

HARRISON AND THE CAUSAL THEORY

Harrison in his article 'Description and Identification' among other things, takes up the task of solving the problems posed in the context of the Causal Theory of names, by propounding a distinction between A-identifications (actually identifying descriptions) and R-identifications (referentially identifying descriptions)¹. The limitations that he sees in the Causal Theory is its inability to handle such cases like Pierre's Paradox² devised by S. Kripke, and to account for the change of reference³ pointed out by G. Evans. Harrison believes that Pierre's paradox is the consequence of not maintaining the distinction between A-identifications and R-identifications⁴ and accounting for change of reference is a problem for the Causal Theory because it does not incorporate the speaker's intentions and beliefs.⁵

The crucial difference between A-identifications and R-identifications is that in the former, the person is able to pick out the object referred to among other things, and in the latter, he may not be in that position, but is capable of doing so eventually by taking help from other sources.⁶ Harrison grants that "identifying descriptions are indeed required for successful reference to unique real individuals by means of proper names."⁷ A-identifications will involve both what he calls epistemic and logical relationships,⁸ whereas in the case of R-identifications only logical relationship between the designator and the designated is involved; and an epistemic relation may be obtained only if necessary by utilizing the identifying description or causally connected series of uses of the word. Harrison remarks :

R-identification is not an autonomous species of identifying description at all, but an essentially parasitic or secondary mode of description which can provide a sufficient condition for successful reference by means of a proper name, and the corresponding intention to refer on the part of a speaker, only in cases in which it can be backed by, an actually identifying description.⁹

Pierre once visited London and he was living in some corner of the city. Having learnt that the place where he lived,

was not clean, believed that London was ugly. Before coming to London, in some contexts he had heard "Londres is pretty." Pierre lacks the knowledge that London is the same city which is called 'Londres' in French. He makes the apparent contradictory statement "London is ugly, whereas Londers is pretty." In the case of London Pierre can provide actually identifying descriptions, while his remark about 'Londres' cannot be taken to be A-identification, but has to be considered as R-identification since Pierre is not in a position to identify the city or provide any actually identifying descriptions. The solution offered to Pierre's paradox by Harrison is the following :

The solution of Kripke's puzzle about Pierre's beliefs is, then that Pierre believes of London that it is an ugly city, and of the name 'Londres' that it names some city or other which, as a matter of fact, is pretty. The two beliefs, having different objects, in no way contradict one another.¹⁰

I

What needs to be examined carefully is whether one can have a certain kind of belief about names which Harrison's notion of R-identifications requires. While discussing another example and making the same point he remarks : "If I know only that there exists a mountain called 'Chimborazo' which is tall, but not which mountain it is, then I am not in a position to entertain any belief about the actual mass of stone and vegetation called 'Chimborazo' but only a belief about the word 'Chimborazo' namely that it is the name of some mountain or other which is, as mountains go, tall".¹¹

In one sense we can have belief about words. We are told that in none of the lodges in Japan we will find Room No. 13. This is because Japanese would not like to stay in room numbered '13' as they have some superstitious beliefs about that number. In certain sections of Indian society, one finds the belief that the wife should not utter the name of her husband. There are names which are considered to be good or bad. In northern part of India no one wants to name his son as 'Ravana' whereas, the word 'Rama' is a popular name. There are cultural reasons for all these beliefs but certainly these beliefs are not due to the fact that a word happens to be the name of a particular person or place. Harrison's talk of beliefs about proper names is quite different from the

above cultural beliefs which vary from society to society. According to Harrison, the notion of beliefs about proper names is possible only when one talks of names which designate existents. Harrison maintains that the properties of the word 'Chimborazo' which is the name of a mountain, are not direct properties of Chimborazo,¹² and the properties of 'Pamela Andrews' are not direct properties of the girl named Pamela Andrews,¹³ they are so, if at all, only indirectly.

