PROPER NAMES

AND

NEGATIVE EXISTENTIALS

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ABSTRACT

Sentences which affirm or deny existence are known as positive and negative existentials respectively. A singular existential whose grammatical subject is a proper name is, for purposes of this essay, called a "denotative" negative existential. Thus, the sentence "Santa Claus does not exist" is an example of a denotative negative existential. A major concern here is this: How can we account for the truth of certain denotative negative existentials without implying or presupposing the actuality of the individuals whose existence is denied?

In the current philosophical literature there are two important rival views of denotative negative existentials: the concealed description view and the causal history view. This essay exposits and rejects the concealed description view. Next, it exposits the causal history view and develops it into a theory of name-use which is then employed in the formulation of a general truth condition for denotative negative existentials. In addition, it is argued that the causal history view of name-use implies that all true denotative negative existentials are necessarily true, even when their truth is unknowable a priori. Finally, this essay considers and rejects certain objections to the claim that denotative negative existentials can be both necessarily true and empirically knowable.

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Introduction

At moments when we are exclusively concerned with what is actually the case, as opposed to what is merely imagined or fantasized, even the most sentimental among us is apt to admit that the sentence "Santa Claus does not exist," when used in its customary sense, expresses a truth. Moreover, it is clear that the truth of such a sentence cannot be a consequence of its correctly denying the existence of an actual individual named "Santa Claus," for if that individual were to actually exist, the sentence would not be true. Since the sentence makes no explicit reference to anything actual, a puzzle arises: What in the world makes such a sentence true? The refinement and solution of this puzzle is the business of the present essay.

Sentences which affirm or deny existence are known in philosophical writings as positive and negative existentials respectively. For purposes of this essay let us agree to call a singular existential whose grammatical subject is a proper name a "denotative" existential. The above-quoted sentence about Santa Claus would then be an example of a denotative negative existential. As the example shows, some denotative negative existentials are true; however, exactly what determines their truth is far from obvious. A major concern here is this: how can we account for the truth of

certain denotative negative existentials without implying or
presupposing the actuality of the individuals whose existence
they deny? In other words, can we formulate an illuminating
necessary and sufficient truth condition for denotative
negative existentials?

One might be tempted to approach the formulation of a
general truth condition for denotative negative existentials
with the help of a distinction between mere being and actual
existence. Such a distinction would not be new to philosophy.
For example, some philosophers, including the early Bertrand
Russell, have proposed that, although the referent of a name
might fail to actually exist, this does not mean that it
lacks being:

> Being is that which belongs to every conceivable
> term, to every possible object of thought . . .
> thus being is a general attribute of everything,
> and to mention anything is to show that it is.
>   Existence, on the contrary, is the prerogative
> of some only amongst beings.[1]

Thus, according to the early Russell, if a name such
as "Santa Claus" is used in a denotative negative existential,
it must refer to something which has being, regardless of
whether that something actually exists. This suggests that
a denotative negative existential is true just in case the
name it contains refers to an individual who has being but,
nevertheless, lacks actual existence. However, this condition
would provide an illuminating account of what makes some

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[1] Bertrand Russell, Principles of Mathematics, Second Edition,
New York: W. W. Norton and Company [1938]; Reprint Edition,
New York: W. W. Norton and Company [1965], 449.

denotative negative existentials true, only if it were supplemented with an illuminating account of what must be added to mere being in order to attain actual existence. Since no such account is likely to be forthcoming, a distinction between mere being and actual existence is not going to provide a solution to the present problem. Hence, a different approach is needed.

This essay considers the problem of formulating an illuminating general truth condition for denotative negative existentials in accordance with the following restrictions. First, the only denotative negative existentials with which this essay is concerned are those which make literal denials of actual existence. For example, this essay is not concerned with any denials of fictional existence of the sort that might occur in conversations about whether a character in a story is a mere figment of another character's imagination. Second, all the denotative negative existentials with which this essay is concerned are to be interpreted as expressing absolute and temporally unrestricted denials of existence, as in "Pegasus does not (= does not now and never did) exist." Those that express temporally restricted denials of existence, as in "Krakatoa Island no longer exists" are not considered here. Third, although the discussion of truth is focused on sentences, instead of propositions, this need not be construed as an endorsement of the view that sentences are the ultimate bearers of truth. Speaking of sentences as being true (false) is consistent with maintaining that sentences are true (false)

only in the derivative sense of expressing true (false) propositions. Finally, this essay focuses on only those approaches to negative existentials which do not require that there be individuals who do not exist. Although this essay does not pass judgement on the viability of a distinction between mere being and actual existence, it does take its point of departure from a philosophical tradition in which such a distinction plays no role. It is within the spirit of this tradition to explain, for example, how a sentence like "Santa Claus does not exist" can be true without having to posit the being of a nonexistent Santa Claus.

Within the tradition with which we are concerned there are two important rival views of denotative negative existentials: the concealed description view and the causal history view. This essay begins with a critical exposition of the concealed description view and argues that, contrary to this view, the truth of a denotative negative existential is independent of whether the definite descriptions associated with the name it contains are uniquely satisfied by the same individual. Next, this essay exposits the causal history view. This exposition leads to the development of a theory of name-use which is then employed in the formulation of a general truth condition for denotative negative existentials. In addition, it is argued that this causal history view of name-use implies that all true denotative negative existentials are necessarily true, even when their

truth is unknowable a priori. Finally, this essay considers and rejects certain objections to the claim that denotative negative existentials can be both necessarily true and empirically knowable.

The Concealed Description View

The idea that the use of a proper name involves a tacit descriptive attribution gained widespread acceptance in contemporary philosophy largely due to the later writings of Bertrand Russell. In his later work, Russell came to regard his earlier belief in nonactual objects as a violation of "that feeling for reality which ought to be preserved in the most abstract studies."[2] In obedience to his new-found feeling for reality, Russell insisted that in philosophical analysis "nothing 'unreal' is to be admitted."[3] Although Russell rejected the idea that nonactual objects have a kind of logical being, he held, nevertheless, that any proper name must refer to something which actually exists, on the ground that " . . . what does not name anything is not a name, and therefore, if intended to be a name, is a symbol devoid of meaning."[4]

His disbelief in the logical being of nonactual objects together with his belief in the necessary reference of proper names led Russell to conclude that all proper names--including those used in denotative existentials--

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[2] Bertrand Russell, Introduction to Mathematical Philosophy, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1919; Reprint Edition, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1971, 169.

[3] Ibid., 170.

