

# Widescopism and Caplan's "Against Widescopism"

CHEN BO

(Forthcoming in *The Philosophical Forum* (A&HCI) 2018, No.2 )

In his publications (1970, 1972, 1980)<sup>1</sup>, Saul Kripke strongly criticizes descriptivism about names (traced back to Frege and Russell): the meaning of a singular or general name consists in descriptive content, which is both what determines its reference, and is what competent speakers know when they understand the name. Moreover, he develops his notion of "rigid designation:" a name is a rigid designator for it refers to the same object in all possible worlds (where the object exists), and his theory about "how a name refer to its object:" a causal-historical chain about a name explains how the name came to have the reference it actually has. So far, Kripke's criticism, notion, and theory seem to have been accepted as correct by most of philosophers, and take a dominant position at least in the philosophy of language.

However, there were/are some philosophers, e.g. Michael Dummett, John Searle, Alvin Plantinga, David Lewis, Jason Stanley, and David Sosa, who have tried to explain away the attack to descriptivism from Kripke and others with wide-scope names or rigidified descriptions. According to widescopism, rigid designators can be reduced to the definite descriptions taking wide scopes with respect to modal operators. For instance, Dummett thinks that *if* names were rigid designators, *then* rigid names could be explained as the descriptions with wide scopes over modalities. This does not mean that he really thinks that names are rigid designators, and should be always treated as the descriptions with wide scopes over modalities. On the contrary, he asserts that, just like descriptions, names can have either narrow or wide scopes in modal contexts; only by arbitrarily ruling out the use of proper names with narrow scopes does Kripke achieve his doctrine of rigidity.<sup>2</sup> Sosa argues that like descriptions, names can take

---

\* This article is supported by the major research projects 'Studies on the Significant Frontier Issues of Contemporary Philosophy of Logic' (No. 17ZDA024) and "The Debates between Descriptivism and Direct Reference Theory" (No. 12AZX008) both funded by the National Foundation of Social Science, China.

<sup>1</sup> S. Kripke, "Identity and Necessity", in *Identity and Individuation*, ed. M. K. Munitz (New York: New York University Press 1971) 135-164; reprinted in his *Philosophical Troubles, Collected Papers*, Volume 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 1-16; the page number cited is from the reprinted. S. Kripke, "Naming and Necessity", in *Semantics of Natural Language*, eds. D. Davidson and G. Harman (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1972) 253-355; *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>2</sup> M. Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2nd edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 111-151, especially 127-128; *The Interpretation of Frege's Philosophy* (London: Duckworth, 1981) 182-95, and 557-603.

either narrow or wide scopes in modal talk.<sup>1</sup> I myself also justify the claims that names can have either narrow or wide scopes relative to modalities, and not all names always take wide scopes in modal constructions, so not all names can be regarded as rigid designators.<sup>2</sup>

According to rigidified descriptivism, descriptions can be rigidified by adding the qualification “in the actual world,” referring to their satisfiers in the actual world, and fixedly referring back to their actual satisfiers in all other possible worlds. Plantinga<sup>3</sup> and Searle are among the earliest proponents of rigidified description. Searle writes:

...any definite description at all can be treated as a rigid designator by indexing it to the actual world. I can, by simple fiat, decide to use the expression “the inventor of bifocals” in such a way that it refers to the actual person who invented bifocals and continues to refer to that very person in any possible world, even in a possible world in which he did not invent bifocals. Such a use of the definite description will always take wide scope or will be in a sense scopeless in a way that is characteristic of proper names.<sup>4</sup>

Ben Caplan constructs six arguments to argue against widescopism in his paper (2005):

Widescopers should be Super Widescopers: that is, they should say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to complementizers such as “that.” Super Widescopers should be Super Duper Widescopers: that is, they should say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to quotation marks. And Super Duper Widescopers should be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers: that is, they should say that, when the definite description that a name is synonymous with itself contains a name, the definite description that that name is synonymous with must take wide scope with respect to modal adverbs, complementizers, and quotation marks. But Descriptivists should not be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. So Descriptivists should not be Widescopers either.<sup>5</sup>

In this paper, I want to rebut Caplan’s arguments against widescopism. At first, I will outline my own widescopist and rigidified descriptivist objections to Kripke’s rigidity theses. Then, I will carefully argue that, in his arguments against widescopism, Caplan (2005) commits a crucial fallacy: after supposing a name is synonymous with its corresponding description, he still permits the name and its relevant description not

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Sosa, “Rigidity in the Scope of Russell’s Theory”, *Noûs* 35(2001): 1–38.