It is far from clear, how the thesis that one can have beliefs about words (which is a necessary requirement of R-identifications) which are proper names, and the thesis that proper names are rigid designators, can be conjoined together in a theory of reference. Harrison explicitly maintains that these two theses go together. He writes :

Rigid designation is the direct consequence of the fact that the referentially identifying description conveys no direct information about the individual so identified.¹⁴

Change of reference is a problem if proper names are rigid designators. If a proper name rigidly designates a place or a being in all possible worlds, then how can change of reference occur? Perhaps one has to invoke some different notion of proper names where there is a mechanism to distinguish one use of a word from another, though the same word is used as proper name to refer to two different places or beings, and deny thereby the very possibility of change of reference. One may have to talk about two different sets of beliefs in such a situation, and each set includes the attributes of two distinct objects which are attributes of those objects only indirectly. Talk of beliefs about proper names is not absurd within the frame-work of Frege or Cluster Theorist who maintain that names have meaning, because one can refer to meaning of a word which is different from the referent of the word. If a word has significance only in virtue of its having a referent in a language, then the talk of beliefs about words, i.e., words within quotation marks, either turns out to be mere talk about marks that made the words or sounds; or it has to be about the referents and in which case the point of putting the words within the quotation marks is lost. Harrison does not agree with Frege that proper names have meaning; on the contrary, he argues against it.¹⁵ Given the premises of Harrison, that proper names

are rigid designators, and that they have no meaning, and that the beliefs are not about referents, one fails to understand his notion of beliefs about proper names.

What prompted Harrison to talk about beliefs about names in this fashion seems to be the following consideration which he makes clear while discussing an example :

If we treat my statement 'Chimborazo is a tall mountain' as expressing a belief about a mountain, we confront the question *which* mountain, exactly this belief is a belief about. It will not do to reply 'Chimborazo' on the basis only of a referentially identifying description..¹⁶

It is not quite true that the description provided is identifying description. It is simply one of the descriptions of Chimborazo, though the only description known to the speaker, and there are many other mountains which are tall, and hence on the basis that a mountain is tall we or the speaker cannot identify the mountain to be Chimborazo. Nonetheless, there are two beliefs involved, one about the word and object relationship, i. e., 'Chimborazo' is the name of a mountain, and the other that, mountain is tall whichever it may be. What seems to be the case is that the word "belief" is defined in a very narrow sense (and paradoxically too widely by including beliefs about words). Harrison takes 'belief' to be an epistemic relation and hence thinks that belief about an individual necessarily requires actual epistemic contact with the individual in question.¹⁷ If Harrison is right, after having received an interview letter from the head office at Delhi, a candidate cannot start his journey to Delhi if he has not visited Delhi before. He cannot, for example, believe that he will have a place to live and appear for the interview the next morning. We do believe that there is a country called "Australia", though we may never have visited that country at any time. These examples are adequate to prove that Harrison's concept of belief is very narrow. In fact this narrow notion of belief seems to have lead him to conclude that the question "which mountain is tall?" in the above example of 'Chimborazo' cannot be answered satisfactorily.

One final point regarding the beliefs about words needs to be made here. If we grant Harrison's restricted notion of belief that it is an epistemic relation, and that one can have beliefs

about Chimborazo if and only if one had an epistemic contact, then one should ask the question to Harrison : what kind of beliefs does he have about the word 'Chimborazo' ? In other words, what kind of epistemic contact can one have with a word ? That it is pleasing to hear the word ? Or that it is tall ? It is absurd to say that the word 'Chimborazo', or the name 'Chimborazo' is tall. Harrison's notion of belief itself does not admit the possibility of having belief about words which are names, since names are not things that can be perceived, though letters and sounds are.