[4] Ibid., 179.

must refer to individuals which actually exist. Russell further concluded that it would be impossible for a denotative existential to be significant, on the ground that it would be impossible to correctly understand what such a sentence meant without also knowing whether it were true. Although he recognized that it is possible to correctly understand a sentence like "Homer did exist" and not know whether it is true, he did not feel compelled to conclude that denotative existentials are significant. Instead, he concluded that a sentence like the one quoted above exemplifies a sort of grammatical illusion, in that what appears from a grammatical point of view to be a proper name is really, from a logical point of view, an abbreviated definite description, i.e., is really a code word standing for an expression of the form "the so-and-so."

> And so when we ask whether Homer existed, we
> are using the word "Homer" as an abbreviated
> description: we may replace it by (say) "the
> author of The Iliad and The Odyssey." The
> same considerations apply to almost all uses
> of what look like proper names.[5]

Let us agree to call a singular existential whose grammatical subject is a definite description a "descriptive" existential. Russell's view may then be stated as follows: existentials which appear to be denotative are really descriptive and for logical purposes ought to be treated as such. Since Russell had developed a method for logically analyzing descriptive existentials, this view was not without

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[5]Ibid., 179.

consequence.

Russell's method for analyzing descriptive existentials is to treat them as logically equivalent to a certain type of existential generalization in which no definite description occurs. For example, he would treat "The present king of France exists" as logically equivalent to "There exists one and only one individual who is a present king of France." Given such equivalencies, it follows that a descriptive positive existential is true just in case there exists exactly one individual who fits the description it contains. In other words, in Russell's view, a descriptive positive existential is true if and only if the description it contains is uniquely satisfied. Since a descriptive negative existential is a contradiction of a descriptive positive existential, it follows that a descriptive negative existential is true if and only if the description it contains is not uniquely satisfied.

Russell's treatment of descriptive negative existentials has an important feature. Since he accounts for the truth of a descriptive existential in terms of whether the definite description it contains is uniquely satisfied, he does not need to hold that the definite description refers to an object which is said not to exist. Thus, in his treatment of descriptive negative existentials Russell avoids having to posit the being of a nonexistent object in order to explain how such sentences can be true.

Because Russell believed that all singular existentials

which appear to be denotative are really descriptive, he did not provide special truth conditions for denotative existentials. According to Russell, one could arrive at a truth condition for a would-be denotative existential by substituting the definite description abbreviated by the subject-place term for that term, and treating the resulting descriptive existential in the way outlined above. Given that the descriptive existential is logically equivalent to the would be denotative existential, the truth of both sentences would-be subject to basically the same necessary and sufficient condition. For example, if the substitution of "the sun-god" for "Apollo" in "Apollo does not exist" yielded a logically equivalent sentence, both sentences would be true just in case the description "the sun-god" is not uniquely satisfied. Thus, according to Russell, a would-be denotative negative existential is true just in case the definite description abbreviated by its subject-place term is not uniquely satisfied.

In effect, Russell's treatment of existentials like "Apollo does not exist" involves denying that they are what they appear to be. They appear to be sentences containing proper names, but Russell tells us that the expressions they contain are really abbreviated definite descriptions. Hence, those singular negative existentials which have been regarded here as denotative would, if Russell were correct, really be descriptive--or at least logically equivalent to ones that are descriptive. Russell's position is, of course,

highly controversial. However, in order to facilitate our discussion of his views on expressions which are ordinarily regarded to be proper names and the singular existentials which contain them, it will be simpler to continue to refer to those expressions and sentences in accordance with our previously adopted terminology. So, in order to avoid confusion let us agree to continue to use the expression "proper name"--and its abbreviated form "name"--to refer to what are ordinarily taken to be proper names, while reserving the expression "genuine proper name" to refer to names which, in accordance with Russell's requirements, cannot fail to refer. (It is here left an open question whether any Russellian genuine proper names exist.) Similarly, let us continue to use the expression "denotative" to indicate those singular existentials whose grammatical subjects would ordinarily be regarded as proper names. In keeping with this terminology, we may say that in Russell's view a denotative negative existential is true if and only if the name it contains abbreviates a definite description which is not uniquely satisfied.

By maintaining that proper names occurring in denotative negative existentials abbreviate definite descriptions, Russell was able to provide a way to understand what a given denotative negative existential might mean. After all, in order to understand what is meant by "Apollo does not exist," it seems that we would have to know whose existence is being denied. Since that sentence might be true, we cannot expect someone to explain whose existence is being denied by pointing to the individual in question and saying

that he is the one who is being said not to exist. Recognizing this, we might inquire into who Apollo is supposed to be. Were we to do so, we would probably come up with some description which is associated with his name. Suppose we were to look in a classical dictionary and discover that "Apollo" is associated with the description "the sun-god." By assuming that the description gives the meaning of "Apollo," we might infer that a singular negative existential containing that name denies that the sun-god exists and is, therefore, true if and only if there is no individual who uniquely satisfies the definite description "the sun-god." Thus Russell's theory seems to provide us with a way of explaining how denotative negative existentials can be both meaningful and true.

Nevertheless, there are difficulties with the idea that proper names in the context of denotative existentials abbreviate definite descriptions. For one thing, names do not typically abbreviate definite descriptions in the way expressions like "the hist. of phil." do; for example, "Apollo" is not a shortened form of "the sun-god." It would be better to say that a name stands in for, rather than abbreviates, a given definite description. But even if "abbreviates" is interpreted liberally to mean something like "stands in for," another difficulty remains: how is it determined that a name in a denotative existential abbreviates a particular definite description?

Well, perhaps a speaker tacitly decides for himself--

in a less than fully conscious way--what definite description he intends a name (in the context of a denotative existential) to abbreviate. Such tacit stipulations would, however, make it unlikely that different speakers understand what each other really means when they use denotative existentials. Suppose, for example, that in the course of a conversation about ancient Greek authors two speakers nod in agreement and say "Homer did exist." If the one speaker used "Homer" to abbreviate "the author of The Iliad" while the other used that name to abbreviate "the author of The Odyssey," then even though both would have expressed a truth, they would not have expressed the same truth. Hence it would be incorrect for them to think that they were really in agreement. Against this, it would seem that each speaker would not only believe that what the other said was true, but would also know what fact or proposition they agreed upon. To think otherwise is to regard the use of denotative existentials as more fraught with the possiblity of mis-understanding than is actually the case.

