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Brief article

Semantics, cross-cultural style

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Abstract

Theories of reference have been central to analytic philosophy, and two views, *the descriptivist view of reference* and *the causal-historical view of reference*, have dominated the field. In this research tradition, theories of reference are assessed by consulting one's intuitions about the reference of terms in hypothetical situations. However, recent work in cultural psychology (e.g. *Psychological Review* 108 (2001) 291) has shown systematic cognitive differences between East Asians and Westerners, and some work indicates that this extends to intuitions about philosophical cases (*Philosophical Topics* 29 (2001) 429). In light of these findings on cultural differences, an experiment was conducted which explored intuitions about reference in Westerners and East Asians. The experiment indicated that, for certain central cases, Westerners are more likely than East Asians to report intuitions that are consistent with the causal-historical view. These results constitute prima facie evidence that semantic intuitions vary from culture to culture, and the paper argues that this fact raises questions about the nature of the philosophical enterprise of developing a theory of reference.

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1. Introduction

Theories of meaning and reference have been at the heart of analytic philosophy since the beginning of the twentieth century. Two views, *the descriptivist view of reference* and *the causal-historical view of reference*, have dominated the field. The reference of names has been a key issue in this controversy. Despite numerous disagreements, philosophers agree that theories of reference for names have to be consistent with our *intuitions* regarding who or what the names refer to. Thus, the common wisdom in philosophy is that Kripke (1972/1980) has refuted the traditional descriptivist theories of reference by producing some famous stories which elicit intuitions that are inconsistent with these theories. In light of recent work in cultural psychology (Nisbett, Peng, Choi, & Norenzayan, 2001; Weinberg, Nichols, & Stich, 2001), we came to suspect that the intuitions that guide theorizing in this domain might well differ between members of East Asian and Western cultures. In this paper, we present evidence that probes closely modeled on Kripke's stories elicit significantly different responses from East Asians (EAs) (Hong Kong undergraduates) and Westerners (Ws) (American undergraduates), and we discuss the significance of this finding for the philosophical pursuit of a theory of reference.

1.1. Two theories of reference

Theories of reference purport to explain how terms pick out their referents. When we focus on proper names, two main positions have been developed, *the descriptivist view of reference* (e.g. Frege, 1892/1948; Searle, 1958) and *the causal-historical view* associated with Kripke (1972/1980).

Two theses are common to all descriptivist accounts of the reference of proper names:¹

- D1.** Competent speakers associate a *description* with every proper name. This description specifies a set of properties.
- D2.** An object is the referent of a proper name if and only if it *uniquely or best satisfies* the description associated with it. An object uniquely satisfies a description when the description is true of it and only it. If no object entirely satisfies the description, many philosophers claim that the proper name refers to the unique individual that satisfies most of the description (Lewis, 1970; Searle, 1958). If the description is not satisfied at all or if many individuals satisfy it, the name does not refer.

The causal-historical view offers a strikingly different picture (Kripke, 1972/1980):²

- C1.** A name is introduced into a linguistic community for the purpose of referring to an individual. It continues to refer to that individual as long as its uses are linked to

¹ There are a variety of ways of developing description theoretic accounts (e.g. Frege, 1892/1948; Garcia-Carpintero, 2000; Jackson, 1998; Lewis, 1970; Loar, 1976; Searle, 1958, 1983).

² This picture has been refined in various ways (e.g. Devitt, 1981; Devitt & Sterelny, 1999; Salmon, 1986; Soames, 2001).

91 the individual *via a causal chain* of successive users: every user of the name acquired
 92 it from another user, who acquired it in turn from someone else, and so on, up to the
 93 first user who introduced the name to refer to a specific individual.

- 94 **C2.** Speakers may associate descriptions with names. After a name is introduced, the
 95 associated description *does not play any role* in the fixation of the referent. The
 96 referent may *entirely* fail to satisfy the description.