<sup>2</sup> CHEN Bo, “Descriptivist Refutation of Kripke’s Modal Argument and of Soames’s Defense,” *Theoria, A Swedish Journal of Philosophy* 79 (2012): 225–260.

<sup>3</sup> A. Plantinga, “The Boethian Compromise,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978):129–138.

<sup>4</sup> J. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 258.

<sup>5</sup> B. Caplan, “Against Widescopism,” *Philosophical Studies* 125 (2005): 167.

to co-refer in a context where they both occur, so his arguments against widescopism failed.

## 1. Widescopism and Rigidified Description

Based on Kripke (1971, 10; 1980, 21n, 48, 77-78) and a report about Kripke's position from Kaplan<sup>1</sup>, I formulate his precise and strict definition of "rigid designator" as follows:

The term  $d$  is a rigid designator of an object  $o$  if and only if  $d$  designates  $o$  in any possible world where  $o$  exists, and  $d$  does not designate anything other than  $o$  in any possible world.

Then, I formulate Kripke's "rigidity theses" (RT for short) as follows:

In natural language, proper names (perhaps except vacuous names) are rigid designators, but most of definite descriptions are nonrigid designators.<sup>2</sup>

In my view, Kripke develops two arguments for his RT: one is the intuitive test for rigidity (cf. his 1971, 13; 1980, 48-49), which is also his intuitive argument for rigidity; another is his modal argument for rigidity and against descriptivism. He takes the intuitive test very seriously. He once complains, many readers misunderstand his theory of rigid designation because they "even seem to have overlooked the intuitive test for rigidity, as emphasized on pages 48-49" [of *Naming and Necessity*] (Kripke 1980, 11; underline added). I reformulate the test as follows:

### The Intuitive Test for Rigidity

- (i) The proper name  $n$  is rigid if and only if " $n$  cannot but have been  $n$ " is true.
- (ii) The definite description  $d$  is non-rigid if and only if " $d$  might not have been  $d$ " is true.

Kripke constructs his modal argument against descriptivism and for rigidity. I reformulate it as follows, in which "P1" is short for "premise 1," "C" for "conclusion," and so on.

### The Modal Argument

P1. If descriptivism is correct, then, a name and its corresponding description should have the same modal profile, and a statement like (\*) should be necessarily true:

(\*) Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander.

P2. A name and its corresponding description have different modal profiles,

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Kaplan, "Afterthoughts," in *Themes from Kaplan*, eds. J. Almog et al (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989) 569-571.

<sup>2</sup> See J. Stanley, "Names and Rigid Designation," in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Language*, ed. B. Hale and C. Wright (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 565-569, for his discussion of Kripke's rigidity theses.

and a statement like (\*) is not necessarily true.

C. Descriptivism is wrong.

Kripke argues for P2 by appealing to the following examples:

- (1) Aristotle might not have been Aristotle.
- (2) Aristotle might not have been the teacher of Alexander.
- (3) The teacher of Alexander might not have been the teacher of Alexander.

Kripke claims that the sentence (1) only has a false reading: it is necessarily false. He argues, the two occurrences of “Aristotle” in (1), whether as its subject or predicate, refer to the very same person, viz. Aristotle. Since Aristotle could not be a different person from himself in *any* possible world, (1) is necessarily false. He also claims that the sentence (2) has a true reading: it is obviously true. He argues, the name “Aristotle” as the subject of (2) refers to a particular person, viz. Aristotle, and the description “the teacher of Alexander” as the predicate of (2) describes a property, status, or role that could be taken by different individuals in different possible worlds. In some counterfactual situations, it is possible that Aristotle is not the teacher of Alexander. Then, (2) would be true. In his view, the only difference between (1) and (2) consists in this fact: where (1) has the second occurrence of the name “Aristotle,” (2) instead has the description “the teacher of Alexander.” From this fact, Kripke concludes that a proper name like “Aristotle” is a rigid designator: it designates the same object in all possible worlds; but a description like “the teacher of Alexander” is a nonrigid ones: it could designate different objects in different possible worlds.

In what follows, I will refute Kripke’s interpretations of the sentences (1) and (2).