Maybe the speech community as a whole or some authority within the speech community decides that a name in the context of a denotative existential on a particular occasion is to abbreviate a certain definite description. This idea, however, does not seem very plausible either. How, for example, could such decisons be arrived at in connection with particular uses of denotative existentials? Moreover, even if such decisions could be arrived at, the idea that

they would determine the definite description which is abbreviated cannot be correct. For suppose someone says "Aristotle did exist" and it is decided or otherwise determined by the speech community that the name he used abbreviates the description "the teacher of Alexander the Great." This would imply that the speaker really said that the teacher of Alexander the Great did exist--even if the speaker had never even heard of Alexander the Great. Worse still, should it be the case that Alexander was never really taught by anyone, i.e., that he nad no formal education, it would follow that what the speaker said was false. However, since Aristotle could have existed without his having ever met up with Alexander, the truth of "Aristotle did exist" is logically independent of whether anyone ever taught Alexander the Great. Considerations such as these render the idea that proper names in denotative existentials abbreviate definite descriptions too implausible to warrant acceptance. Hence the Russellian view that the truth of a denotative existential is determined by whether the name it contains abbreviates a uniquely satisfied definite description ought not to be accepted.

A more acceptable version of the concealed description view can be found in John Searle's "Proper Names."[6] Searle rejects the Russellian view that a name in a denotative

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[6] John A. Searle, "Proper Names," in P. S. Strawson, ed., Philosophical Logic, New York: Oxford University Press, 1967, 89-96.

existential abbreviates a specific definite description.
In contrast, Searle holds that there is typically a cluster
of definite descriptions which a speaker or community of
speakers commonly associates with a proper name. There
may even be more than one cluster of commonly associated
definite descriptions. For example, one of the clusters
of definite descriptions associated with the name "Aristotle"
might include the description "the most famous pupil of
Plato," while another such cluster might include the de-
scription "the second husband of Jackie Onassis." Searle
departs from Russell in allowing that no one definite
description need be singled out as the definite description
whose unique satisfaction determines the truth of a given
denotative existential. In Searle's view, the truth of a
denotative existential would be determined, not by whether
a specific definite description is uniquely satisfied, but
by whether a sufficient number of the (relevant cluster of)
definite descriptions is uniquely satisfied by the same
individual.[7] Thus, according to Searle, a denotative
negative existential is true if and only if a sufficient
number of the relevant cluster of definite descriptions
associated with the subject-place name is not uniquely
satisfied by the same individual.

By leaving open which and how many of the definite
descriptions associated with a name must be uniquely

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[7]Ibid., 95-6.

satisfied by the same individual in order for the referent of the name to exist, Searle was able to avoid a difficulty similar to one which led to the rejection of Russell's abbreviated description view. For example, in Searle's view "Aristotle did exist" would still be true, even if no one individual satisfies the entire (relevant) cluster of definite descriptions associated with "Aristotle." It would be true as long as an unspecified but sufficient number of the definite descriptions is satisfied by the same individual. So, if there is only one individual who uniquely satisfies most of the associated definite descriptions, and that individual happens not to satisfy the description "the teacher of Alexander," this would not commit Searle to saying either that "Aristotle did exist" is false or that "Aristotle did not exist" is true. Since Searle does not require that a particular definite description be singled out as the one which must be uniquely satisfied in order for the referent of a name to exist, his view has the virtue of allowing that a name can refer to an actual object, even though the speakers who use the name are unable to tell which of their uniquely descriptive beliefs about the referent might not be true.

Searle's version of the concealed description view became widely accepted in philosophical circles and remained without serious competition from rival views until fairly recently.* In recent years, however, a number of philosophers,

especially Saul Kripke[8] and Keith Donnellan,[9] have raised

powerful doubts about the viability of any version of the

concealed description view of denotative existentials, even

versions as sophisticated as Searle's. These doubts are

supported by two lines of criticism which jointly lead to

the view that the truth of a denotative existential is

independent of whether the definite descriptions associated

with the name it contains are uniquely satisfied by the

same individual.

One line of criticism stems from the idea that it is

possible to have a substantially false account of an actual

individual to which we refer by name. For example, historians

now say that King Arthur might have existed even though our

present-day accounts of him are wildly inaccurate. It is

at least possible, for all we know that the story of King

Arthur is a legendary tale about an actual person. Saul

Kripke cites a similar example about the prophet Jonah.[10]

According to Kripke, biblical scholars now believe that

most of what the Bible says about Jonah is false (that it

is false that Jonah was swallowed and disgorged by a large

fish, that Jonah went to Ninevah to preach, etc.). They

believe they have independent evidence both that Jonah was

an actual person and that the biblical account of Jonah is

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[8]Saul Kripke, "Naming and Necessity" in Donald Davidson and
Gilbert Harman, eds., Semantics of Natural Language,
Dordrecht-Holland; D. Reidel Publishing Co., 1972, 253-355.

[9]Keith Donnellan, "Speaking of Nothing," Philosophical Review,
LXXXIII, January 1974, 3-31.

[10]Kripke, 282.

really a substantially false account of what this actual
person did. Thus if biblical scholars are correct, then,
even though a few, if any, of the definite descriptions
commonly associated with "Jonah" are uniquely satisfied
by the same individual, it is false that Jonah does not
exist. These sort of examples show that even if most of
(the relevant cluster of) definite descriptions associated
with a proper name are not uniquely satisfied by the same
individual, a denotative negative existential containing
the name need not be true. Hence it seems doubtful that
even a concealed description view as sophisticated as
Searle's can provide a sufficient condition for the truth
of denotative negative existentials.

Another line of criticism of the concealed description
view stems from the idea that there must be a history of
appropriate causal connections linking present uses of a
name with an individual previously identified as the
intended referent of the name, in order for the name so-used
to successfully refer to an actual individual. In his
article, "Speaking of Nothing," Keith Donnellan attacks the
concealed description view of denotative negative existentials
and argues that even if all the definite descriptions asso-
ciated with a name happen to be uniquely satisfied, it does
not follow that the referent exists.

> Suppose, for example, that contrary to what we
> adults believe we know, there is, in fact, a man
> with a long white beard and a belly like a bowl
> full of jelly who comes down chimneys on Christ-
> mas night to leave gifts (the ones whose labels
> are missing about which parents worry because

they don't know to what aunt the child should
write a thank-you note). We must, of course,
imagine that it is absolutely fortuitous that
our descriptions of Santa Claus happen to fit
so accurately this jolly creature. In that
case I do not think that he is Santa Claus.[11]

It is, of course, hard to imagine that an individual

of the above description might actually exist. Nevertheless,

having been asked to suppose that he does, it seems just

as hard to imagine that he would not be Santa Claus. But

according to Donnellan, whether he is Santa Claus, i.e.,

whether he is the individual speakers now call Santa Claus,

depends entirely upon whether he is the individual that is

appropriately linked by a history of causal connections to

various present-day uses of the name "Santa Claus." So,

whether all or most of the definite descriptions commonly

associated with "Santa Claus" are uniquely satisfied would

be beside the point. Thus, if Donnellan is correct, the

concealed description view fails to provide a necessary

condition for the truth of a denotative negative existential.

Donnellan, in the above-quoted passage, is not merely

objecting to the concealed description view. He is also

appealing to a view of proper names and denotative existen-

tials which is in conflict with the concealed description

view. This is the causal history view to which we now turn.