97 98 1.2. *The Gödel case and the Jonah case*

99
100 There is widespread agreement among philosophers on the methodology for
 101 developing an adequate theory of reference. The project is to construct theories of
 102 reference that are consistent with our intuitions about the correct application of terms in
 103 fictional (and non-fictional) situations.³ Indeed, Kripke's masterstroke was to propose
 104 some cases that elicited widely shared intuitions that were inconsistent with traditional
 105 descriptivist theories. Moreover, it has turned out that almost all philosophers share the
 106 intuitions elicited by Kripke's fictional cases, including most of his opponents. Even
 107 contemporary descriptivists allow that these intuitions have falsified traditional forms of
 108 descriptivism and try to accommodate them within their own sophisticated descriptivist
 109 frameworks (e.g. Evans, 1973, 1985; Jackson, 1998).

110 To make all of this a bit clearer we present two of Kripke's central cases in greater
 111 detail and describe the corresponding descriptivist⁴ and causal-historical intuitions.

112 113 1.2.1. *The Gödel case (Kripke, 1972/1980, pp. 83–92)*

114 Kripke imagines a case in which, because of some historical contingency,
 115 contemporary competent speakers associate with a proper name, "Gödel", a description
 116 that is entirely false of the original bearer of that name, person *a*. Instead, it is true of a
 117 different individual, person *b*. Descriptivism implies that the proper name refers to *b*
 118 because *b* satisfies the description. The descriptivist intuition is that someone who uses
 119 "Gödel" under these circumstances is speaking about *b*. According to the causal-historical
 120 view, however, the name refers to its original bearer, since contemporary speakers are
 121 historically related to him. The Kripkean intuition is that someone who uses "Gödel"
 122 under these circumstances is speaking about *a*. According to Kripke (and many other
 123 philosophers), our semantic intuitions support the causal-historical view:

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126 Suppose that Gödel was not in fact the author of [Gödel's] theorem. A man called
 127 'Schmidt' (...) actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold
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129 ³ Philosophers typically assume that speakers know (perhaps implicitly) how the reference of proper names is
 130 picked out. The intuitive judgments of the speakers are supposed somehow to reflect that knowledge (Kripke,
 131 1972/1980, pp. 42, 91; Segal, 2001).

132 ⁴ We use "descriptivism" to refer to the simple, traditional versions of descriptivism, and not to its recent,
 133 sophisticated elaborations. We call intuitions that are compatible with the causal-historical theory and
 134 incompatible with the traditional versions of descriptivism *Kripkean intuitions*. In contrast, we call those that are
 135 compatible with the traditional descriptivist theories and incompatible with the causal-historical theory
descriptivist intuitions.

136 of the manuscript and it was thereafter attributed to Gödel. On the [descriptivist] view
 137 in question, then, when our ordinary man uses the name ‘Gödel’, he really means to
 138 refer to Schmidt, because Schmidt is the unique person satisfying the description ‘the
 139 man who discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic’. (...) But it seems we are not.
 140 We simply are not. (Kripke, 1972/1980, pp. 83–84)

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143 *1.2.2. The Jonah case (Kripke, 1972/1980, pp. 66–67)*

144 Kripke imagines a case in which the description associated with a proper name, say
 145 “Jonah”, is not satisfied at all. According to descriptivism, “Jonah” would then fail to have
 146 a referent. The descriptivist intuition is that someone who uses the name under these
 147 circumstances isn’t speaking about any real individual.⁵ On the contrary, on the causal-
 148 historical view, satisfying the description is not necessary for being the referent of a name.
 149 The Kripkean intuition is that someone can use the name to speak about the name’s
 150 original bearer, whether or not the description is satisfied.⁶ Again, our intuitions are
 151 supposed to support the causal-historical view:

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Suppose that someone says that no prophet ever was swallowed by a big fish or a whale.
 Does it follow, on that basis, that Jonah did not exist? There still seems to be the
 question whether the Biblical account is a legendary account of no person or a
 legendary account built on a real person. In the latter case, it’s only natural to say that,
 though Jonah did exist, no one did the things commonly related to him. (Kripke,
 1972/1980, p. 67)

