Could Hesperus Have Failed to be Phosphorus?

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Or: How Yablo Awoke Me from my Dogmatic Slumbers and Inadvertently Convinced Me that Names are not Rigid Designators

Conceivability and Possibility

- Yablo 1993: Conceivability is a defeasible guide to possibility.

- …

- Yablo 2006: When intuitions of possibility are defeated, the defeat should (ideally?) take a certain form.

Yablo's Psychoanalytic Standard

- "Unless the conceiver is confused or resistant, ◇F explains E's seeming possibility only if he/she does or would accept it as an explanation, and accept that his/her intuition testifies at best to F's possibility, not E's."

Kripke on Hesperus and Phosphorus

- Kripke (N&N, lecture 3): It seems possible that Hesperus is not Phosphorus (H≠P). However, this is not possible.

- When we say it seems possible to us that H≠P, it really seems possible that the morning star isn't the evening star, or that a sentence analogous to 'H≠P' is true in a qualitatively identical evidential scenario.

Simple 2D Explanation

- It's *epistemically* possible (not ruled out apriori, conceivable as actual) that H≠P.

- It's not metaphysically possible (it couldn't have been the case) that H≠P.

- When we say it seems possible that H≠P, this is explained by the epistemic possibility intuition (which we may confuse with a metaphysical possibility intuition).

Psychoanalytic Standard

- Yablo: This doesn't meet the psychoanalytic standard.

- I can distinguish epistemic from metaphysical possibility, and even so it seems metaphysically possible that H≠P.

- I.e. intuitively, it seems to me that (even though H=P), it could have been that H≠P.

Counterfactual Intuitions

- I think Yablo is right: we have the counterfactual intuition that it could have been that H≠P.

- Call this an anti-rigidity intuition.

- Some even stronger anti-rigidity intuitions…

Turning Out

- Intuition: It could have turned out that $H \neq P$.

- Given that "turns out that" is factive, this entails that it could have been that $H \neq P$.

Discovering That

- Another intuition: We could have discovered that H≠P.

- Given that "discovered that" is factive, this entails that it could have been that H≠P.

Epistemic or Counterfactual

- One might suggest that these are just epistemic intuitions, reflecting an epistemic (past-tense indicative) use of "could have been".

- But they seem to support paradigm counterfactuals: e.g. if the morning star and evening star had been distinct, we would have discovered that H≠P.

Explaining Away

- Kripke recognizes these counterfactual intuitions and tries to explain them away in terms of the intuition that

  - (1) it might have been that the morning star isn't the evening star (MS≠ES)

  - (2) it might have been that a sentence of the form 'H=P' was true.

Psychoanalytic Standard

- Prima facie, just as the 2D explanation doesn't meet the psychoanalytic standard, these explanations don't either.

- Even after recognizing the difference between 'H≠P', 'MS≠ES', and 'a sentence of the form 'H≠P' is true', I still have the intuition that it could have been that H≠P.

Defeating Intuitions

- Kripkean (Yablovian?) line: these anti-rigidity intuitions are *defeated* by arguments that names are rigid designators, so 'H=P' is necessary.

- Perhaps this defeat *plus* the explaining-away of intuitions meets the psychoanalytic standard: after seeing the pro-rigidity arguments, one recognizes that the anti-rigidity intuitions only support (1) and (2).

Naming and Necessity, Lecture 1

- 1. Arguments about de re modality.

- 2. Modal argument that names aren't equivalent to descriptions.

- 3. Argument that names are rigid designators.

1. De Re Modality

- De re modal intuitions: e.g. Hesperus (that thing) might have failed to be the evening star.

- Objects have modal properties independently of how they're picked out.

- I won't dispute any of this.

2.Modal Argument against Descriptivism

- Intuition: It might have been that Hesperus wasn't the evening star. [e.g. if it had been knocked off course by a comet]

- So 'Hesperus' is not modally equivalent to 'the evening star' (and so on).

Observations

- 1. This argument doesn't yet establish that names are rigid.

- 2. The anti-descriptive intuition here doesn't contradict the anti-rigidity intuition.

- 3. Even if it did: why does the former defeat the latter and not vice versa?

Naming and Contingency

- A backward version of N&N that starts with the anti-rigidity intuition.

- Lecture 1: it's contingent that H=P, names are nonrigid.

- Lecture 3: the intuition that it could have been that H≠ES is defeated by the argument for nonrigidity and explained away by the de re intuition that H could have failed to be ES.

3. Arguments for Rigidity

- Kripke's official argument for rigidity goes via an intuitive test

  - No one other than Nixon might have been Nixon.

- If so, Nixon (the actual referent) is the referent of 'Nixon' in every world where there is one: i.e. 'Nixon' is (weakly, modally) rigid.

- Call this the pro-rigidity intuition.

Evaluating the Intuition

- This pro-rigidity intuition isn't all that strong.

- Nothing other than Hesperus might have been Hesperus?

- Intuitively: Mars might have turned out to be Hesperus. (We could have discovered that it was Hesperus).