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[11]Donnellan, 24.

The Causal History View

Like the concealed description view, the causal history view provides a way of looking at the referential connection between a proper name and the object to which it refers. Unlike the concealed description view, the causal history view does not attribute successful reference to the satisfaction of various definite descriptions by the same individual; rather, it attributes successful reference to the existence of a causal history of name-use that connects present-day uses of a name with previous uses and, ultimately, to the referent itself. The formulation and development of the causal history view is due largely to the work of Saul Kripke and Keith Donnellan. The following two passages--the first by Kripke and the second by Donnellan--should serve to indicate the main points of the causal history view. Kripke states his version as follows:

> A rough statement of a theory might be the following: An initial baptism takes place. Here the object may be named by ostension, or the reference of the name may be fixed by description. When the name is 'passed from link to link', the receiver to the name must, I think, intend when he learns it to use it with the same reference as the man from whom he heard it. If I hear the name 'Napoleon' and decide it would be a nice name for my pet aardvark, I do not satisfy this condition.[12]

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[12]Kripke, 302.

Donnellan expresses his position along analogous lines:

> The main idea is that when a speaker uses a
> name intending to refer to an individual and
> predicate something of it, successful reference
> will occur when there is an individual that
> enters into the historically correct explanation
> of who it is that the speaker intended to
> predicate something of. That individual will
> then be the referent and the statement made
> will be true or false depending upon whether
> it has the property designated by the predicate.[13]

Despite differences in tone and emphasis, Kripke's
and Donnellan's remarks are similar enough to be recogniz-
able as expressions of the same theoretical viewpoint.
Kripke's remarks follow a forward-looking time order, while
Donnellan's follow a backward-looking time order. However,
this should not obscure the fact that both philosophers are
drawing attention to the same thing: the causal history
of the use of a name. For both philosophers, it is the
causal history of the use of a name which is said to
determine its reference.

According to the causal history view, the ability to
use a name is typically passed from speaker to speaker as
each successive speaker encounters a previous speaker's
use of the name and then uses the name with the intention
that it have the same reference which it previously had.
In this way the ability to use a name is held to be trans-
mitted from speaker to speaker, with the history of those
transmissions forming the causal history of the present use
of the name. A proper name refers, according to the causal

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[13]Donnellan, 16.

history view, by virtue of its present use having a causal
history which ends in an event in which the intended referent
of the name is identified. For example, if the causal
history behind a present use of the name "Aristotle" ends
in an event in which the individual identified as the intended
referent was the philosopher Aristotle, then the causal
history of the present name-use may be said to end at
Aristotle and thereby determine that he is the referent of
the name.

It is an important feature of the causal history view
that the reference of a name does not depend upon the
accuracy of a speaker's beliefs about the referent. To
begin with, it is not a speaker's awareness of the ending
of a causal history which determines a referent; it is the
ending of the causal history itself. If the causal history
of a name-use ends at a certain individual, then that
individual is the referent of the name, regardless of whether
the speaker is aware of how the causal history ends. Further-
more, a name may have a referent, in this view, even though
the user of the name is unable to supply any accurate definite
descriptions of the referent. He may even be mistaken as to
whether the referent of the name actually exists.

Some names have causal histories of use which do not
end in events in which an individual is identified as the
referent of the name. Such names do not refer. For example,
the name "Santa Claus," as it is presently used, fails to
refer (so we assume), because the causal history of its

present use ends in an event in which the intended referent

of the name was stipulated or otherwise determined to be

a merely fictional entity. In such a case, no actual indi-

vidual would have been identified as the intended referent

of the name. Donnellan appeals to this sort of example in

order to introduce the concept of a block in the causal

history of the use of a name. He writes:

> When the historical explanation of the use of
> a name (with the intention to refer) ends in
> this way with events that preclude any referent
> being identified, I will call it a 'block' in
> the history.[14]

Given the notion of a block, Donnellan proposes that

a denotative negative existential is true just in case the

causal history of the use of the subject-place name ends in

a block. He offers the following rule for evaluating deno-

tative negative existentials:

> Rule (R): If N is a proper name that has been
> used in predicative statements with the inten-
> tion to refer to some individual, then ⌐N does
> not exist⌐ is true if and only if the causal
> history of those uses ends in a block.[15]

Donnellan is quick to point out that as it stands Rule

(R) requires amendment, as it cannot distinguish which uses

of a name are relevant and, therefore, cannot distinguish

the denial of the existence of one putative individual from

the denial of the existence of a different individual of

the same name. For example, the name "Mars" has one estab-

lished use whose causal history ends at a certain planet

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[14]Ibid., 13.

[15]Ibid., 25.

and another whose causal history ends in a block involving a story about the Roman god of war. How, then, is Rule (R) to assign a determinate truth-value to a sentence like "Mars does not exist"? Unless Rule (R) is amended in a way that makes it sensitive to the fact that certain names may be put to more than one well-established referential use, it will be unable to assign a determinate truth-value to a denotative negative existential having such a name as its grammatical subject.

Perhaps the failure of Donnellan's Rule (R) to distinguish among the different denials of existence which a given denotative negative existential sentence might be used to make, stems from the employment of a concept of name-use which is inadequate to the task at hand. According to Donnellan, the successful reference of a name is determined by the existence of a causal history of name-uses which links a current use of the name with an object previously identified as the referent of the name. On the other hand, when a current use of a name derives from a causal history of uses which ends in a block, no referent is determined and the name so-used is capable of occurring as the subject of a true negative existential sentence. This, then is the picture of reference failure which underlies the formulation of Rule (R). Yet when we look closely at Rule (R) we see that it is not sensitive to the fact that the same name can be put to different well-established referential uses on different occasions. In order to accommodate this fact,

we need to employ a concept of name-use which allows that a speaker, or different speakers, can put a name to one use on some occasions and a different use on other occasions.

There are contexts in which it seems natural to distinguish among the various established uses of a name. To begin with, we may wish to explain the fact that the same name may refer on different occasions to different individuals by saying that a given name may have more than one established use. For instance, we might note that depending upon the use to which it is put on a given occasion, the name "Aristotle" may refer to a certain philosopher, a certain shipping magnate, or someone else who bears that name. In addition, we may also wish to observe that some distinct names seem to have a similar, if not identical, established use. For example, we might point out that "Moses" and "Moyses" are distinct, although etymographically close, names which have similar, if not identical, uses as variant names of the same biblical character. Thus it appears that we do have a pre-theoretical concept of a name-use which allows that a name may be put to the same (or different) uses on different occasions. This pre-theoretical concept should serve as a basis for the construction of a philosophically more acceptable concept of name-use.

