

Consequences of Reference Failure. By MICHAEL MCKINSEY. Routledge Studies in Contemporary Philosophy. (New York: Routledge, 2020. Pp. x + 155. Price £115.00.)

Michael McKinsey's *Consequences of Reference Failure* is about Direct Reference (DR) and empty names (i.e. names that don't refer).

Chapter 1 sketches some background. According to DR, a name's semantic content—what it contributes to propositions expressed by sentences containing it—is its referent. (McKinsey restricts DR to cases where names are used *as names* and allows for exceptions. I touch on these exceptions at the end but ignore them for now.) According to DR, the semantic content of 'Socrates' is Socrates, and

(1) Socrates is wise.

expresses a proposition that can be represented as

(1p) <Socrates, *being wise*>.

If 'Santa' is an empty name, then according to DR 'Santa' has no semantic content. McKinsey argues that DR theorists should accept The No Proposition View (NP), on which sentences containing empty names don't express propositions. If 'Santa' is an empty name, then according to NP

(2) Santa is wise.

expresses no proposition. Since a sentence has a truth-value only if it expresses a proposition with that truth-value, (2) is neither true nor false.

In Chapter 2, McKinsey argues that some classical logical truths should go. He argues that, given NP, we should replace classical logic with a *neutral free logic*, NuFL. NuFL is free (rather than classical) insofar as it permits interpretations with empty domains as well as

interpretations that don't assign referents to some constants. And NuFL is neutral (rather than positive or negative) insofar as every atomic sentence containing a constant is neither true nor false on any interpretation that doesn't assign a referent to that constant. In NuFL, ' Fa ' is neither true nor false on an interpretation that doesn't assign any referent to ' a ', and so is

$$(3) Fa \vee \sim Fa.$$

(This fits with NP.) As a result, although (3) is a classical logical truth, it isn't a logical truth in NuFL. Similarly, although ' $a = a$ ', ' $\exists x(x = x)$ ', and ' $a = b \rightarrow (Fa \rightarrow Fb)$ ' are classical logical truths, they aren't logical truths in NuFL.

In Chapter 3, McKinsey argues for a new class of aposteriori necessities (sentences or propositions that are true in every world but that can't be known apriori), distinct from Saul Kripke's 'water = H₂O' example. Some classical logical truths that aren't logical truths in NuFL are aposteriori necessities on interpretations on which their constants all refer. Although (3) isn't a logical truth in NuFL, it's true on every interpretation that assigns a referent to ' a '. In McKinsey's modal extension of NuFL, MNFL, on any such interpretation (3) is necessary: it's true in every world. But it's aposteriori rather than apriori. To know that (3) is true, speakers would need to know that ' a ' refers, which isn't apriori. (Not all classical logical truths that aren't logical truths in NuFL are aposteriori necessities: ' $a = a$ ' and ' $\exists x(x = a)$ ' are aposteriori but, in MNFL, contingent.) Switching back to natural language, on McKinsey's view

$$(4) \text{ Either Socrates is wise or Socrates isn't wise.}$$

expresses a proposition that's necessary but aposteriori: it's true in every world; but, to know it, speakers need to know that Socrates exists, which isn't apriori (except perhaps for Socrates).

McKinsey's case for aposteriori necessities rests on NP, which justifies the claim that *any* sentence containing a constant isn't a logical truth. An alternative to NP is The Gappy Proposition View (GP), on which (assuming 'Santa' is empty) (2) expresses a gappy proposition that can be represented as

(2p) <__, *being wise*>.

On Nathan Salmon's version of GP (from his 1998 paper "Nonexistence"), all gappy atomic propositions are neither true nor false. But it doesn't follow that *any* sentence containing an empty name is neither true nor false. On Salmon's view, if 'Santa' is empty, then

(5) Either Santa is wise or Santa isn't wise.

expresses a gappy non-atomic proposition that can be represented as

(5p) <OR, <__, *being wise*>, <NOT, <__, *being wise*>>>.

which is the disjunction of the gappy proposition represented as (2p) and its negation, the gappy proposition represented as

(NOT-2p) <NOT, <__, *being wise*>>.

Provided NOT is a suitable form of negation (*exclusion* negation, roughly equivalent to 'it's not the case that the following is a true proposition'), the proposition represented as (5p) is true when the proposition represented as (2p) is neither true nor false. Switching back to formal logic, (3) would be a logical truth, because on an interpretation on which '*Fa*' lacks a truth-value ' $\sim Fa$ ' is still true. And (3) might be necessary, as McKinsey argues, but perhaps it's apriori after all. Accepting Salmon's view might thus block the new class of aposteriori necessities. But, even if GP is true, some classical logical truths (e.g. ' $a = a$ ' and ' $\exists x(x = a)$ ') would still need to go, as on McKinsey's view.

In Chapter 4, McKinsey argues against alternatives to NP, including David Braun's version of GP (from his 1993 paper "Empty Names"), on which all gappy atomic propositions are false (pp. 89–91). Although McKinsey doesn't argue directly against Salmon's version of GP, one of his arguments against Braun's version extends to Salmon's version:

there can be no propositions that are 'gappy'. For a proposition is a way that the world can be said to be. But when we use a sentence containing an empty name ... , there is *no* way that the world is said to be by our use of that sentence. And so there is nothing about the way the world is that could make our sentence either true or false. (p. 89, italics in original)

McKinsey might be right that there's nothing about the world that could make the gappy proposition represented as (2p) either true or false. But it doesn't follow that there's nothing about the world that could make the gappy proposition represented as (NOT-2p) either true or false. Perhaps what makes that proposition true is that whatever is represented as (2p) isn't a true proposition. (Compare: Socrates isn't a proposition and hence isn't a true proposition, but the proposition that Socrates isn't a true proposition is a proposition, and it's true.)

Chapter 5 deserves much more attention than I can give it here. Briefly, in that chapter McKinsey argues that some sentences containing empty names are true when those names are used, not *as* names, but rather as short for reference-fixing descriptions. McKinsey restricts this claim to a narrow class of names (e.g. 'Vulcan', 'Holmes') in a narrow class of sentences (i.e. positive and negative existentials, metafictional and "metamythic" sentences, and "cognitive" sentences). In the case of 'Holmes', the reference-fixing description is rigidly non-referring (p. 131), so McKinsey's view isn't vulnerable to the sort of Kripkean modal argument that he uses against standard forms of descriptivism in Chapter 1. In the case of 'Vulcan', the

reference-fixing description isn't rigidly non-referring (p. 124), but perhaps the class of sentences in which the name is short for the description is sufficiently narrow to avoid the modal argument.

I recommend *Consequences of Reference Failure* to anyone interested in direct reference or apparently empty names. It's an excellent book: clear, succinct, and tightly argued throughout.

BEN CAPLAN

University of Kansas