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Naming And Necessity



Synopsis

Naming and Necessity has had a great and increasing influence. It redirected philosophical attention to neglected questions of natural and metaphysical necessity and to the connections between these and theories of naming, and of identity. This seminal work, to which today's thriving essentialist metaphysics largely owes its impetus, is here reissued in a newly corrected form with a new preface by the author. If there is such a thing as essential reading in metaphysics, or in philosophy of language, this is it.

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Customer Reviews

In 1970, Saul Kripke gave a series of three lectures at Princeton University. These lectures, subsequently published under the title Naming and Necessity, were quickly recognized as one of those rare events that turns the world of philosophy on its ear. Amazingly, Kripke was a mere 29 years old at the time and he delivered the lectures without any notes. This book reflects both the advantages and shortcomings of the spoken form: it is clear, engaging, and often witty, but it is also repetitive at times and frustratingly incomplete at others. It is perhaps fitting that Kripke delivered these lectures the same year that Bertrand Russell passed away, since their main target is the descriptivist theory of names associated with Russell. According to Russell - and to the reigning philosophical orthodoxy until 1970 - names are best analyzed as abbreviated definite descriptions, i.e. as unique sets of properties possessed by their bearers. However, Kripke argues that on this analysis, all such properties belong to their possessors necessarily - which is obviously false. For

instance, if the name "Billy Strayhorn" just means "The composer of 'Take the "A" Train,'" then there is no possible world in which Billy Strayhorn did not compose the song. But this is false: Even if Billy Strayhorn had never written any songs, he would obviously still be Billy Strayhorn. What a puzzle! In place of descriptivism, Kripke proposes the theory of direct reference, according to which a name "rigidly designates" its referent in every possible world in which it exists. That is, a name is just a "tag" attached to its referent, with no descriptive content whatsoever. Kripke also proposes an alternative theory for how names are transmitted, the causal theory of names.

Analytic philosophy often boasts of "rigor", going over intellectual distinctions with a fine tooth comb. Yet one of the most famous and rewarding works of said analytic philosophy, *Naming and Necessity*, is a breezy romp through many of the most major problems of linguistic and metaphysical analysis; though informal, it honors those commitments in the breach. Saul Kripke was a teenage genius attracted to the burgeoning field of "modal" logic, publishing his first paper on the topic when he was 19. When he was slightly older (all of 30) he gave lectures at Princeton University on the philosophical consequences of these advances in logic, lectures which are published here in almost unaltered form. Yet even if you know little of the logical principles behind Kripke's arguments, if you have a little sense you are bound to be struck, awed almost, by the scope and plausibility of what he says. Since analytic philosophy was originally conceived of as "linguistic" philosophy, a vast armamentarium of distinctions and principles for handling the "surface" form of intellectual categories and parts of speech was established by analytic philosophers during the 20th century. Yet Kripke argues that in the case of naming, where a word somehow relates to an extra-linguistic individual object, most of his colleagues got it all wrong. The "received" view in analytic philosophy, dating back to the turn of the century works by Frege and Russell, is that a name is a disguised "definite description" identifying a particular object by means of properties it possesses (or, in the case of a non-existent object, would possess if it was actual).

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