It is important to firm up the concept of a use of a name by saying what a name-use is and what differentiates one name from another. We will proceed by considering some

general features of name-uses and, in so doing, introduce
a broad distinction between a species of name-use and an
individual name-use which belongs to a given species of
name-use. We will then be in a position to say what
differentiates one individual name-use from another.
After that we will turn to the problem of differentiating
among various species of name-use.

One of the more general things one can say about
name-uses is that they are actions performable by speakers.
As with other actions, we must distinguish between those
which can in principle be performed by different agents on
different occasions and those which can only be performed
by a specific agent on a specific occasion. For example,
the use of "Aristotle" as the name of the famous philosopher
is a species of name-use whose performance is open to
different speakers on different occasions. In contrast,
the use of "Aristotle" by Professor Smith on March 1, 1980
is an individual name-use by a specific speaker on a
specific occasion. As such, no speaker can perform that
individual name-use on any other occasion. Because an
individual name-use has a specific date and speaker it is
a unique unrepeatable event. Nevertheless, collections of
individual name-uses, such as all those in which "Aristotle"
is used as the name of the famous philosopher, may form a
class which can be regarded as belonging to a distinct
species of name-use. While no speaker can perform the same
individual name-use on different occasions, a speaker, or

several speakers, can perform the same species of name-use
on different occasions.

It is easy to say what differentiates one individual
name-use from another. Since an individual name-use is a
concrete action performable by only a specific speaker at
a specific time and place, individual name-uses can be
differentiated on the basis of where, when, and by whom they
are performed. In contrast, what differentiates one species
of name-use from another is not as apparant. There are,
of course, many different species of name-use in which the
respective referents are distinct; however, although the
determination of different referents may be regarded as a
sufficient condition for distinctness among various species
of name-use, it is clearly not a necessary condition. If
it were, then certain species of use which we know on pre-
theoretical grounds to be distinct, would be the same. For
example, the species of use of the name "Vulcan" to refer
to the mythical god of fire and the species of use of that
same name to refer to the hypothetical planet within the
orbit of Mercury are distinct uses, even though no distinct
referents are determined in connection with them.

Neither is the sameness of referent an obviously
sufficient condition for the identity of a species of name-
use. Even when the same name is customarily used by different
speakers to refer to the same individual, there may be no
guarantee•that the same species of name-use is exemplified
by each individual name-use. Given a case in which the same

individual is called "Samson" in virtue of his great physical strength by different groups of speakers who are not in any communication with each other, we may legitimately raise doubts about whether their respective individual name-uses belong to a single species of name-use. Indeed, the causal history view would suggest otherwise. In addition, some individual name-uses ought not to be classified as belonging to the same species of name-use, even when the same referent is involved. For example, individual name-uses of "Phosphorus" and "Hesperus" to refer to Venus clearly ought not to be classified as belonging to the same species of name-use, given their different historical origins. On what basis, then, are different individual name-uses to be classified as belonging to this or that species of name-use?

Before attempting to answer the above-posed question, we might pause to reflect on the analogy which is implicit in the phrases "species of name-use" and "individual name-use." These phrases are obviously intended to suggest an analogy with the biological distinction between a species of organism and an individual organism which belongs to a given species. Although this analogy ought not to be over-worked, it does provide a model for classifying different individual name-uses as belonging to one or another species of name-use.

Just as a biologist who is involved in classifying individual organisms ought to base his classification on evidence which indicates related natural histories, someone

who is involved with classifying individual name-uses ought
to base his classifications on evidence which indicates
related causal histories. For the biologist engaged in
classification, the initial evidence typically consists
in the discovery of structural similarities among organisms.
However, for the purpose of biological classification, the
biologist would be interested, not so much in the structures
themselves, but in their respective origins; that is, he
must ascertain which structures indicate common ancestry
and which do not. Only those that do are admissible as
classificatory criteria, since the overall point of bio-
logical classification is to reflect common links in the
evolutionary histories of groups of organisms.

In the case of someone who would be classifying
individual name-uses, the initial evidence would likely
consist in finding out what definite descriptions were
associated with each name-use. From the point of view of
the causal history theory, the classifier should be concerned
with the historical sources of the associated definite
descriptions; that is, he should ascertain how certain
descriptions came to be associated with different individual
name-uses. He might discover, for example, that certain
definite descriptions were associated with an individual
name-use because the speaker had encountered similar
descriptions in connection with certain other individual
name-uses which he later intended to reproduce. In this
way, links among individual name-uses could, in principle,

be traced back to a common root use which might serve as the basis of their being classified under a single species of use. Donnellan offers an example which serves to illustrate such a possibility:

> So in tracing back several uses of the name 'Aristotle' by me and several uses by you, we may find a common root in certain ancient writings and documents, while other uses of the name by me or by you may have nothing in common with the history of the first set of uses.[16]

The above discussion of name-uses reintroduces the idea that speakers associate definite descriptions with their uses of names and raises the issue of how we can, in principle, say what descriptions are associated with a given individual name-use. One reasonable way to address this issue is to maintain that the definite descriptions associated with an individual name-use are those which the speaker would give in response to a question like "To whom or what did that name you just used purport to refer?" if he were fully aware of the contents of his mind at the time of the name-use and were willing and able to answer the question truthfully. This implies, of course, that speakers need not be conscious of the definite descriptions they associate with their individual name-uses.

In typical cases, however, speakers may be assumed to be somewhat aware of several of the definite descriptions they associate with their individual uses of names. Introspection in connection with our own individual name-uses

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[16]Ibid., 26

supports this assumption. Moreover, future advances in psychology or neurophysiology may introduce more objective evidence in support of the idea that speakers associate definite descriptions with their uses of names. In any case, that speakers are disposed to supply definite descriptions in response to questions concerning the referent of a name makes the idea that definite descriptions are associated with individual name-uses reasonable enough to merit acceptance.

Although the idea that definite descriptions are associated with individual name-uses harks back to the views of Russell and Searle, it plays a different role in the present discussion. For Russell and Searle, the definite descriptions associated with a name served to identify its referent. However, according to the causal history view being elaborated here, the associated definite descriptions do not serve to identify the referent; rather, they serve to indicate causal connections among various individual name-uses. The idea here is this: as the ability to put a name to a certain established species of use is transmitted from one speaker to another, certain definite descriptions are passed along with that ability and serve to distinguish individual name-uses which manifest that ability from any which might manifest a different, separately acquired ability to put the same name to a different established species of·use. If what is being said here is close to the truth, the definite descriptions associated with an individual

name-use provide evidence of its causal connections with other previous individual name-uses.[17] Since evidence is, in general defeasible, the associated descriptions are not analytically tied to the use of a name.