In my view, (1) can have a true reading: “Aristotle might be different from what he in fact is: he might not have been a philosopher, he might not have been a giant of knowledge, and so on.” The key point of this reading is that the first occurrence of “Aristotle” as the subject of (1) is used *designatively*, that is, to pick out a particular person, namely Aristotle, in the actual world, but the second occurrence of “Aristotle” is used *predicatively*, that is, to signify the properties, status, or roles that Aristotle actually has. Put in wide/narrow scope, in (1), the first “Aristotle” takes wide scope with respect to the modality “might,” but the second “Aristotle” takes narrow scope, signifying a set of properties: F, G, H, ..., R. Then, we reformulate (1) as follows:

(4) Aristotle is such that he might not have some of properties F, G, H, ..., R that he actually has.

In symbols, we rewrite (4) as (5):

$$(5) [a]((a=\text{Aristotle}) \wedge \Diamond(\neg Fa \vee \neg Ga \vee \neg Ha \vee \dots \vee \neg Ra))$$

Obviously, both (4) and (5) are true, so (1) has a true reading. When Kripke asserts that (1) only has a false reading, he commits a mistake.

In order to highlight the fact that (1) has a true reading, let us consider one counterfactual conditional:

(6) If he had not been taught by Plato, Aristotle might not have been Aristotle.

In (6), “Plato” and the first occurrence of “Aristotle” are used to designate a particular person in ancient Greek. But the second occurrence of “Aristotle” in (6) are radically different: we cannot continue to interpret it as referring to a specific person in the actual world. In so doing, (6) will have a necessarily false consequent, since Aristotle cannot be a different person from himself; and will have a possibly true antecedent, since we can conceive the situation that Aristotle is not taught by Plato. Then, (6) will become a false counterfactual conditional with a true antecedent and a false consequent. However, in our intuition, (6) is true. In order to respect our intuition about (6), we have to treat the two occurrences of “Aristotle” in the consequent of (6) differently. The first occurrence of “Aristotle” in (6) is regarded to designate the man Aristotle, but the second occurrence is regarded to signify the properties, status, or role that Aristotle actually has, e.g. being a philosopher, being a giant of knowledge, and so on. Then, the truth-condition of the sentence (6) will be equal to that of the counterfactual (7):

(7) If he had not been taught by Plato, Aristotle might be different from what he in fact is: he might not have been a philosopher, he might not have been a giant of knowledge, and so on.

Obviously (7) is true, so is (6). This result coincides with our intuition about (6).

Now we in turn consider the sentence (2). If both the subject “Aristotle” and the predicate “the teacher of Alexander” of (2) are interpreted to co-designate the very same person *in the actual world*, (2) will mean that an individual might not be different from himself. In this interpretation, (2) will mean (8):

(8) Both Aristotle and the teacher of Alexander are such that Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander in the actual world and it might be the case that Aristotle is not the teacher of Alexander.

Let “the  $x:Tx$ ” is short for “the teacher of Alexander.” We rewrite (8) as (9):

(9)  $[a][\text{the } x:Tx] (a=\text{Aristotle}) \wedge \exists! y ((y=\text{the } x:Tx) \wedge (a=y) \wedge \Diamond \neg (a=y))$ <sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Here, I follow Soames’ notation in his paper “The Modal Argument: Wide Scope and Rigidified Descriptions”,

According to (9), in the actual world, there is an individual which is self-identical; but in some possible world(s), it is not self-identical. (9) conflicts with Kripke's thesis that identity is necessary, viz.  $\forall x \forall y ((x=y) \rightarrow \Box(x=y))$ , so it is false, so is (6), and so is (2). Thus, (2) could have a false reading. It is not the case that (2) only has a true reading.

The interpretation of (2) as (8) and (9) looks a little weird; it is so just because we misunderstand the uses of names and descriptions in our language. For example, Kripke always interprets proper names *designatively*, viz. fixing to refer to a particular individual, but this is not the case: names could be used *predicatively*, viz. signifying the properties, status or roles that an individual actually has. He often interprets descriptions *predicatively*, especially when used as the predicates of sentences. In his view, a description such as "the teacher of Alexander" does not refer to a particular person in the actual world, but signify a property, status, or role that could be taken by different objects in different possible worlds. However, this is not the unique kind of cases how we use descriptions in natural language. For instance, when using the description "the first US president," we usually use it to fixedly designate the man George Washington, viz. the person who was in fact the first US president in our actual world (short for "@")<sup>1</sup>, rather than to whoever might have been the first US president in any other possible worlds. From the perspective of reference, descriptions could be rigidified if they are supplemented with a qualification "in @." Why do we usually not make the qualification clear and explicit? For most of time we talk with respect to @, there is no need to mention @ all the time. However, when talking counterfactually, we go beyond @ and into other possible worlds, "in @" has to be added in: "the teacher of Alexander in @." In this way, the description is no less rigid than the name "Aristotle:" they both refer to the very same person in the actual world, and will refer back to that person even in any other possible world.<sup>2</sup>