- It might have been (turned out) that Jimmy Hoffa was Nixon?

Competing Intuitions

- Even if there's a strongish pro-rigidity intuition here, there's also a strongish anti-rigidity intuition.

- Why does the former get to trump the latter?

- Pretheoretically stronger? (Hmm…)

- Posttheoretically stronger?

Abductive Argument

- There's also a potential abductive argument for rigidity.

  - The anti-descriptive intuition is best explained by the hypothesis that names are rigid.

  - That hypothesis is simple and powerful.

  - So names are rigid.

Abductive Trumping

- On this view, the anti-descriptive intuition plus abduction trump the pro-rigidity intuition.

- Two worries: (1) is the anti-descriptive intuition really pretheoretically stronger than the pro-rigidity intuition? (2) maybe there are better explanations of both intuitions.

Extreme Alternatives

1. Keep anti-descriptive and pro-rigidity intuitions, junk all anti-rigidity intuitions (explain away via Kripkean strategy): names are always rigid.

2. Keep all anti-rigidity intuitions, junk anti-descriptive and pro-rigidity intuitions (explain away via scope): names are always descriptive.

   Question for both: what breaks symmetry?

Moderate Alternatives

3. Keep anti-descriptive and pro-rigidity intuitions, keep some anti-rigidity intuitions and junk others (non-factivity).

4. Keep all anti-rigidity intuitions, keep pro-descriptive intuition and junk pro-rigidity intuition (semi-rigidity).

5. Keep all the intuitions (context dependence, ambiguous operator).

3. Non-Factivity

- Yablo's line: accept that it could have turned out that H≠P, but deny that it could have been that H≠P: "turns out that" isn't factive.

- Awkward: "If it turned out that p, then p" seems trivially correct.

- And what about: we could have discovered that H≠P? [Gluer/Pagin: this isn't factive! Yablo: explain this away?]

4. Semi-Rigidity

- One can reconcile the anti-descriptive and anti-rigidity intuitions (but not the pro-rigidity intuition) via the thesis that names are semi-rigid designators:picking out actual referent in some world, description-satisfier in others.

    - in some worlds 'Hesperus' picks out Venus (so it's possible that H≠ES)

    - in other worlds 'Hesperus' picks out the evening star (so it's possible that H≠P).

Worry

- Worry: take a world where Venus spirals out of the solar system, and Jupiter and Mars are visible in morning and evening,

- Regarding this very world, the anti-descriptive intuition says 'Hesperus is Mars (not Venus)' and the pro-rigidity intuition says 'Hesperus is Venus (not Mars).

Two Different Worlds?

- Semi-rigidity view might say there are two different qualitatively identical worlds here: one in which Hesperus is Venus (and spirals out of control), one in which Hesperus is Mars (and is visible in the evening).

- But intuitively: this is a linguistic difference, two ways of describing the same world; not two ways the world could have been.

5. Contextualism

- Accommodate all the intuitions by saying that some uses of 'Hesperus' are rigid and some uses are nonrigid (depending on context).

- Anti-descriptive and pro-rigidity intuitions work by triggering rigid use.

- Anti-rigidity intuitions work by triggering nonrigid use.

Pushing Around

- E.g. 'It might have been that H≠ES' (with a little bit of charity) tends to push us to rigid use.

- 'It might have been that H≠P' (especially cued by "turns out") tends to push us to nonrigid use.

Order Effects

- After 'It might have been that H≠ES' (and 'It might have been that P≠MS', 'It might have been that H≠P' typically seems (and is) false.

- After 'It might have turned out that H≠P' and 'It might have been that H≠P', 'It might have been that H≠ES' typically seems (and is) false. [Not sure!]

6. Ambiguous Operator

- Alternative reconciliation: 'It might have been that' is ambiguous between two readings.

    - One generates pro-rigidity intuitions.

    - One generates anti-rigidity intuitions (cf. 'It might have turned out that')

- Names are rigid with respect to the first reading but not the second reading.

Three Operators

- This last view recognizes at least three modal operators: one purely counterfactual ("It might have been that"), one purely epistemic ("It might be that"), and one combined counterfactual/epistemic ("It might have turned out that").

- The view might treat these as fundamentally distinct (Yablo's view, three-dimensionalism) or it might collapse the last two (e.g. both work off primary intensions).

Open Questions I

- I'm somewhat agnostic between a number of these options.

- I like the contextualist view, but don't know if it can be made rigorous. Likewise the ambiguity and semi-rigidity view.

- I don't currently see a compelling case for either extreme view.

Open Questions II

- Does all this generalize to other putative rigid expressions (demonstratives, natural kind terms): I'm inclined to think so.

- Are pure rigid designators even possible? (Maybe e.g. "that very object: …"?)

Open Questions III

- How does this relate to other cases for nonrigidity/descriptiveness of names: e.g. Cumming, Geurts, Roberts, Rothschild, …

Concluding Challenge

- For those who favor the traditional Kripkean view on which names are always rigid: what breaks the symmetry between the pro-rigidity and anti-rigidity intuitions, so that the former trump the latter?