# The Legacy of *Naming and Necessity*[1]

by

NATHAN SALMÓN

*Department of Philosophy, University of California*

NEARLY FORTY years ago, at the ripe old age of 29, a logic prodigy from Omaha, Nebraska, gave a series of three talks that would change philosophy. Working without any written text or notes, Saul Kripke gave these talks in a casual, informal, almost conversational style. The impact of his ideas was colossal. The talks were transcribed, then published as an article and later as a monograph with a newer preface. It would be difficult to overstate the work's significance. Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1972, 1980) is a work of genius that has withstood the test of time. By any reasonable standard, it ranks with the best philosophical work ever. I feel extraordinarily fortunate to have begun my own study of philosophy at a time when a work as inspired and as inspiring as this was available to study, to learn from, to respond to, to go back to and think more about, and to profit from. *Naming and Necessity* is an intellectual treasure.

On a personal note, I first met Saul – with very keen anticipation – at the University of California, Los Angeles in the spring of 1972, when we were both young men. That academic year of 1971–1972 was the most educationally valuable year of my life. I was a junior; Saul was only ten years my senior (he still is) and already a professor at Princeton University. It was my first year studying philosophy beyond the level of introductory courses. That year I took a course on Frege from Tyler Burge; a course on the later Wittgenstein from the late Keith Donnellan; a course in intermediate logic from David Kaplan; a course in the philosophy of mathematics from the late, great Alonzo Church; and topping it all, an undergraduate course on Frege's and Russell's philosophies of language from Saul. In addition, although I was far too green to follow most of the discussion, I attended Saul's graduate seminar on "Naming and Necessity," also attended by Burge, Donnellan, Kaplan, and Alvin Plantinga, among many others. I learned more philosophy, and more about how to think philosophically, that year than I did during the rest of my life.

I did not get the opportunity to meet Hilary Putnam until much later. That is probably just as well. Had I taken a course from Hilary as well that year, my

---

[1]These remarks were originally presented as a keynote address for the opening of the Saul Kripke Center at the CUNY Graduate Center, May 23, 2008, and by way of introducing a panel discussion among David Kaplan, Saul Kripke, and Hilary Putnam.

brain might have exploded from exposure to too much sheer talent and intellect in too short a span of time.

Throughout the 1970s, I took more courses from Saul and re-studied *Naming and Necessity* numerous times. Of course, my relationship with Saul has evolved over the years, during which we have been both friends and colleagues, but I'm happy to say that I've never stopped learning from him.

Philosophers the world over are deeply indebted to *Naming and Necessity*, and none more so than I am. My own doctoral dissertation (Salmon, 2005) and an entire generation of dissertations across the globe have been based in one way or another on this work by a philosopher who himself never wrote a doctoral dissertation. *Naming and Necessity* has generated a huge literature, to which very many here at this conference have contributed. Among the contributors to that literature is Saul himself, with no fewer than three brilliant sequels: "Speaker's Reference and Semantic Reference" (1979); "A Puzzle about Belief" (1976), and *Reference and Existence: The John Locke Lectures* (2013). The last of these was put into print four decades after the lectures were delivered.

Ostensibly and in fact, the central burden of *Naming and Necessity* was to refute a particular kind of theory about the semantic properties of proper names and related linguistic items, and to supplant it with a very different "picture" (Saul's word) of how these expressions work. But the book is so much more than that. Looking just at the vast literature spawned by *Naming and Necessity*; one might not even guess that an issue concerning the semantics of proper names lies at its core. Remarkably, Saul was able to bring his arguments concerning names to bear on a host of seemingly unrelated, or only distantly related, issues – including issues concerning such metaphysical notions as necessity, modal essentialism, and identity; such epistemological notions as empiricism and apriority; and such issues in philosophy of mind as materialism, dualism, and the mind–body problem. (I distinguish between modal essentialism and the more dubious doctrine, or purported doctrine, that subsequently appropriated the term "essentialism.") Other philosophers, especially younger philosophers, sometimes attempt something this ambitious. Such efforts generally fail miserably, never to see the light of day. Saul not only succeeded, but his *Naming and Necessity* set much of philosophy on a new and straighter course. No philosopher since has accomplished anything quite like it. And regrettably, much of philosophy has lost its way since *Naming and Necessity*.