In this spirit, let us go back to consider the sentence (3). In my view, it could have at least three readings as follows:

(10) It might have been the case that the teacher of Alexander is not the teacher of

---

*Noûs* 32 (1998): 1-22. By putting a name or a definite description into square brackets and putting the brackets at the beginning of a formula, I mean that the name or the description takes a wide scope with respect to the formula that follows. Actually, this notation comes from Russell. He do so when he distinguishes "primary occurrence" and "secondary occurrence" of a description in a negative proposition, and he uses " $\exists!y$ " to mean "there is exactly one y."

<sup>1</sup> Here, I want to keep distance with D. Lewis's modal realism. According to Lewis, each possible world is a separate spatiotemporal system; there is no way of getting from one world to another. Likewise, possible worlds are causally isolated from each other. He puts forward the "indexical analysis" of actuality: what is "actual" is an indexical matter, just like the question of which time is "past," "present," and "future." Thus, the habitants in each possible world could call the world at which they locate and the things in their world "actual," just as we call the world in which we live and the things in our world "actual." In this sense, every world is *actual* in itself, and thereby all worlds are on a par. Cf. D. Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986) 92-93.

<sup>2</sup> Some scholars, e.g. Soames in his article (1998) and in his book *Beyond Rigidity: The Unfinished Semantic Agenda of Naming and Necessity* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Caplan in his article (2005), rebut widescopism and actually-analysis as the responses to Kripke's modal argument against descriptivism. In CHEN Bo (2012), I have replied Soames's defense of Kripke's modal argument.

Alexander.

(11) The teacher of Alexander is such that *he* might not have been the teacher of Alexander.

(12) It might have been the case that the teacher of Alexander in the actual world is not the teacher of Alexander.

In (10), the modality “might” takes wide scope, ranging over the whole sentence in which it occurs. Accordingly, the description “the teacher of Alexander” takes narrow scope relative to the modality, ranging over the sub-sentence inside the scope of the modality. Under this reading, (10) is not only straightforwardly false but actually a contradiction, because it means that one person could be different from her/himself, or that one characteristic could be different from itself.

In (11), the modality “might” takes narrow scope: it only ranges over one part of the whole sentence in which it occurs. Accordingly, the description “the teacher of Alexander” takes wide scope relative to the modality, ranging over the whole sentence in which it occurs, and is used designatively. Under this reading, a particular object is marked out or specified: *he* is the teacher of Alexander in @ at which we are located, and it is possible that he is not the person who is the teacher of Alexander in other possible worlds. In this reading, (11) will be true.

In (12), the description “the teacher of Alexander in the actual world” is a rigid designator. It is used designatively, that is, referring to a particular person in the actual world; even though it might be used in other possible worlds, it still refers back to the particular person in the actual world, so it fixedly refers to that person in all possible worlds. It is conceivable that the teacher of Alexander in @ is not the person who is the teacher of Alexander in other possible worlds, just as a father in @ might not have been a father, since possibly he did not marry, or had no baby after marriage. Otherwise, we have to say that a father in @ must be a father, or that the teacher of Alexander in @ must be the teacher of Alexander. These claims are ridiculous. So, (12) is also true, just as (11) is.

In symbols, we rewrite (10) as (13), (11) as (14), and (12) as (15):

(13)  $\Diamond((\text{the } x:Tx) \text{ is not } (\text{the } x:Tx))$

(14)  $[\text{the } x:Tx] \exists!y((y=\text{the } x:Tx) \wedge \Diamond \neg(y=\text{the } x:Tx))$

(15)  $\Diamond((\text{the } x:Tx \text{ in } @) \text{ is not } (\text{the } x:Tx))$

Obviously, (13) is necessarily false; both (14) and (15) are true. Hence, (3) could have two readings: a false reading like (13), and a true reading like (14) or (15). In (13), the description “the teacher of Alexander” takes narrow scope relative to the modality “might.” In (14), the description takes wide scope. In (15), the description has been transformed into the rigidified description “the teacher of Alexander in @.”

