

PROBLEM SET 6
due by Tuesday, April 2 in class

PHILOSOPHY OF
LANGUAGE

Exercise 1 (20 pts.) Which of the following sentences would (on its most natural reading) involve a *metaphysical modal*, and which would involve *epistemic modal*.

- (a) You say Jones might be at home. I disagree, Jones never goes home straight after work.
- (b) Humans could have evolved wings if they had also developed much more efficient metabolic systems.
- (c) Couldn't the Earth have spun in the opposite direction: clockwise (looked at from the north pole) rather than counter-clockwise?
- (d) Where are those keys? Could I have left them at work?
- (e) Human beings are necessarily rational animals.

Exercise 2 (18 pts.) *Actualist descriptivism* is the view that a name “*N*” shares its semantic value with a definite description of the form “The actual *D*”. The term “actual” here is used to ensure the description *D* is always interpreted relative to actual, as opposed to a counterfactual, circumstances. For example, the following is true.

- (a) It could have been the case that the president of the United States was Hilary Clinton.

It’s true because in some counterfactual scenarios (those where Trump lost the election) “the president of the United States” picks out Clinton, not Trump. On the other hand the following statement is false.

- (b) It could have been the case that the *actual* president of the United States was Hilary Clinton.

That is false because “the *actual* president” picks out Donald Trump, regardless of what counterfactual scenario we are considering. So (b) claims that Donald Trump could have been Hilary Clinton which is (arguably) false.

- (i) Say whether actualist descriptivism succumbs to, or avoids, Kripke’s “Modal Argument” and why.
- (ii) Say whether actualist descriptivism succumbs to, or avoids, Kripke’s “Epistemic Argument” and why.

Exercise 3 (12 pts.) Does the claim that names are rigid designators *by itself* entail that Millianism is true? Explain to the best of your ability why or why not. (Hint: consider the previous question) Does Millianism by itself entail that names are rigid designators? Again, to the best of your ability explain why or why not.