

Direct Reference Theory: A Critical Observation

Dr. Sadek Ali

Assistant Professor of Philosophy, University of Gour Banga, Malda

The first few decades of 20th century philosophy were marked as linguistic philosophy because there we witnessed a dramatic change. There is no question of doubt that the base of philosophy is metaphysics and metaphysics is philosophy. Philosophy was born out of metaphysics and subsequently up to the end of nineteenth century philosophy was dominated by metaphysics. However this prolonged dominant trend is strongly protest at the very beginning of the 20th century. A group of likeminded philosophers having scientific background conceived that, at that time there is no progress in philosophy and philosophy was heavily encircled by speculative metaphysics. But, we had seen in natural science, economics, and commerce generates new concepts day to day. In economics what is relevant today may not be relevant tomorrow. But philosophy still remained in its own position in dealings with metaphysics. The main culprit of philosophy is the domination of metaphysics; metaphysics has no relevance at all because it is meaningless. So the question of meaningless and meaningful had been coming here. In this regard language comes into being. A sentence is meaningful if it has corresponding reference or observational data. And again a sentence is meaningless if it has no corresponding reference. But the metaphysical sentence has no corresponding reference at all and if philosophy were dominated by metaphysics then philosophy has no progress at all. So language is important as a method to discuss about philosophy.

So, philosophers had divergence of opinion regarding the very nature of language. Some would adhere to the view that ordinary language is alright to dealing with philosophy and some other would like to say that ordinary language by its very nature is vague and ambiguous. Those who suggest a modification of ordinary language is called revisionist. Revisionist emphasized on to construct a new form of language known as artificial or ideal language which is free from ambiguity and vagueness. In this respect the question is: what should be the vocabulary of ideal language? Linguistics opines that noun or proper name is the minimum vocabulary of that language. For them name is directly denotes to an object or directly refers to an object. By a names we denotes to an object either denotation ally or connotation ally.

John Stuart Mill's view on direct reference theory:

The philosopher Mill was one of the earliest modern advocates of a direct reference theory beginning in 1843. Mill was not a recognized linguistic philosopher but he was a logician. In his famous book "A System of Logic" he gave so many clues on the basis of which later philosophers were flourished the concept of proper names as a direct referential device. According to Mill, 'every name denotes to an object either denotationally or connotationally'(Mill, *A System of Logic*, 1872). Mill opines that "a proper name is an unmeaning mark which we connect in our mind with the idea of the object. Whenever the marks meet our eyes or occur to our thoughts we may think of that individual object". According to Mill, a proper name like Paul or Ceaser is a singular name which is devoid of all connotations. 'Connotation' means attributes and attributes one kind of descriptive content of a name. Mill said that a name is a word or a group of word. But that does not mean to say that all words or group of words can be regarded as names. For example- Paul, the first emperor of Rome, man, redness are all names. But 'of', 'to', 'heavy' etc are not name at all. According to Mill, the word of the second group cannot be regarded as names because

'these words do not express things of which anything can be affirmed or denied'(Mill, *A System of Logic*, p-35). We can say significantly that 'Paul died young' or that 'the emperor of Rome was a great warrior, but at the same time we cannot say 'of' is a relation or that 'heavy' is difficult to carry. So, it is clear that, according to Mill 'a word or a group of words would be a name only if it could be used in the position of the subject of some assertion.'(Mill, *A System of Logic*, p-34). It seems possible to add also that a name, in Mill's view, is what many contemporary philosophers have called 'a referring expression'.

According to Mill a name always denotes to an object either denotatively or connotatively. It means that, a name refers to an object either directly or indirectly. 'Directly' means a name directly acquainted with an object and 'indirectly' means a name refers to an object by its properties or attributes. Mill distinguished between connotative and non-connotative terms. Mill said that 'a non-connotative term is one which signifies a subject only or an attribute only. But on the other hand, 'a connotative term is one which signifies a subject and its attribute. In this regard Mill distinguishes between subject and predicate of a statement. A name being a non-connotative term always occupies the subject position of a categorical proposition. On the other hand, connotative terms always occupy the predicate position of a statement. Mill thinks that, a name means a singular name or singular non-connotative name which is positioned in the subject of some assertion and it always directly designates to an object but not via any attributes.

Russellian view on direct reference theory:

Bertrand Russell's theory of proper names is different from Mill's theory of proper names. To discuss the direct reference theory, Russell actually emphasized on the classification of proper names. According to Russell proper names are divided into two types namely ordinary proper names and logically proper names. The basic idea of Russell's theory of proper names is, we think the contrast between a name and what he calls a description. 'Scott' is a name but 'the author of *Waverley*' is a description. 'Armstrong' is a name but 'the first man on the moon' is a description. According to Russell, 'a name in the strict sense of the term can never be a description and a description in the strict sense of the term can never be a name'. Russell said that a logically proper name always occupies the subject position in a categorical proposition and it always designates an object or refers to an object directly. Russell said that demonstrative pronouns like 'this', 'that', 'it' etc. are logically proper names and these all directly refer to an object.