As with any event, we may assume that there is a causal history to a speaker's associating certain descriptions with a given individual name-use. In many cases, this causal history will include previous individual name-uses, often by other speakers, which serve to communicate to the future name user various definite descriptions which he might later associate with some of his own individual uses of the name. Let us call these previous individual name-uses "root uses." Some root uses may occur in conversations or writings which explicitly communicate uniquely descriptive information about the referent, as in Donnellan's previously quoted "Aristotle" example. Other root uses might even serve to put a name user in direct contact with the referent, thus permitting him to acquire, by observation of the referent, a store of definite descriptions to associate with future uses of the name. This usually happens, for example, when people are introduced to each other by name. In short, root uses are those individual name-uses which are causally instrumental in a speaker's coming to associate various definite descriptions with a given individual name-use.

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[17] See Michael Devitt, "Semantics and the Ambiguity of Proper Names," Monist, 59, 1976, 404-23 for a presentation and defense of this idea.

Some root uses are original. A root use is original when it serves to introduce a new species of name-use. An example of an original root use would be the use of a name in a baptisman ceremony. There are two basic sorts of original root uses: those that are causally connected in an appropriate way to an individual referent and those which are not. The latter sort are what we have been calling a "block." Hence, the causal history of an individual name-use either ends at a referent or else ends in a block.[18]

Not all original root uses need be intended to introduce a new species of name-use. Some individual name-uses may inadvertently lead to the origination of a new species of name-use. For instance, the name "Madagascar" once had an established species of use as a name of part of the African mainland; however, a misunderstanding of its native use led Europeans to use "Madagascar" as a name of the largest island off Africa's eastern coast. This misunderstanding gave rise to an original root use which introduced a new species of use of the same name. Today the older native species of use is probably extinct, while the more recent European species of use still survives.

It is hard to say exactly what mechanisms are involved in cases of name-use speciation like the above; however, it appears that some form of pragmatic inconsistency is

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[18]Donnellan apparently allows that a non-original root use might constitute a block; however, as the concept of a block is employed here, only those root uses which are original may be regarded as blocks.

involved. When different co-temporaneous speakers begin associating radically different definite descriptions with their respective individual name-uses, they may reach a point where their individual uses of the name impair effective communication between them. For example, we can imagine the communication difficulties that the "Madagascar" misunderstanding might have brought about, had the natives and Europeans continued to use the name "Madagascar" to try to communicate with each other. When relatively co-temporaneous individual uses of the same name became associated with incomprehensibly different descriptions in the minds of different speakers or groups of speakers--to the point where enough of the users of the name would refuse to regard themselves as talking about the same thing--then one species of name-use may give rise to a new and different species of name-use. An individual name-use which served as an influential precedent for an emerging species of name-use would be an original root use of the name.

On the basis of the preceding discussion, three main points may be made about the nature of a species of name-use. First, individual name-uses may be classified as belonging to the same species of name-use only if their respective causal histories lead back to a common root use. Second, all individual name-uses whose respective causal histories lead back to the same original root use may be regarded as belonging to the same species of name-use. Third, the causal histories of individual name-uses which

join up at the same original root use may be collectively regarded as constituting the causal history of a single species of name-use; hence the identity of a species of name-use is a function of its original root use. These three points constitute principles for classifying individual name-uses into various species of name-use.

As with the classification of biological organisms, the classification of name-uses, in accordance with the three points outlined above, would involve quite a bit of indeterminacy. In biological classification there is considerable arbitrariness in saying of any given organism that it represents the first of its kind, a new species distinct from all its predecessors. A new biological species emerges gradually from a population group, usually a reproductively isolated one, with no very sharp discontinuities to focus on. Nevertheless, as time goes on it eventually becomes possible to say of a given population group that its membership constitutes a newly evolved biological species. One may then look back, as it were, and select a given individual to regard as the original member of the new species. This would, of course, involve an idealization: the pretense of a sharper boundary is no more harmful or scientifically dishonest than many other standard scientific idealizations. A similar attitude is called for with regard to the idea of an original root use. Even if we were omniscient, we would not always see a precise dividing line in the emergence of a new species of name-use.

As with biological classification, this indeterminacy ought not to be developed into an objection to the idea that individual name-uses belonging to a given species of name-use have a common origin. We need to focus on the origin of a group of related individual name-uses in order to classify them as belonging to a given species and it simplifies matters greatly to regard a single individual name-use as the point of their origination.

Difficulties may also enter into classifying certain borderline cases of individual name-uses into one or the other of several well-established species of use. For example, someone not well versed in the history of music might associate with his individual uses of the name "Bach" a group of definite descriptions which he had picked up from encounters with several individual name-uses that, without his knowing it, belonged to more than one species of use. He might associate descriptions like "the composer of the Art of the Fugue" and "the man responsible for the sonata form" with the same individual name-uses, thus running together definite descriptions associated with the causal histories of two different species of use: one which leads back to J. S. Bach and another which leads back to C. P. E. Bach. How then are we to classify his individual uses of "Bach"? If he uses "Bach" in a conversation about the great masters of the fugue, then it is probably the case that the former of the two descriptions has a greater weight in his mind; thus, his individual use of "Bach" on that occasion

would be more influenced by the description which has its source in writings or conversations which are historically connected to J. S. Bach. In such a case, the speaker's individual name-use would belong to the species of use whose causal history leads back to that particular Bach. However, it is not hard to imagine individual name-uses in which neither description would carry a greater weight. Such name-uses would be hybrids that would fail to uniquely refer. In such a case the speaker could not be said to be putting the name to any particular established species of use.

(In keeping with the biological species analogy, a hybrid name-use cannot be said to be instrumental in propagating a line of use. Thus, anyone who puts "Bach" to use as a name, because he heard or read a hybrid use of "Bach," would not, on that basis alone, be in a position to put that name to any of its previously established species of use. On the other hand, he might thereby create a new species of use; however, any species of name-use whose original root use is historically derived from a previous hybrid use would have a causal history which ends in a block. Hence, the name so-used would fail to refer.)

Our inquiry into the concept of a name-use was initiated in order to remedy a difficulty which arose in connection with Donnellan's Rule (R), which as the reader may remember, was designed to yield truth conditions for denotative negative existentials. The difficulty stemmed from the fact that

Rule (R) is unable to distinguish among the different denials of existence--some true, others false--which certain denotative negative existentials, e.g., "Mars does not exist," might be used to make. As a result, Rule (R) is unable to assign determinate truth-values to such sentences. However, now that we are in possession of the concept of a species of name-use, Rule (R) may be amended to handle this difficulty along the following lines:

> Rule (R'): Where N is a proper name which is being put to an established species of name-use, S, a denotative negative existential of the type ⌐N does not exist⌐ is true if and only if the causal history of S ends in a block.