Right now, we can talk something about “widescopism” and “rigidified descriptivism.” According to widescopism<sup>1</sup>, rigid designators can be reduced to the descriptions taking wide scopes relative to modalities. According to rigidified descriptivism<sup>2</sup>, descriptions can be rigidified by adding the qualification “in @,” referring to their satisfiers in the actual world, and fixedly referring back to their actual satisfiers in all other possible worlds.<sup>3</sup> In my judgement, a descriptivist can combine widescopism with rigidified descriptivism, and claim that names with wide scope relative to modalities share the same modal profiles with rigidified descriptions.

However, if a name or a description takes narrow scope relative to modality, or a description is not rigidified, then, the name or the description could be used either designatively or predicatively. Consider two examples:

(14) It is possible that Aristotle was not the greatest ancient Greek philosopher.

(15) If he had not been born and living in the United States, Obama might not have been Obama.

Obviously, both the name “Aristotle” and the description “the greatest ancient Greek philosopher” in (14) take wide scopes relative to the modality “possible,” and both could be used to refer to the very same ancient Greek figure. The first occurrence of “Obama” in (15) takes wide scope relative to the modality “might,” and is used to designate the man Obama, the 44<sup>th</sup> US president. In contrast, the second occurrence of “Obama” in (15) takes narrow scope relative to the modality, and is used *predicatively*.

---

<sup>1</sup> As I know, widescopism is first put forward by Dummett in his book *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, 2nd edition (New York: Harper & Row, 1981) 111-151, especially 127-128, and then developed and strengthened by Stanley (1997) and Sosa (2001) in different ways. Also see M. Nelson, “Descriptivism Defended,” *Noûs* 36(2002): 408–436; F. Hunter, “Soames and Widescopism,” *Philosophical Studies* 123 (2004): 231-241; A. Everett, “Recent Defenses of Descriptivism,” *Mind & Language* 20(2005):103-139, and CHEN Bo (2012).

<sup>2</sup> The first source of rigidified descriptions includes: A. Plantinga, *The Nature of Necessity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974); “The Boethian Compromise,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 15 (1978):129-138; J. Searle, *Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) 258.

<sup>3</sup> It bears emphasis that my “@” is different from the actuality operator used by many other scholars, whether descriptivists or referentialists. Usually, the actuality operator has two forms: one is the adverb “actually,” prefixing a formula or sentence to form a more complex ones, such as “Actually S,” or “Actually, I am in Toronto;” another is the adjective “actual,” prefixing a noun or phrase to form a more complex ones, such as “the actual F,” or “the actual teacher of Alexander.” It is argued that “the actual F” can reduced to “the x: actually Fx.” Following Lewis (“Anselm and Actuality”, *Noûs* 4(1970):18), most scholars take the actuality operator to be indexical: its content varies from world to world, or from context to context. See Stanley (1997, 569); S. Soames (2002, 40) and his paper “Actually,” *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, Supp. vol. 81(2007): 252-253; J. Kallestrup, “Actually-Rigidified Descriptivism Revisited,” *Dialectica* 66(2012):10. In contrast, Y. Stephanou (“The Meaning of ‘Actually’,” *Dialectica* 64(2010): 153–185) partly argues that the actuality operator is not indexical; F. Haraldsen (“On What Actually Is,” *Erkenntnis* 80(2015): 643–656) argues for the dispensability of the actually-operator as rigidifier in natural language semantics.

I don’t agree to the indexicality of actuality, see CHEN Bo (2012, 252). For me, the actual world is fixed and unique, viz. the world at which we locate. So I just make “@” designate *our* world, as Jackson (*Language, Names, and Information* [West Sussex and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2012] 104) says: “...the actual world is *our* world,” and his paper “Reference and Description Revisited”, in *Philosophical Perspectives Language, Mind, and Ontology* 12, ed. J. Tomberlin [Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 1998] 205-206. I use “the F in @” to refer to the unique individual in @ which satisfies the description F, and it refers back to that individual in any other possible worlds. In this sense, “the F in @” would be a rigidified description (if any). I do not use “the actual F” or “Actually S” unless I quote from other authors.



Then, the consequent of (15) will mean “Obama might have been different from what he actually is:” for instances, he might not have graduated from two famous American universities, might not have been a civil rights attorney, might not have been a American senator, might not have been elected as the US president twice, or might not have been awarded Nobel Peace Prize.

## 2. Against Caplan’s “Against Widescopism”

According to Caplan (2005), descriptivists say that every name is synonymous with some definite description; if they are widescopers, they should also say that the definite description that a name is synonymous with must take wide scope not only with respect to modal adverbs such as “necessarily,” but also to complementizers such as “that,” and to quotation marks. Caplan (2005)<sup>1</sup> calls this position as “Ultra Super Duper Widescopism.” He constructs six arguments to show that descriptivists should not be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers, so they should not be widescopers either.