In his direct reference theory, Russell firstly distinguished between a logical subject and a grammatical subject. The former is the thing in the real world-the referent; while the latter is a description or concept. He then claimed that in logic a "feeling for reality" had to be maintained in order to save discussion from a whole host of troubles. And since the logical subject was made up only of reference, tied together in strings by propositional functions, in logic there was no meaning except reference.

Russellian distinction between logically proper names and ordinary proper names actually makes two different theories namely-the theory of description which is related to ordinary proper names and the realist view which is related to logically proper names. Russellian theory of direct reference is reliance on logically proper names. In his famous article "Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description" he made the distinction between logically proper names and ordinary proper names. By a logically proper name we are directly acquainted with an object, not via any attributes or descriptions. But on the other hand, ordinary proper names are known by description. A logically proper name is a singular name and it equally to be a particular. So direct reference theory is associated with logically proper names. For Russell, when we

say, 'this is a table', 'that is a pen', here we are directly acquainted with that objects such as 'table' and 'pen'.

Kripkean view on direct reference theory:

After Russell, there we found another view regarding direct reference theory in Kripke's philosophy. Earlier Mill told that, a proper name is denoted to an object either directly (denotatively) or indirectly (connotatively). But Kripke gave much more emphasis on directly referential view on proper name and in this regard he introduced a new concept as 'rigid designator'. According to Kripke proper name is a rigid designator, because it designates an object directly. Kripke analyzed proper name in terms of rigidity. And he distinguished between rigidity and non-rigidity of a proper name. To discuss the concept of proper name, Kripke took possible world concept. According to Kripke, "a rigid designator is one which designates the same object in all possible worlds; i.e., if it designates a certain object in the actual world then it designates the same object in all possible worlds in which the object exist at all." (Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*. p.321). On the other hand, "a non-rigid designator is one which does not designate the same object in all possible worlds; i.e., there are possible world in which the designator designates objects that are different from what it designates in the actual world." (Ibid). For example- 'the square root of 4' is a rigid designator for it designates the same object, namely- the number 2, in all possible worlds; but 'the president of USA in 1970' is a non-rigid designator for it does not designate the same individual in all possible worlds, it designates Richard Nixon in the actual world, but that is only due to the actual outcome of the relevant presidential election, and the result of the election need not have been what it actually was; the result of election might have been different and a different man might have been elected.

After distinguishing between rigid designator and non rigid designator, Kripke want to show that proper name has no sense; i.e. attributive meaning or descriptive meaning at all. Kripke's argument against the sense theory of proper name is that: "If a proper name has a sense then the reference of the proper name is determined by its sense; i.e., there is associated with a proper name a certain condition, whatever that condition may be, and an object is designated by the name if and only if it satisfies that condition. If this is how the reference of a proper name is determined then a proper name cannot be a rigid designator; at least it cannot in general be a rigid designator."(Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*.P-323). For, there is no guarantee that the object which satisfies the condition associated with the proper name in the actual world would also satisfy it in all other possible worlds. It may well be that some other object satisfies the condition in another world. In fact, if the reference of a proper name is determined by its sense, it will be a non-rigid designator and behave exactly like "the president of USA in 1970". But a proper name is a rigid designator. It does not have any sense.

But the question is: how can we show that a proper name is a rigid designator? Kripke's argument for this is quite straightforward. A proper name must be a rigid designator; otherwise we could not make counterfactual assertions by their help, as we can actually do. In order to assert the man who was actually the president of USA in 1970, by virtue of having won the relevant election, might not have been the president, for it was just a contingent matter of fact that he won the election, now we can use the name of the person and say 'Nixon might not have been the president of the USA in 1970'. This counterfactual could not mean that it means unless the proper name 'Nixon' designated the same individual in both the actual world, in which he is the president, and the possible world, in which he is not.

Putnam's theory of direct reference:

After Kripke, Hilary Putnam's notion of direct reference is a distinct kind. Putnam endorses Kripke's theory that proper names as well as natural kind terms are rigid designators; that is, the names rigidly designate their referents in such a way that they can be supposed to be true of the referent across all possible worlds. This may be called the theory of direct reference. It combines the indexicality of the referring expressions with a rigidity in their standing as referents. Putnam also endorses the view that a causal chain is necessarily the underlying mechanism of reference. He, however, brings into prominence the community of language-users and the environment in the determination of the causal chain underlying the reference mechanism.