Thus, according to Rule (R') a denotative negative existential of the type "Mars does not exist" is true, if the name "Mars" is put to a species of use whose causal history ends in a story about the god of war, but is false if "Mars" is put to a species of use whose causal history ends at the fourth planet from the sun. Hence, Rule (R') provides a way of assigning a determinate truth-value to potentially ambiguous denotative negative existentials and is, therefore, preferable to Rule (R) in that respect. Moreover, Rule (R') retains an important virtue which its forerunner, Rule (R), also possessed; it explains the truth of a denotative negative existential in terms of a natural phenomenon: a block in the causal history of the use of a name. Rule (R') is clearly in the spirit of the views of Donnellan and Kripke on the references of proper names and deserves consideration as a development of an increasingly

influential viewpoint in the philosophy of reference.

The causal history treatment of denotative negative existentials by means of Rule (R') entails an interesting conclusion about the modal status of propositions expressed by such sentences. According to Rule (R'), any true denotative negative existential contains a proper name which is put to a species of use whose causal history ends in a block. Since there is no actual referent at the end of a causal history which ends in a block, it follows that there is no possible world in which the actual referent at the end of such a causal history exists. Hence, there is no possible world in which what a true negative existential actually says (the proposition it expresses in the actual world) is false. Thus, according to the causal history view, all true denotative negative existentials express necessary truths. Such a conclusion is controversial and needs to be defended against the sorts of objections it is likely to provoke.

A Counter-Example Dismissed

No doubt there are some philosophers who would dispute
the claim that denotative negative existentials, if true, are
necessarily true. Let us consider how a plausible counter-
example might be developed. Suppose that someone who objects
to the thesis that true denotative negative existentials are
necessarily true reasons as follows: Assume that the astrono-
mers who introduced a new species of use of the name "Vulcan"
did so by saying, "Let 'Vulcan' be the name of the planet
between the Sun and Mercury." Since there is a possible
world in which there exists a planet between the Sun and
Mercury, there is a possible world in which Vulcan exists.
Perhaps there actually once was a planet between the Sun and
Mercury. If so, then Vulcan really did exist. Someday we
might even come to know that Vulcan existed, as a result of
investigating the solar system for signs of its previous
existence in the way we investigate archaeological sites for
signs of extinct life forms. How then could it be necessarily
true that Vulcan never existed? In addition, it would seem
that we could never know a priori, i.e., without appealing
to experience, whether or not Vulcan ever existed. That is
something which could only be known empirically, i.e., by
appealing to experience. But, since the statement that
Vulcan does not exist is empirical and not a priori, only

facts about the actual world could determine its truth-value. Therefore, it cannot be necessarily true. Thus we have a counter-example to the claim that denotative negative existentials, if true, are necessarily true.

The above line of reasoning, although initially plausible, embodies several assumptions which, if not false, are quite dubious in the light of the arguments belonging to the causal history theory of proper names. First, it assumes that a definite description used to introduce a new species of name-use provides a criterion for identifying the referent of the name in other possible worlds; second, it assumes that any actual individual who happens to uniquely satisfy the description used to introduce the name-use is, therefore, the referent of the name; third, it assumes that a proposition which is empirical cannot be necessarily true. Let us consider each of these assumptions in turn.

With regard to the first assumption, it is false that the description used to introduce a new species of name-use provides a criterion for identifying the referent of the name in other possible worlds. For example, even if we suppose that the species of use of "Neptune" which refers to the eighth planet from the sun had been introduced via the definite description "the planet perturbing the orbit of Uranus," we cannot legitimately infer that in any possible world, whatever uniquely satisfies that description would be Neptune. There is no inconsistency in stipulating that there is a possible world such that the planet perturbing

the orbit of Uranus is not Neptune but some other planet, say Jupiter, and that Neptune does not exist. Thus it is false that in every possible world whatever satisfies the description "the planet perturbing the orbit is Uranus" is Neptune. Therefore, the definite description used to introduce the relevant species of use of "Neptune" does not provide a criterion for identifying Neptune in other possible worlds.

By parity of reasoning, what holds for the definite description used to introduce the relevant species of use of "Neptune" also holds for the definite description used to introduce the relevant species of use of "Vulcan." Even if the description "the planet between the Sun and Mercury" had been used to introduce a use of "Vulcan," that description would not provide a criterion for identifying Vulcan in other possible worlds, since different planets would satisfy that description in different possible worlds. Since that description does not provide a criterion for identifying Vulcan in other possible worlds, one cannot argue that in other possible worlds whatever uniquely satisfies that description is Vulcan. Therefore even if it is possible that there is a planet between the Sun and Mercury, it does not follow that it is possible that Vulcan is that planet.

It is wrong to assume that any individual who actually happens to uniquely satisfy a description that is used to introduce a name-use is, therefore, the referent of the

name. According to the causal history view, the referent

of a name is the individual intended to be the referent by

the introducer of the name-use. Often the introducer of

a name-use is acquainted with the individual to be named

and is in a position to pick it out ostensively. In such

cases the use of a definite description is perhaps best

viewed as a surrogate for an ostension. Even if the descrip-

tion does not accurately describe the individual intended

to be the referent, it may, nevertheless, serve to identify

that individual. In a footnote in "Naming and Necessity"

Kripke says:

> Following Donnellan's remarks on definite
> descriptions, we should add that in some
> cases, an object may be identified, and the
> reference of a name fixed, using a description
> which may turn out to be false of its object.
> The case where the reference of 'Phosphorus'
> is determined as the 'morning star', which
> later turns out not to be a star, is an
> obvious example.[19]

Because the individual intended to be the referent of

"Phosphorus" (by the introducer of that use of the name) is

a certain planet, it would not matter if the description

"the morning star" happened to be uniquely satisfied by some

star which was also visible for the same period of time

elsewhere in the morning sky. Similarly, if the individual

intended to be the referent of a certain name is illusory

or fictional, it would not matter if the description used

to introduce the name-use happened to be uniquely satisfied

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[19]Kripke, 348.

by some individual, since that individual would not be the intended referent of the name. Should someone walking through Stanley Park hallucinate a pink elephant and say, "I hereby name the pink elephant who lives in Stanley Park 'Harold'," and should there happen to be, by coincidence, a pink elephant living undetected in Stanley Park, that pink elephant would not be the referent of "Harold," since it would not be the pink elephant to which the introducer of the name-use intended "Harold" to refer.