1.3. Cultural variation in cognition and intuitions

Philosophers typically share the Kripkean intuitions and expect theories of reference to
 accommodate them. As we discuss more fully in Section 3, we suspect that most
 philosophers exploring the nature of reference assume that the Kripkean intuitions are
 universal. Suppose that semantic intuitions exhibit systematic differences between groups
 or individuals. This would raise questions about whose intuitions are going to count,
 putting in jeopardy philosophers’ methodology.⁷

As researchers in history and anthropology have long maintained, one should be wary
 of simply assuming cultural universality without evidence. Recent work in cultural
 psychology has provided experimental results that underscore this cautionary note. In an
 important series of experiments, Richard Nisbett and his collaborators have found large
 and systematic differences between EAs and Ws on a number of basic cognitive processes

⁵ Or that the statement “Jonah exists” is false (given that the name has no referent).

⁶ Or that Jonah might have existed, whether or not the description is satisfied.

⁷ A few philosophers have acknowledged the possibility that there is variation in semantic intuitions (e.g.
 Dupré, 1993; Stich, 1990, 1996), but this possibility has not previously been investigated empirically.

181 including perception, attention and memory.⁸ These groups also differ in the way they go
182 about describing, predicting and explaining events, in the way they categorize objects and
183 in the way they revise beliefs in the face of new arguments and evidence (for reviews, see
184 Nisbett, 2003; Nisbett et al., 2001). This burgeoning literature in cultural psychology
185 suggests that culture plays a dramatic role in shaping human cognition. Inspired by this
186 research program, Weinberg et al. (2001) constructed a variety of probes modeled on
187 thought experiments from the philosophical literature in epistemology. These thought
188 experiments were designed to elicit intuitions about the appropriate application of
189 epistemic concepts. Weinberg et al. found that there do indeed seem to be systematic
190 cross-cultural differences in epistemic intuitions. In light of these findings on epistemic
191 intuitions, we were curious to see whether there might also be cross-cultural differences in
192 intuitions about reference.

193 We lack the space to offer a detailed account of the differences uncovered by Nisbett
194 and his colleagues. But it is important to review briefly some of the findings that led to the
195 studies we will report here. According to Nisbett and his colleagues, the differences
196 between EAs and Ws “can be loosely grouped together under the heading of holistic vs.
197 analytic thought.” Holistic thought, which predominates among EAs, is characterized as
198 “involving an orientation to the context or field as a whole, including attention to
199 relationships between a focal object and the field, and a preference for explaining and
200 predicting events on the basis of such relationships.” Analytic thought, the prevailing
201 pattern among Ws, is characterized as “involving detachment of the object from its
202 context, a tendency to focus on attributes of the object in order to assign it to categories,
203 and a preference for using rules about the categories to explain and predict the object’s
204 behavior.” (Nisbett et al., 2001, p. 293).

205 One range of findings is particularly significant for our project. The cross-cultural work
206 indicates that EAs are more inclined than Ws to make categorical judgments on the basis
207 of similarity; Ws, on the other hand, are more disposed to focus on causation in describing
208 the world and classifying things (Norenzayan, Smith, & Kim, 2002; Watanabe, 1998,
209 1999). This differential focus led us to hypothesize that there might be a related cross-
210 cultural difference in semantic intuitions. On a description theory, the referent has to
211 satisfy the description, but it need not be causally related to the use of the term. In contrast,
212 on Kripke’s causal-historical theory, the referent need not satisfy the associated
213 description. Rather, it need only figure in the causal history (and in the causal explanation)
214 of the speaker’s current use of the word.

215 Given that Ws are more likely than EAs to make causation-based judgments, we
216 predicted that when presented with Kripke-style thought experiments, *Ws would be more*
217 *likely to respond in accordance with causal-historical accounts of reference, while EAs*
218 *would be more likely to respond in accordance with descriptivist accounts of reference.*⁹
219 To test this hypothesis, we assembled a range of intuition probes to explore whether such

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221 ⁸ The East Asian participants were Chinese, Japanese, and Korean.