Putnam explains the notion of reference in connection with his thought-experiment about the Twin Earth. This experiment is like this: imagine another Earth and that there are people exactly like us on this Twin Earth also. Just as the people on Earth speak English, the people on the Twin Earth also speak a language like English. Let us imagine that the word "Water" occurs in the Twin Earth-English. There is stuff on Twin Earth which looks like water and is very much used in the same way. Before 1750, neither the Earthian nor the Twin Earthians knew about the chemical structure of water. But because of new developments in science, now it is known that water on Earth is H₂O and the water on Twin Earth is XYZ. The question now is: What is the referent of the word "Water" in the Earthian English and in the Twin Earthian English? Is it the same or different? On the surface both the word "water" in earth and "Water" in Twin Earth mean the same thing and are representing the same concept, and so they refer to the same substance. But at the deeper level they are different. The meaning is not the same, though they may represent the same concept. They, in fact, refer to two different things such as H₂O on Earth and XYZ on Twin Earth. When the Earthian drinks water they drink that stuff which is H₂O and not XYZ and vice versa. Thus reference is tied to the stuff directly presented to us without the help of concepts.

Putnam holds that proper names and natural-kind terms are such that they directly refer and are not determined by the concepts and meanings suppose to be in the mind of the speaker. That is to say that the "Psychological states" do not determine the extension of natural-kind terms. Like Kripke, Putnam argues that names as well as natural-kind terms do refer to their objects rigidly and indexical and they do not depend on descriptions for securing their reference. He rejects the description theory because it is wrong in committing itself to the idea that names are synonymous with descriptions. Putnam suspects that the cluster theory of names does not suffice to fix reference. That the reason why he accept the Kripkean view that names are rigid designators. The names can ostensive refer or can fix their referents by stereotypes which about in our language. Stereotypes are the established ways of talking about the natural-kind terms such as "gold", "water", "tiger" etc. Reference-fixing is done by them. Putnam says: "the stereotype of a tiger does enable one to recognize tigers (unless their albino or some other typical circumstance is present), and the stereotype of a lemon generally enables one to recognize lemons. In the extreme case, the stereotype may be just the marker: the stereotype of molybdenum might be just that molybdenum is a metal."(Putnam, The meaning of Meaning).

David Kaplan's theory of direct reference:

In this connection, it is worth bringing in Kaplan's theory of direct reference, especially his notion of 'Dthat' which carries the import of singular reference. Kaplan's is a theory of singular reference which has the unique distinction of keeping the Kripkean mode of rigid reference with a modicum of the Fregean

sense such that reference for him is no more a matter of pure ostension, but of reference with contextual determinations and the speaker's intentions. Thus, for Kaplan, we must understand the use of 'Dthat' only with reference to the speaker's parameters of contextualized intentions and the possible determinations of the sense of the linguistic symbols. Kaplan writes: "I will speak of a demonstrative use of a singular denoting phrase when the speaker intends that the object for which the phrase stands be designated by an associated demonstration". (Kaplan, 'Dthat' in *The Philosophy of Language*).

That is to say that the demonstrative use of a referring expression must be accompanied by the associated contextual determinations and the speaker's intentions. Speaker's intentions matter for the reason that without referring to what the speaker intends to do we cannot understand what he refers to.

But reference in the proper context must be indicated by the reference-indicating device 'Dthat' which is supposed to indicate that a singular reference has been made to an object in the right context. 'Dthat' is the referential device that shows that a certain reference has been made as in the following example: Dthat (the speaker points to a picture) is a picture of one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century.

Ruth Marcus's view on direct reference theory:

Ruth Barcan Marcus was an American philosopher and logician who developed the theory of direct reference by introducing the metaphor 'Tag'. Marcus's name has been associated with the new theory of proper names which asserts that proper names as 'tag' refer directly to items, with contrast to the traditional or old theory of proper names. Traditional or old theory of names asserts that names are relevantly similar locations express descriptive senses or are disguised descriptions. However, the new theory holds that names as rigid designators are direct referential nominees. Thus, the new theory of names identifies names as rigid designators (Kripke), direct reference (Kaplan), identity across possible worlds, the necessity of identity, a posteriori necessities, singular propositions, essentialism about natural kinds. There are a good number of philosophers of language, namely, Marcus, Kripke, Kaplan, Donnellan, Putnam, Perry, Salmon, Soames, Almog, Wittgenstein, and a number of other contemporary philosophers who have paid significant contribution in developing the new theory of proper names.