Although I’m sort of stubborn descriptivist, I don’t think that every name is synonymous with some definite description(s). In my view, the meaning of a name, say *n*, consists in the collection of informative descriptions of *n*’s bearer acknowledged by our linguistic community, and these descriptions are about the features of the object. Since *n*’s bearer and our cognition of it are always in the process of change, so the collection of informative descriptions of *n*’s bearer is open-ended, and is vague to some extent. Therefore, *n* cannot be strictly synonymous with any single definite description, even with the collection of such descriptions.<sup>2</sup> However, let me temporarily accept Caplan’s supposition that for descriptivists, every name is synonymous with some definite description. Thus, we will have a common start-point.

According to descriptivism about names, any name (perhaps except so-called “empty names”) has meaning and reference: it’s meaning is given by some description(s), and its reference is determined by its meaning. Suppose every name is synonymous with some definite description, a conclusion follows naturally: a name and its corresponding description are co-referential, i.e. referring to the same object all the time. Then, a name and its relevant description should be used in the same way all the time. For example, if a name takes wide scope with respect to modal adverbs, complementizer, and quotation marks, the relevant description should take wide scope too. But I find that Caplan (2005) does not follow these rules, for he permits a name and its relevant description to be used differently, and allows them not to be co-

---

<sup>1</sup> B. Caplan, “Against Widescopism,” *Philosophical Studies* 125 (2005): 167-190.

<sup>2</sup> I develop a hybrid but still alternative theory of names to reply the question of how names refer to their referents, see CHEN Bo, “Socio-historical Causal Descriptivism: a Hybrid and Alternative Theory of Names,” *Croatian Journal of Philosophy* 16 (2016): 45-67.

referential. I think this is the crucial mistake of his arguments against widescopism. In what follows, I only examine one of his arguments, since his other arguments are similar with this almost in every respect.

At first, let us be familiar with Caplan's abbreviations and stipulations: "D" is for "definite description," "Q" is for "quotation," "N" is for "narrow scope," "W" is for "wide scope," and the names and their relevant descriptions in displayed sentences are in boldface. Caplan takes "Super Widescopism" to signify the descriptivist position that both a name and its corresponding description take wide scope relative to quotation marks.

Suppose that according to descriptivism, "Aristotle" is synonymous with "the teacher of Alexander." Let us have a close look at Caplan's argument against Super Widescopism from two premises (3Q) and (2QDN) to the conclusion (2Q) (Caplan 2005, 176-177):

- (3Q) The proposition expressed by "If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander" = the proposition expressed by "If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander."
- (2QDN) The proposition expressed by "If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander" is a necessary truth.
- (2Q) The proposition expressed by "If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **Aristotle** taught Alexander" is a necessary truth.

Caplan calls this argument " $\beta$ ." Here, it should be emphasized that Caplan himself does not endorse  $\beta$ , but he thinks widescopists should accept it. Thus, he constructs his own argument (I call it as " $\beta^\nabla$ ") as the *reductio ad absurdum* of  $\beta$ . He calls  $\beta^\nabla$  as "The Second Argument from Validity:"

- (P5\*) If Super Widescopism is true, then the premise (3Q) is true.
- (P6\*) If Super Widescopism is true, then the premise (2QDN) is true.
- (P7\*) If Super Widescopism is true, then the conclusion (2Q) is false.
- (C4\*) So, if Super Widescopism is true, then the premises (3Q) and (2QDN) are true and the conclusion (2Q) is false. (From (P5\*)-(P7\*))
- (P8\*) If the premises (3Q) and (2QDN) are true and the conclusion (2Q) is false, then  $\beta$  is invalid.
- (C5\*) So, if Super Widescopism is true, then  $\beta$  is invalid. (From (C4\*) & (P8\*))
- (P9\*)  $\beta$  is valid.
- (C6\*) So Super Widescopism is false. (From (C5\*) & (P9\*))

But I will show that, by means of  $\beta^\nabla$ , he wrongly or unfairly presents widescopism. I have five objections to his argument  $\beta^\nabla$  as follows.