II

After having argued that Harrison's notion of 'belief' which is an essential part of R-identifications is found to be a vacuous concept, and implying thereby the very notion of R-identifications must be philosophically useless, I would like to put forth another argument which if valid, would prove that the distinction between A-identifications and R-identifications is untenable. By showing that if we interpret a situation as the one where A-identification is being used, then the referent would be one where R-identification is being used, then the referent would be one thing; and if we interpret the same situation as the one where R-identification is being used, then the referent would be another thing. We would like to point out that the distinction can lead to ambiguous reference. The example is : A cheat comes to Dr. Deshpande's house and introduces himself as D'souza and states that he stays in Room No. 14 in the next building. Since Dr. Deshpande has moved to this house very recently, he had no occasion to know all the people who lived in the next building. After telling a story about his mother how she has been ill for many days, D'souza makes a request to Dr. Deshpande to lend his scooter for ten minutes for going to market urgently and buying the medicine prescribed by his family doctor. Dr. Deshpande being a helpful person lends his scooter and waits for D'souza. After having waited for a sufficiently long time, Dr. Deshpande sets out himself in search of D'Souza and having found him no where Dr. Deshpande suspects whether he is a cheat, and subsequently lodges a complaint in the nearest police station. Next day, after the enquiries the police inform Dr. Deshpande that no one by name 'D'souza' stayed in the

building referred to by Dr. Deshpande, however, they had managed to catch the cheat along with the vehicle in a nearby town and the real name of the cheat is 'Sudhakar Kulkarni'.

Now the question here is: How should the police interpret Dr. Deshpande's complaint? On the interpretations of R-identifications, the police need to conclude that Dr. Deshpande has lodged the complaint against the name 'D' Souza' whomsoever it refers to, and should plead for punishing Sudhir Kulkarni having told a lie to Dr. Deshpande that his name is 'D'sonza'. If we take into consideration of the fact that Dr. Deshpande had seen Kulkarni and had given the identifying descriptions of him along with his complaint, the police should treat it as a case of cheating. Cheating may involve telling lies, but mere telling lies will not always turn out to be as serious a crime that of cheating. It is obvious that the punishments that may be recommended on these two different interpretations could be different.

Sometimes it happens that the identifying descriptions turn out to be mere descriptions. This happens for many varied reasons, but one of the reasons is that the speaker lacks certain relevant informations and thinks that certain descriptions are identifying descriptions, and when pointed out that the speaker has not provided an identifying descriptions of the person or the place, he provides some other detailed description which serves the purpose. One such example may be given here: the speaker suggests that they should propose the name of Dr. Babu for the best teacher award for the year. The hearer knows of two faculty members in the same institute who are called 'Dr. Babu' and asks the speaker to be more specific. The speaker clarifies that he had that teacher in mind who teaches Mechanical Engineering to the students, and this serves as an identifying description for the hearer in this case. In this example, Harrison's condition of correlative intention to refer to the same individual in R-identification is fulfilled. In some other cases, however, it is very difficult to say whether this condition of correlative intention is met when a new set of identifying descriptions is provided.

In our example of 'D' Souza' something else could have happened. Let us consider the following possibility. Dr. Deshpande lodges the complaint against 'D' Souza' giving the identifying description "one who stays in Room No. 14 in the building next to mine." When it is pointed out to Dr. Deshpande that

there are only ten rooms in that building and no one by name 'D' souza' has ever stayed in that building. Dr. Deshpande thinks of some other identifying descriptions and considers whether to use the name 'D' souza' to refer to the person or to use only identifying descriptions whom so ever they fit. If Dr. Deshpande decides to retain the name in his complaint, and provides as many different identifying descriptions as he can, the police have to search for the person whom those descriptions fit and the one who is called 'D'souza'. Instead, if Dr. Deshpande drops the name and retains only identifying descriptions, it is quite difficult to say whether he has retained the same correlative intention of referring to the individual by the name 'D' souza'. If we are to think along the line of Causal Theorists¹⁸ including Harrison, then we would say that the police should search for the person whom the community would identify as 'D' souza' and produce him in the court of law, because proper names are rigid designators, and the name 'D' souza' designates one and only one individual in all possible worlds given the socio-linguistic conventions pertaining to the use of the word. Or else, we need to give a chance to Dr. Deshpande to reconsider his complaint and lodge a fresh complaint either retaining the name 'D' souza' and giving some more identifying descriptions if possible, or drop the name and provide only identifying descriptions. If the latter alternative is chosen by Dr. Deshpande, then the police would have recourse to Cluster Theory¹⁹ and present the person whom so ever the identifying descriptions fit best. It is up to Dr. Deshpande to identify the person withheld in the police custody when asked, and say whether he is the same person who had cheated him. Suppose, the so called identifying descriptions fit more than one person and all of them are asked to be present in the police station on a particular day and at a particular time and Dr. Deshpande is asked to identify the person against whom he has lodged the complaint; it is up to Dr. Deshpande to identify any of them as cheat. In case, the so called identifying descriptions fit an unmanageable number of persons, the police tell Dr. Deshpande that the clues are not adequate to identify the cheat.