Analogously, even if there happens to be something uniquely satisfying the description "the planet between the Sun and Mercury," that thing might not be the referent of "Vulcan" since it might not be the thing to which the astronomers who introduced the name-use intended the name to refer. Perhaps they used that description because they believed it to pick out a hypothetical planet alleged to be responsible for certain observed effects, say certain perturbations of the orbit of Mercury, and intended to name the planet responsible for those effects. Even supposing that there once was a planet between the Sun and Mercury, that planet could be the referent of "Vulcan" only if it was the planet responsible for the observed perturbations of Mercury's orbit. So, even if we were to discover that there once was a planet between the Sun and Mercury, this would not by itself show that Vulcan existed. We would also have to show that it was the planet to which the introducers of the relevant use of "Vulcan" intended that

name to refer.

This brings us to the assumption that a proposition which can only be known to be true empirically cannot also be necessarily true. Why should no necessary truth be knowable empirically? To begin with we must distinguish between knowing that a proposition is true when that proposition is also necessarily true and knowing that a proposition is, if true, then necessarily true. One can have the one kind of knowledge without the other. Assuming that the classical view of mathematics is correct, all mathematical propositions are, if true, then necessarily true. Now a mathematician might know this and therefore might know that Goldbach's conjecture (any even number greater than 2 is the sum of two primes) is, if true, then necessarily true, yet in the absence of a proof for Goldbach's conjecture our mathematician may not believe it to be true and therefore might not know that it is true.[20] On the other hand, a schoolchild might know that a certain mathematical proposition, say that one plus two is three, is true without also knowing that it is necessarily true. In fact he may even know that it is true on the basis of experience, although in later life he may come to know its truth by a priori means. Thus someone can know the truth of a neccessary proposition on the basis of experience. However, the question remains: Are there any necessary truths which can be known empirically, i.e., can be known only on the basis of

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[20]Ibid., 261.

experience? In particular, are true denotative negative

existentials examples of such knowable necessary truths?

We commonly look to mathematics for examples of

necessary truths which are too complicated or abstract to

be known on the basis of experience and therefore can only

be known a priori. Is there any science which may provide

us with examples of necessary truths which are not knowable

independently of experience and therefore can only be known

empirically? According to many phylogenetic taxonomists, a

logically necessary and sufficient condition for different

animals belonging to the same taxonomic unit is their having

the same propinquity of descent from a common ancestor.

Waterman states, "The taxonomic units of a phylogenetic

classification are equivalent to organisms that have common

descent."[21] No animals could belong to the taxonomic unit

to which they belong unless they had the ancestry they, in

fact, have. Thus all biological statements which classify

different animals as belonging to the same higher order

taxonomic unit are, if true, then necessarily true. Now a

biologist might know this and yet not know whether two

superficially dissimilar animals have evolutionary histories

which join up at a certain common ancestor. In order to

find this out he must investigate their internal structures

to see if they exhibit the hypothesized degree of homology.

If the internal structure similarity confirms that the

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[21]Allyn J. Waterman, Chordate Structure and Function, New
    York: The Macmillan Company, 1971, 37.

animals have a certain common ancestry, one which may not
be evident on the basis of their superficial resemblance,
then the biologist will have made an empirical discovery
of a necessary truth. For example, it was an empirical
discovery that whales and cows both belong to the mammalian
order, yet if this is so, then it is necessarily so, since
nothing could be either a whale or a cow unless it is also
a mammal.

On need not restrict oneself to comparative zoology
for examples of similar empirical necessary truths. Kripke
raises the question of whether an individual could have had
different biological parents than the parents he or she in
fact had. He asks us to try and imagine a possible world
in which Elizabeth II exists, but had different biological
parents than she in fact had. There is, he concedes, a
possible world in which someone who resembles Elizabeth II
to an astonishing degree had different biological parents
than Elizabeth II had, but that person, he claims, is not
to be confused with the actual person we call "Elizabeth II."
Not only is it true that Elizabeth is a child of Albert
Windsor and Elizabeth Bowes-Lyon, it is necessarily true.
It is also an empirical truth.

Some statements of identity involving proper names
also provide us with examples of empirical necessary truths.
For example, astronomers once believed that Hesperus, a
certain celestial body visible for a time just after sunset,

22Kripke, 317.

and Phosphorus, a certain celestial body visible for a time
just before sunrise, were different celestial bodies.
Eventually astronomers learned by empirical means that
Hesperus and Phosphorus were one and the same planet: the
planet we now call Venus. Since Hesperus is identical to
Phosphorus and since necessarily everything is identical
with itself, it follows that Hesperus is Phosphorus is
necessarily true. It is simply incoherent to suppose that
there is a possible world in which Hesperus and Phosphorus
are distinct. At best, one could suppose that there is a
possible world in which the expressions "Hesperus" and
"Phosphorus" are used to refer to two different individuals,
but that would be a possible world in which "Hesperus is
Phosphorus" would express a different proposition than in
our world. Hence it would not be a possible world in which
the thing we call Hesperus and the thing we call Phosphorus
are distinct.[23] There are, of course, other examples of
identity statements about individuals who are known empiri-
cally. Some philosophers, including Kripke, even argue that
identity statements about substances, e.g., that water is
H_2O, are empirical necessary truths. These statements are
both necessary and not knowable a priori; they are empirical
necessary truths.

Since there are a number of extremely plausible examples
of empirical necessary truths, one cannot dispute the claim

[23]Ibid., 308.

[24]Kripke, 314.

that denotative negative existentials are, if true, then
necessarily true on the grounds that the notion of an
empirical necessary truth is incoherent. Perhaps one is
tempted to think that a denotative negative existential
such as "King Arthur does not exist" must be contingent
because, for all we know, it might be true and also might
be false. However, if the causal history view is correct,
the sense in which a denotative negative existential might
be true and also might be false is indicative only of its
epistemic, not its modal status.

Since each of the assumptions embodied in the alleged
counter-example about the planet Venus has been shown to be
false, it should be clear that such a counter-example cannot
support an objection to the causal history view. Similar
counter-examples which rely on the same assumptions should
also be dismissed. Once such counter-examples are seen to
rest on false assumptions, there no longer appears to be any
good reason for rejecting the idea that denotative negative
existentials, if true, are necessarily true. Hence, objec-
tions to the causal history view which are based on the idea
that no existentials can be necessarily true, ought not to
be sustained.

Summary

In this essay, the concealed description view of denotative negative existentials is rejected in favor of the causal history view. However, a key element in the causal history approach, Donnellan's Rule (R) for evaluating the truth of denotative negative existentials, is found to have a certain defect which stems from an inadequate concept of name-use. A portion of this essay is then devoted to developing a theory of name-use according to which individual name-uses can be classified as belonging to different species of name-use. Next, the concept of a species of name-use is employed in the formulation of a general truth condition for denotative negative existentials called Rule (R'). Rule (R') is found to be free from the defect which afflicted Donnellan's Rule (R). Finally, this essay argues that although the causal history view, as developed here, implies that denotative negative existentials are, if true, then necessarily true, this should not count against its acceptance.

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