Actually the new theory of proper names had developed by Marcus in his famous article "Modalities and Intentional Languages" in 1962. After ten years (1972) Saul Kripke used proper names as rigid designators in his book "Naming and Necessity". So Marcus's notion of "Tag", Kripke's notion of "Rigid designator" and Russell's notions of "Logically Proper Names" all are equally treated. These words directly refer to an object not via any attribute. According to Marcus, proper names are directly referential and are not abbreviated or disguised descriptions or attributes like Russell and Frege and many others up to 1970. In this regard, Marcus writes: "But to give a thing a proper name is different from giving a unique description... (An) Identifying tag is a proper name of the thing... This tag, a proper name, has no meaning. It simply tags. It is not strongly equatable with any of the singular descriptions of the thing." Marcus then claims that this should be the basis of the contemporary 'direct reference' theory of the proper names where proper names are argued not to be camouflaged or disguised descriptions. For example, 'Scott' refers directly to Scott and does not express a sense expressible by such a definite description as "the author of *Waverley*". We think that Marcus's position has a simile to Russell's concept of logical proper names. The only difference that we note here is that Marcus while introducing her concept of tag as the mark of proper names takes the help of modal necessity unlike Russell.

The direct reference theory has elaborately discussed above and so many linguistic philosophers contribute their valuable opinion regarding direct reference theory. Actually, direct reference theory is related with atomic language. Any kind of language has two different meaning namely-denotational meaning or connotational meaning. When linguistic philosophers were tussled regarding the very nature of language, one of the groups of linguistic philosopher had opined that ordinary language by its very nature is ambiguous. So they decided that there we have needed a new language which is non ambiguity and vague less. In this regard, they proposed to make a new form of language which is known as ideal language. But the question is: what should be the vocabulary of ideal language? The answer is 'noun' i.e. proper name is the minimum number of vocabulary. But, in the direct reference theory the above mention philosophers were emphasized on the denotational aspect of name which so limited view concerning proper names. For Mill, proper name denotes to an object either denotationally or connotationally. In the theory of direct reference, philosophers (Russell, Kripke, Kaplan, Putnam, Marcus) are adhering to the denotation aspect but they did not pay much importance on connotational aspects. In our everyday life, we used ordinary language for communicating from one to other. Without bearer, name is meaningless. So, name is bearing two different values such as denotation and connotation. So, without connotational meaning of name; name remained meaningless.

Gottlob Frege introduced in his book 'On Sense and Reference' the concept of 'sense'. For him sense means mode of presentation. In this regard he distinguished between sense and reference. According to Frege, reference is determined by its sense. So sense means connotation. To determine the reference of a proper name, sense is important. After Frege, Wittgenstein, in his 'Philosophical Investigation' argued against referentialism. He said that, 'the meaning of a word is its use'. So, 'use' means attributive use. It is true to say that, direct reference theory remained obscure if it is not reliance on connotational aspect of name. For example: if we utter the name of 'Socrates', it not only refers to the person 'Socrates' and it equally refers that: he is being a philosopher, he is the master of philosophy. So the connotation of a proper name is so important.

References

1. Altham, J.E.J., 'The Causal Theory of Names'; *The Aristotelian Supplementary* Volume 47, 1973.
2. Ammerman, Robert, *Classic of Analytic Philosophy*: Tata McGraw Hill Publishing Company, Bombay-New Delhi, 1965.
3. Ayer, A. J., *Language Truth and Logic*, Gollancz, London, 1936; Pengun.
4. Ayer, A. J., *Logical Positivism*, The Free Press of Glencoe, New York, 1959.
5. Bach, K., *Thought and Reference*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987.
6. Burge, T., 'Reference and Proper Names' *Journal of Philosophy*, 1973.
7. Das, Kantilal., *Philosophical Relevance of Language*, Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, 2006.
8. Frege, G. "On Sense and Reference". Reprinted in P. Geach and M. Black, (ed.) *Translations from the Philosophical Writing of G. Frege*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1960.
9. Kaplan, David. 'That' in *The Philosophy of Language*, (ed.) A. P. Martinich, Oxford University Press, Oxford and New York, 1990.
10. Kripke, Saul, 'Naming and Necessity' in *Semantic of Natural Languages*, (eds.) Donald Davidson and Gilbert Harman, D. Reidel, Dordrecht, 1972.
11. Marcus, B., 'Modalities and Intentional Language', *Synthese*, vol. 13(4), 1961.

12. Mill, J.S., *A System of Logic*, London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1872.
13. Putnam, Hilary, 'Meaning and Reference', *Journal of Philosophy*, vol, 70, 1970.
14. Rorty, Richard, *The Linguistic Turn: Recent Essays in Philosophical Method*, Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1968.
15. Putnam, Hilary, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'", in his *Mind, Language and Reality: Philosophical papers*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
16. Putnam, H., 'Is Semantic Possible?' in *Mind, Language and Reality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.
17. Russell, B. '*Philosophy of Logical Atomism*', Papers 8, 1918.
18. Russell, B, 'Descriptions' in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich, 1985.
19. Russell. B, 'Knowledge by Acquaintance and Knowledge by Description' in *Mysticism and Logic*, Paperback edition, Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1957.
20. Strawson, P. F., 'On Referring' in *The Philosophy of Language*, ed. A. P. Martinich, 1903.