222 ⁹ There is a common concern that the labels ‘East Asian’ and ‘Western’ are too rough to do justice to the
223 enormous diversity of cultural groups such labels encompass. We are sympathetic to this concern. However, the
224 crudeness of these groupings does nothing to undermine the experiment we present. On the contrary, if we find
225 significant results using crude cultural groupings, there is reason to believe more nuanced classifications should
yield even stronger results.

226 differences might be revealed. The probes were designed to parallel the Jonah case and the
227 Gödel case.

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230 **2. Experiment**

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232 *2.1. Method*

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234 *2.1.1. Participants*

235 Forty undergraduates at Rutgers University and 42 undergraduates from the University
236 of Hong Kong participated. The University of Hong Kong is an English speaking
237 university in Hong Kong, and the participants were all fluent speakers of English. A
238 standard demographics instrument was used to determine whether participants were
239 Western or Chinese. Using this instrument, nine non-Western participants were excluded
240 from the Rutgers sample, leaving a total of 31 Western participants from Rutgers (18
241 females, 13 males). One non-Chinese participant was excluded from the Hong Kong
242 sample, leaving a total of 41 Chinese participants from Hong Kong (25 females, 16 males).
243 One additional Hong Kong participant was excluded for failure to answer the demographic
244 questions.

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246 *2.1.2. Materials and procedure*

247 In a classroom setting, participants were presented with four probes counterbalanced
248 for order. The probes were presented in English both in the USA and in Hong Kong. Two
249 were modeled on Kripke's Gödel case, and two were modeled on Kripke's Jonah case.
250 One probe modeled on Kripke's Gödel case and one probe modeled on Kripke's Jonah
251 case used names and situations that were familiar to the Chinese participants. One of the
252 Gödel probes was closely modeled on Kripke's own example (see Appendix A for the
253 other probes):

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256 Suppose that John has learned in college that Gödel is the man who proved an important
257 mathematical theorem, called the incompleteness of arithmetic. John is quite good at
258 mathematics and he can give an accurate statement of the incompleteness theorem,
259 which he attributes to Gödel as the discoverer. But this is the only thing that he has
260 heard about Gödel. Now suppose that Gödel was not the author of this theorem. A man
261 called "Schmidt", whose body was found in Vienna under mysterious circumstances
262 many years ago, actually did the work in question. His friend Gödel somehow got hold
263 of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work, which was thereafter attributed to
264 Gödel. Thus, he has been known as the man who proved the incompleteness of
265 arithmetic. Most people who have heard the name "Gödel" are like John; the claim that
266 Gödel discovered the incompleteness theorem is the only thing they have ever heard
267 about Gödel. When John uses the name "Gödel", is he talking about:

268

269 (A) the person who really discovered the incompleteness of arithmetic? or

270 (B) the person who got hold of the manuscript and claimed credit for the work?

271 Table 1
272 Mean scores for experiment 1 (SD in parentheses)

	Score (SD)
275 Gödel cases	
276 Western participants	1.13 (0.88)
277 Chinese participants	0.63 (0.84)
278 Jonah cases	
279 Western participants	1.23 (0.96)
279 Chinese participants	1.32 (0.76)

281 2.2. Results and discussion

284 2.2.1. Scoring

285 The scoring procedure was straightforward. Each question was scored binomially. An
286 answer consonant with causal-historical accounts of reference (B) was given a score of 1;
287 the other answer (A) was given a score of 0. The scores were then summed, so the
288 cumulative score could range from 0 to 2. Means and standard deviation for summary
289 scores are shown in Table 1.