Some of the important ideas advanced in *Naming and Necessity* did not yet have the names they are known by today, for example, the doctrines of *haecceitism* and, most significantly, *direct reference*. (I believe David Kaplan coined both of these terms.) At least one term coined in *Naming and Necessity* has become a philosophical household name: a *rigid designator*. It is ironic that this central and

tremendously influential idea is still widely misunderstood. (This alone is justification enough for philosophy Ph.D. programs to require at least some exposure to modal logic.)

Among the many other ideas that *Naming and Necessity* has contributed to current philosophy are the following (a partial list):

The recognition that necessity and apriority are different, even to some extent independent (and likewise regarding contingency and aposteriority);

That a necessary truth might nevertheless in some sense have turned out otherwise;

The recognition that necessity and analyticity are similarly different (and likewise regarding contingency and syntheticity);

A sensible realism about necessity and possible worlds, a modal realism free of the previous confusions of other philosophers, such as anti-haecceitism or cross-world counterpart theory;

The exposure of the problem of cross-world identification as largely a pseudo-problem;

The recognition that some substantive doctrine of modal essentialism, far from being a confusion committed by careless thinkers, is in fact correct; in particular, that the original makeup of certain composite individuals yields a modally essential property, and the makeup of a composite substance (chemical element or compound) likewise yields a modal essential property;

A particular way of arguing for some versions of modal essentialism: that something must have a certain property to exist because anything without the property would have to be a different thing;

That in considering a particular class of possible worlds, the class need not be characterized qualitatively and instead is legitimately *stipulated*;

That analogously in talking about a particular individual one need not characterize the individual qualitatively and instead one may directly designate the individual without describing it;

That a description is sometimes used to *fix the reference* of a name without turning the name into a synonym of the description;

That the mechanism of fixing the reference of a name yields examples of statements that are contingent and yet *a priori*;

The recognition that in most cases names are not tied even this closely to descriptions, and that in the normal case reference is fixed contextually rather than descriptively;

That designating names are invariably rigid designators so that true identity statements with two names are always necessary even if they are not *a priori*;

That certain general terms, including at least natural-kind terms and terms for mental phenomena (e.g., "pain"), are like proper names in many of these same respects; and finally,

That some terms – for example, names from fiction and myth – are rigid *non*-designators, so that it is in some sense *impossible* for Sherlock Holmes or unicorns to exist.

Some of these important ideas led subsequently to further significant advances, such as forceful arguments that the correct propositional logic of metaphysical modality is rather weak, weaker even than *S4*.

Besides Saul, one of my favourite philosophers is Woody Allen, and one of my favourite words of wisdom of his is the following. He said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it through not dying."

By the age of 30, with *Naming and Necessity* and a few other astonishing accomplishments under his belt, Saul Kripke had already achieved the kind of immortality that Woody Allen does not want to have. Like Saul, both David Kaplan and Hilary Putnam will also live on through their brilliant contributions to logic and philosophy long after most of the rest of us are forgotten.

## References

KRIPKE, S. (1972) *Naming and Necessity*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980.

KRIPKE, S. (1979) "Speaker's reference and semantic reference." In P. French, T. Uehling and H. Wettstein (eds), *Contemporary Perspectives in the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 6–27. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977.

KRIPKE, S. (1976) "A puzzle about belief." In A. Margalit (ed.), *Meaning and Use*, pp. 239–283. Dordrecht: D. Reidel.

KRIPKE, S. (2013) *Reference and Existence: The John Lock Lectures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

SALMON, N. (2005) *Reference and Essence*. 2nd ed. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1981.