

## A Version of Descriptivism on Natural Kind Terms

Kripke's characterization of the description theory of reference – for short, descriptivism – concerning natural kind terms is similar to the one regarding proper names. According to him the main thesis of descriptivism on those expressions would be the following: a proper name/natural kind term refers to/applies to an entity if and only if this entity satisfies a sufficient number of the properties or descriptions associated by the speakers with the name/the term. Now, on the one side, it has to be emphasized that when characterizing descriptivism Kripke talks indistinctly of properties *or* descriptions, as most advocates of descriptivism do, and so will we in the following. On the other side, Kripke assumes that the properties that according to descriptivism determine the reference of natural kind terms are purely general or qualitative, to which Kripke alludes as *superficial* properties, and hence that the descriptions that determine their reference are ones in purely general terms. Kripke's main thesis concerning the determination of the reference or extension of natural kind terms is that this is determined by *underlying* properties of entities of the kind.

Taking into account some of the claims by Searle and Strawson on proper names, and extending them to natural kind terms, on account of which we will sometimes talk simply of terms, we should make two remarks on descriptivism. Firstly, the descriptions which play the most important role in Searle's and Strawson's reference theory are *identifying descriptions*, but these authors understand this notion in a broad sense. They include three types: “demonstrative presentation, unique description, mixed demonstrative and descriptive identification” (Searle, *Speech Acts*, 86). Therefore, contrary to Kripke's assumption, descriptivism accepts a broad notion of description and so of property, and it is *not* committed to the thesis that purely general or qualitative properties are the only sort of properties which determine the reference of terms.

Secondly, among the descriptions that the average speaker can associate with a term, Searle and Strawson also include descriptions in which such speaker *defers* the reference of the term to other speakers. In this regard descriptivism can accept the thesis of the *division of linguistic labour* put forward by Putnam, and hence can claim that all speakers associate descriptions with the natural kind terms they use, though some of the descriptions associated by non-experts have the function of deferring the reference of those terms to their reference in the use by experts. Now, experts regarding a natural kind will associate with the term in question a set of identifying descriptions and at least some of them will *not* involve the notion of reference; so Kripke's non-circularity condition is fulfilled. Come to this point, descriptivism can maintain that the extension of a natural kind term, such as it is used by experts and hence also by the rest of the members of our linguistic community, includes the entities that satisfy a sufficient number of the descriptions that experts concerning that kind associate with the term, and they will include structural or underlying properties. Therefore the thesis of descriptivism according to which the reference of a natural kind term is determined by a sufficient number of the descriptions associated with it applies, strictly speaking, according to this version of descriptivism, only to *experts* concerning that natural kind.