290 An independent samples *t*-test yielded a significant difference between Chinese and
291 Western participants on the Gödel cases ($t(70) = -2.55, P < 0.05$) (all tests two-tailed).
292 The Ws were more likely than the Chinese to give causal-historical responses. However, in
293 the Jonah cases, there was no significant difference between Chinese and Western
294 participants ($t(69) = 0.486, n.s.$). In light of the dichotomous nature of the underlying
295 distributions, we also analyzed each Gödel case non-parametrically, and the results were
296 largely the same. Western participants were more likely than Chinese participants to give
297 causal-historical responses on both the Tsu Ch'ung Chih probe ($\chi^2(1, N = 72) = 3.886,$
298 $P < 0.05$) and on the Gödel probe ($\chi^2(1, N = 72) = 6.023, P < 0.05$).¹⁰

299 Thus, we found that probes modeled on Kripke's Gödel case (including one that used
300 Kripke's own words) elicit culturally variable intuitions. As we had predicted, Chinese
301 participants tended to have descriptivist intuitions, while Ws tended to have Kripkean
302 ones. However, our prediction that the Ws would be more likely than the Chinese to give
303 causal-historical responses on the Jonah cases was not confirmed. There are a number of
304 possible explanations for this. Setting out the Jonah cases precisely requires a lengthy
305 presentation (see Appendix A), so it is possible that our probes were simply too long and
306 complex to generate interpretable data. Another, more interesting possibility hinges on the
307 fact that in the Jonah cases, the descriptivist response is that the speaker's term fails to
308 refer. It might be that for pragmatic reasons, both the Ws and the Chinese reject the
309 uncharitable interpretation that the speaker is not talking about anyone.

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312 ¹⁰ It is worth noting that this result replicated an earlier pilot study in which we used two different cases modeled
313 on Kripke's Gödel case. In the pilot study, we found that Western participants (at the College of Charleston,
314 $N = 19, M = 1.42, SD = 0.77$) were more likely than Chinese participants (at Hong Kong University, $N = 32,$
315 $M = 0.65, SD = 0.75$) to give causal-historical responses ($t(43) = -3.366, P < 0.01$, two-tailed). The results of
the pilot study were also significant when analyzed non-parametrically.

3. The end of the innocence

Our central prediction was that, given Ws' greater tendency to make causation-based judgments, they would be more likely than the Chinese to have intuitions that fall in line with causal-historical accounts of reference. This prediction was borne out in our experiment. We found the predicted systematic cultural differences on one of the best known thought experiments in recent philosophy of language, Kripke's Gödel case. However, we have no illusions that our experiment is the final empirical word on the issue. Rather, our findings raise a number of salient questions for future research. For instance, we predicted that the Ws would be more likely than the Chinese to have Kripkean intuitions *because they are more likely to make causation-based judgments*. Although our results are consistent with this hypothesis, they fail to support it directly. They do not establish unequivocally that the cultural difference results from a different emphasis on causation. In future work, it will be important to manipulate this variable more directly. Further, our experiment does not rule out various pragmatic explanations of the findings. Although we found the effect on multiple different versions of the Gödel case, the test question was very similar in all the cases. Perhaps the test question we used triggered different interpretations of the question in the two different groups. In addition, our focus in this paper has been on intuitions about proper names, since proper names have been at the center of debates about semantics. However, it will be important to examine whether intuitions about the reference of other sorts of terms, for example natural kind terms (see, e.g. Putnam, 1975), also exhibit systematic cross-cultural differences. We hope that future work will begin to address these questions.

Although there are many empirical questions left open by the experiment reported here, we think that the experiment already points to significant philosophical conclusions. As we noted above, we suspect that philosophers employing these thought experiments take their own intuitions regarding the referents of terms, and those of their philosophical colleagues, to be universal. But our cases were modeled on one of the most influential thought experiments in the philosophy of reference, and we elicited culturally variable intuitions. Thus, the evidence suggests that it is wrong for philosophers to assume a priori the universality of their own semantic intuitions. Indeed, the variation might be even more dramatic than we have suggested. While our focus has been on cultural differences, the data also reveal considerable intra-cultural variation. The high standard deviations in our experiment indicate that there is a great deal of variation in the semantic intuitions within both the Chinese and Western groups. This might reflect smaller intra-cultural groups that differ in their semantic intuitions. A more extreme but very live possibility is that the variability exists even at the individual level, so that a given individual might have causal-historical intuitions on some occasions and descriptivist intuitions on other occasions. If so, then the assumption of universality is just spectacularly misguided.