First, (P5\*) is not certainly true. Suppose that "Aristotle" is synonymous with "the

teacher of Alexander.” According to descriptivists, the referent of a name is determined by its corresponding description, that is, the name refers to the object that satisfies the description, so the name and the description co-refer all the time. However, in (3Q) they are not co-referential: “Aristotle” refers to a particular man, viz. the man Aristotle; but “whoever is **the teacher of Alexander**” refers to anybody who fits the description “the teacher of Alexander” in any possible world. If so interpreted, “**Aristotle** taught Alexander” is a singular proposition: when saying it, we have a particular person in our mind; but “whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander” is a general proposition describing a situation about anybody satisfying the description: when saying it, we have no such specific person in our mind. How does the left side of (3Q) equals its right side?

Second, Caplan’s interpretation of the name “Aristotle” and the description “the teacher of Alexander” in (3Q) is untenable. He thinks, Super Widescopers permit to interpret (3Q) as (3QDW) (cf. his 2005, 179):

(3QDW) **The teacher of Alexander**<sub>*i*</sub> is such that the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he**<sub>*i*</sub> taught Alexander” = the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then whoever is **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.”

(3QDW) is produced by using the description “the teacher of Alexander” to replace the name “Aristotle” in (3Q). In (3QDW), the first occurrence of the description takes wide scope with respect to the first pair of quotation marks, but the second occurrence of the description takes narrow scope with respect to the second pair of quotation marks. That is to say, Caplan interprets the name and the description differently. He makes the name take a wide scope with respect to quotation marks, but makes the description take a narrow scope. He defends his interpretation this way (Caplan 2005, 175-176):

This is consistent with Super Widescopism. Although Super Widescopism requires that some occurrences of definite descriptions take wide scope with respect to complementizers, Super Widescopism is restricted to occurrences of definite descriptions that replace occurrences of names that they are synonymous with; it is not a claim about *all* occurrences of definite descriptions.

But his defense is problematic. Only after descriptivists suppose that “Aristotle” is synonymous with “the teacher of Alexander,” could (3Q) be true. As the interpretation of (3Q), (3QDW) destroys the descriptivist supposition. As I emphasized above, after supposing “Aristotle” is synonymous with “the teacher of Alexander,” the name and the description should be co-referential all the time, since reference is determined by meaning. In order to ensure them to be co-referential, they should be always used in the

same way: if one of them takes wide scope with respect to x, another also should do the same. Otherwise, the proposition in which one of them appears will be different from the proposition in which another appears. Back to (3QDW), since the first occurrence and the second occurrence of the description take different scopes with respect to quotation marks, the two sentences on either side of the equals sign do not match together, so (3QDW) does not hold.

Third, (P5\*) and (P6\*) cannot be true together, for (3Q) is true just under the wide scope interpretation of both the name “Aristotle” and the description “the teacher of Alexander,” but (2QDN) is true just under the narrow scope interpretation of the description “the teacher of Alexander,” so they cannot both be true under the same scope interpretation of the description.

If Super Widescopism is assumed, “Aristotle” and “the teacher of Alexander” both take wide scopes with respect to quotation marks, the left side of (3Q) will become (3Q<sub>L</sub>), and the right side of (3Q) will become (3Q<sub>R</sub>):

(3Q<sub>L</sub>) **Aristotle**<sub>i</sub> is such that the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he**<sub>i</sub> taught Alexander” is true of **him**<sub>i</sub>.

(3Q<sub>R</sub>) **The teacher of Alexander**<sub>i</sub> is such that the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he**<sub>i</sub> taught Alexander” is true of **him**<sub>i</sub>.

Here, I follow Caplan’s strategy, let the subscripts indicate that the pronoun (amounting to a variable) is bound by the precedent name or description.

Since “Aristotle” and “the teacher of Alexander” co-designate, (3Q<sub>L</sub>) and (3Q<sub>R</sub>) say the same thing, so they are both true, and it is also true that (3Q<sub>L</sub>) = (3Q<sub>R</sub>). As shown above, Caplan interprets (3Q) as (3QDW), but (3QDW) is false, and he wants to show the falsehood of (3Q) by means of the falsehood of (3QDW). But I have shown that widescopists could interpret (3Q) as meaning that (3Q<sub>L</sub>) = (3Q<sub>R</sub>), being true.

(2QDN) has the form “P is a necessary truth” which contains the modality “necessary.” According to Hunter<sup>1</sup>, there are two ways to interpret the modality:

- (a) Necessarily, P
- (b) That P is a necessary truth.

