</sup>"Kripke on Mind/Body Identity," a chapter in a forthcoming book, p.9.

<sup>11</sup>Rorty, p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>"Identity and Necessity." p. 162.

<sup>13</sup>"Identity and Necessity," p. 162.

<sup>14</sup>I have cast my paper in terms of "rigid" and "non-rigid" designation and reference-fixing because this is how Kripke presents his argument. A number of people feel, with Feldman and Rorty,--whether due to distrust of Kripke's categories or fondness for simplicity of exposition--that Kripke's argument can be better set out without mentioning the technical terms:

- (i) All pains are essentially painful.
- (ii) No brain states are essentially painful.
- (iii) Therefore, no pains are brain states.

If one casts Kripke's argument this way, my objection is to (ii) while Feldman's is to (i).