Perhaps, however, philosophers do not assume the universality of semantic intuitions. In that case, philosophers of language need to clarify their project. One possibility is that philosophers of language would claim to have no interest in unschooled, folk semantic intuitions, including the differing intuitions of various cultural groups. These philosophers might maintain that, since they aim to find the *correct* theory of reference for proper

361 names, only *reflective* intuitions, i.e. intuitions that are informed by a cautious examination
 362 of the philosophical significance of the probes, are to be taken into consideration.

363 We find it *wildly* implausible that the semantic intuitions of the narrow cross-section of
 364 humanity who are Western academic philosophers are a more reliable indicator of the
 365 correct theory of reference (if there is such a thing, see [Stich, 1996](#), Chap. 1) than the
 366 differing semantic intuitions of other cultural or linguistic groups. Indeed, given
 367 the intense training and selection that undergraduate and graduate students in philosophy
 368 have to go through, there is good reason to suspect that the alleged *reflective* intuitions may
 369 be *reinforced* intuitions. In the absence of a principled argument about why philosophers'
 370 intuitions are superior, this project smacks of narcissism in the extreme.

371 A more charitable interpretation of the work of philosophers of language is that it is a
 372 proto-scientific project modeled on the Chomskyan tradition in linguistics. Such a project
 373 would employ intuitions about reference to develop an empirically adequate account of the
 374 implicit theory that underlies ordinary uses of names. If this is the correct interpretation of
 375 the philosophical interest in the theory of reference, then our data are especially surprising,
 376 for there is little hint in philosophical discussions that names might work in different ways
 377 in different dialects of the same language or in different cultural groups who speak the
 378 same language. So, on this interpretation, our data indicate that philosophers must
 379 radically revise their methodology. Since the intuitions philosophers pronounce from their
 380 armchairs are likely to be a product of their own culture and their academic training, in
 381 order to determine the implicit theories that underlie the use of names across cultures,
 382 philosophers need to get out of their armchairs. And this is far from what philosophers
 383 have been doing for the last several decades.

384

385

386 4. Uncited references

387

388 [Burge, 1973](#); [Geurts, 1997](#); [Longobardi, 1994](#); [Ludlow, 1997](#); [McDowell, 1977](#);
 389 [Recanati, 1993](#); [Strawson, 1950](#).

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392 Acknowledgements

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 395 Philippe Schlenker, and an anonymous referee for advice, discussion and helpful
 396 comments.

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399 Appendix A

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401 A.1. Gödel case

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403 Ivy is a high-school student in Hong Kong. In her astronomy class she was taught
 404 that Tsu Ch'ung Chih was the man who first determined the precise time of the summer
 405 and winter solstices. But, like all her classmates, this is the only thing she has heard about

406 Tsu Ch’ung Chih. Now suppose that Tsu Ch’ung Chih did not really make this discovery.
 407 He stole it from an astronomer who died soon after making the discovery. But the theft
 408 remained entirely undetected and Tsu Ch’ung Chih became famous for the discovery of
 409 the precise times of the solstices. Many people are like Ivy; the claim that Tsu Ch’ung
 410 Chih determined the solstice times is the only thing they have heard about him. When Ivy
 411 uses the name “Tsu Ch’ung Chih”, is she talking about:

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413 (A) the person who really determined the solstice times? or

414 (B) the person who stole the discovery of the solstice times?

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418 *A.2. Jonah cases*

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In high-school, German students learn that Attila founded Germany in the second century A.D. They are taught that Attila was the king of a nomadic tribe that migrated from the east to settle in what would become Germany. Germans also believe that Attila was a merciless warrior and leader who expelled the Romans from Germany, and that after his victory against the Romans, Attila organized a large and prosperous kingdom.