In (a), the modality is a modal adverb; in (b) it is a modal predicate. Put the possible different interpretations of (a) and (b) aside, there is still a question: how to interpret the scope of “Aristotle” and “the teacher of Alexander” in (3Q) and (2QDN) with respect to the modality and quotation marks? (2QDN) has shown itself that it is true just under the narrow scope interpretation. If taken the wide scope interpretation, we will have:

2QDW **The teacher of Alexander**<sub>i</sub> is such that the proposition expressed by “If

---

<sup>1</sup> D. Hunter, “Soames and Widescopism,” *Philosophical Studies* 123 (3): 231 - 241.

there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he<sub>i</sub>** taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

Obviously (2QDW) is false, since the teacher of Alexander in @ might not teach Alexander

Fourth, (P7\*) is not certainly true, for the conclusion (2Q) is not necessarily false. There are the wide or narrow scope interpretation of the name “Aristotle” in (2Q). According to the wide scope interpretation of the name with respect to the modality and quotation marks, (2Q) becomes (2QNW), which is obviously false:

(2QNW) **Aristotle<sub>i</sub>** is such that the proposition expressed by “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **he<sub>i</sub>** taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

If in (2Q) “Aristotle” takes narrow scope relative to the modality, and by following the descriptivist supposition that the name “Aristotle” is synonymous with the description “the teacher of Alexander,” so the name and the description are co-referential, we can use the description to substitute the name in (2Q), then (2Q) will become (2QNN) which is true:

(2QNN) “If there is a unique teacher of Alexander, then **the teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander” is a necessary truth.

Fifth, (C4\*) and (C5\*) are not true either. As shown above, under the wide scope interpretation, (3Q) means that  $(3Q_L) = (3Q_R)$ , which is true. Under the same wide scope interpretation, (2Q) will mean (2QDW), which is obviously false. Only under the narrow scope interpretation, will (2Q) mean (2QNN), which is true. That is to say, (3Q) and (2Q) cannot both be true based on the same scope interpretation. Also shown above, (2QNW) is certainly false, but (2QNN) could be true. Therefore, (C4\*) is false. According to Super Widescopism, there are two inferences from (3Q) and (2QDN) to (2Q). One is that from (3QDW) and (2QDN) to (2QNW), since (3QDW) and (2QNW) are all false, the argument  $\beta$  containing one false premises and a false conclusion is still valid. Another is that from two premises (3Q), which means that  $(3Q_L) = (3Q_R)$ , and (2QDN), to (2QNN), since the two premises and the conclusion of  $\beta$  could be true, the argument  $\beta$  containing two true premises and one true conclusion is still valid. Thus, (C5\*) is false.

In sum, since many premises and the intermediate conclusions of  $\beta^\nabla$ , e.g. (P5\*) - (P7\*), (C4\*), and (C5\*), could be false, the truth of the conclusion of  $\beta^\nabla$ , namely (C6\*), has not been proved. Caplan (2005) does not successfully show that Super Widescopism is false.

Finally, I want to argue that the final conclusions of Caplan (2005) are not sufficiently justified. Consider the following sentence:

(4Q) The sentence “**Aristotle** taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “**The teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander.”

Caplan argues, if Super Widescopism is true, “Aristotle” is synonymous with “the teacher of Alexander,” and the name and the description both take wide scope with respect to quotation marks, then, if replacing the name with the description in “Aristotle taught Alexander,” we will get:

(4QDWW) **The teacher of Alexander<sub>i</sub>** and **the teacher of Alexander<sub>j</sub>** are such that the sentence “**He<sub>i</sub>** taught Alexander” is synonymous with the sentence “**He<sub>j</sub>** taught Alexander.”

He concludes (2005, 187-188),

...(4QDWW) does not capture what Descriptivists want to say, since neither sentence mentioned in (4QDWW) has a descriptive content. So, if Ultra Super Duper Widescopism is true, then there is no true reading of (4Q) either that captures what Descriptivists want to say.

Widescopers should be Super Widescopers; Super Widescopers should be Super Duper Widescopers; and Super Duper Widescopers should be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. But Descriptivists shouldn’t be Ultra Super Duper Widescopers. So Descriptivists shouldn’t be Widescopers either.

But I think that Caplan’s conclusions are too hasty to be correct. In my view, the italic part of (5Q), but not (4QDWW), is the descriptive content that Ultra Super Duper Widescopers want to catch:

(5Q) *Aristotle is the teacher of Alexander*. So, the sentence “**Aristotle** taught Alexander” and the sentence “**The teacher of Alexander** taught Alexander” express the same semantic content: the very same person taught Alexander.

So far, I conclude that Caplan (2005) does not achieve its purpose, i.e. to defeat Widescopism as Descriptivism.

*Peking University*