The basic weakness of Harrison's notion of R-identifications seems to be that in this concept he tries to capture two elements which are generally not known to go together, namely, the intention of the speaker and the behavioural interpretation of it. As

he was decided to retain Causal Theory and the notion of rigid designation as the major parts of his theory of reference, he would like to give importance to what the community would consider as the referent of a proper name. On the other hand, realizing the difficulties pointed out by Evans about Causal Theory, he would like to incorporate intentions of the speaker also in the theory of reference. As a consequence, Harrison's theory can manage to account for only those cases which are, of course, unproblematic in nature, where the community as well as the speaker would refer to the same referent by the same name. Wherever there is an element of *over-riding*²⁰ intentions of the speaker in a communication situation, Harrison's analysis of R-identifications fails completely.

III

We may now turn to the solutions offered by Harrison to the problems posed by Kripke and Evans. In the case of Pierre's belief, Harrison only makes use of his notion of the beliefs about words and speaker's intention while undermining certain elements of the Causal Theory—especially what the members of Pierre's community refer to while using the names 'London' and 'Londres'—which is very much a part of Harrison's theory of reference. While accounting for change of reference, he emphasizes that element of Causal Theory namely, what the community would consider the referent of a name in a changed situation, along the line of Evans without considering any example where the intention of the speaker does not match the use of a name in that community. Thus apparently Harrison's theory can offer satisfactory solutions to many more problems than what the Cluster Theory and the Causal Theory can offer separately. It is true that solutions offered by Harrison to the problems posed by Kripke and Evans are attractive. But, Harrison's theory of reference contains, as I pointed out, incompatible elements, viz., the speaker's intention and the behavioral account of it. And it is only when one examines his theory carefully that one realizes that the theory itself is defective.

Department of Philosophy,
Indian Institute of Technology,
Powai,
Bombay.

P. R. BHAT

NOTES

1. Harrison, B. 'Description and Identification,' *Mind* 1982.
2. S. Kripke, 'A puzzle about belief' in Avishai Margalit (Ed.) *Meaning and Use* (Reidel, 1979), pp. 343 ff. Quoted by Harrison.
3. G. Evans, 'The Causal Theory of Names' in S. P. Schwartz (Ed.) *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, (Cornell University Press, 1977), pp. 250 ff
4. Harrison, B., p. 336.
5. Harrison, p. 332.
6. Harrison, pp. 324 and 333.
7. Harrison, p. 322.
8. Harrison, p. 337.
9. Harrison, p. 325.
10. Harrison, p. 338.
11. Harrison, p. 337.
12. Harrison, p. 337.
13. Harrison, p. 333.
14. Harrison, p. 333.
15. Harrison, pp. 333-34.
16. Harrison, p. 337.
17. Harrison, p. 337.
18. S. Kripke, Donnellan and Putnam are considered to be the main proponents of the Causal Theory. See Kripke on 'Naming and Necessity' pp. 253-355, Donnellan on 'Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions', pp. 356-373 in D. Davidson and G. Harman (Ed.). *Semantics and Natural Language* (Reidal, 2nd Edn. 1977), and see Putnam's article on 'Meaning and Reference', *The Journal of Philosophy*, LXX (1973) pp 699-711 is also reprinted in *Naming, Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, pp. 119-132.
19. The main proponents of Cluster Theory are Searle and Strawson. See J. R. Searle, 'Proper Names' *Mind*, 1958, pp. 166-73, and P. F. Strawson, *Individuals*, (Methuen, London, 1959).
20. I borrow this terminology from Evans, p. 212.