Now suppose that none of this is true. No merciless warrior expelled the Romans from Germany, and Germany was not founded by a single individual. Actually, the facts are the following. In the fourth century A.D., a nobleman of low rank, called “Raditra”, ruled a small and peaceful area in what today is Poland, several hundred miles from Germany. Raditra was a wise and gentle man who managed to preserve the peace in the small land he was ruling. For this reason, he quickly became the main character of many stories and legends. These stories were passed on from one generation of peasants to the next. But often when the story was passed on the peasants would embellish it, adding imaginary details and dropping some true facts to make the story more exciting. From a peaceful nobleman of low rank, Raditra was gradually transformed into a warrior fighting for his land. When the legend reached Germany, it told of a merciless warrior who was victorious against the Romans. By the eighth century A.D., the story told of an Eastern king who expelled the Romans and founded Germany. By that time, not a single true fact remained in the story.

Meanwhile, as the story was told and retold, the name “Raditra” was slowly altered: it was successively replaced by “Aditra”, then by “Arritrak” in the sixth century, by “Arrita” and “Arrila” in the seventh and finally by “Attila”. The story about the glorious life of Attila was written down in the eighth century by a scrupulous Catholic monk, from whom all our beliefs are derived. Of course, Germans know nothing about these real events. They believe a story about a merciless Eastern king who expelled the Romans and founded Germany.

When a contemporary German high-school student says “Attila was the king who drove the Romans from Germany”, is he actually talking about the wise and gentle nobleman, Raditra, who is the original source of the Attila legend, or is he talking about a fictional person, someone who does not really exist?

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(A) He is talking about Raditra.

(B) He is talking about a fictional person who does not really exist.

451 Lau Mei Ling is a high-school student in the Chinese city of Guangzhou. Like everyone
 452 who goes to high-school in Guangzhou, Mei Ling believes that Chan Wai Man was a
 453 Guangdong nobleman who had to take refuge in the wild mountains around Guangzhou in
 454 the eleventh century A.D., because Chan Wai Man was in love with the daughter of the
 455 ruthless Government Minister Lee, and the Minister did not approve. Everyone in Lau Mei
 456 Ling’s high-school believes that Chan Wai Man had to live as a thief in the mountains
 457 around Guangzhou, and that he would often steal from the rich allies of the Minister Lee
 458 and distribute their goods to the poor peasants.

459 Now suppose that none of this is true. No Guangdong nobleman ever lived in the
 460 mountains around Guangzhou, stealing from the wealthy people to help the peasants. The
 461 real facts are the following. In one of the monasteries around Guangzhou, there was a
 462 helpful monk called “Leung Yiu Pang”. Leung Yiu Pang was always ready to help the
 463 peasants around his monastery, providing food in the winter, giving medicine to the sick
 464 and helping the children. Because he was so kind, he quickly became the main character of
 465 many stories. These stories were passed on from one generation of peasants to the next.
 466 Over the years, the story changed slowly as the peasants would forget some elements of
 467 the story and add other elements. In one version, Leung Yiu Pang was described as a rebel
 468 fighting Minister Lee. Progressively the story came to describe the admirable deeds of a
 469 generous thief. By the late fourteenth century, the story was about a generous nobleman
 470 who was forced to live as a thief because of his love for the Minister’s daughter. At length,
 471 not a single true fact remained in the story.

472 Meanwhile, the name “Leung Yiu Pang” was slowly altered: it was successively
 473 replaced by “Cheung Wai Pang” in the twelfth century, “Chung Wai Man” in the
 474 thirteenth, and finally by “Chan Wai Man”. The story about the adventurous life of Chan
 475 Wai Man was written down in the fifteenth century by a scrupulous historian, from whom
 476 all our beliefs are derived. Of course, Mei Ling, her classmates and her parents know
 477 nothing about these real events. Mei Ling believes a story about a generous thief who was
 478 fighting against a mean minister.

479 When Mei Ling says “Chan Wai Man stole from the rich and gave to the poor”, is she
 480 actually talking about the generous monk, Leung Yiu Pang, who is the original source of
 481 the legend about Chan Wai Man, or is she talking about a fictional person, someone who
 482 does not really exist?

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- 484 (A) She is talking about the generous monk, Leung Yiu Pang.
 485 (B) She is talking about a fictional person who does not really exist.

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