Tutorial on two-dimensional semantics and sameness of meaning

In the past fifteen years, many philosophers have appealed to two-dimensional possible words semantics to characterize the meanings of expressions like names and natural kind terms, whose reference seems to depend on facts external to a competent speaker’s mind. The tutorial will outline the philosophical motivations for this approach and the different interpretations of the 2D framework. Frank Jackson and David Chalmers claim the 2D framework can help define a notion of meaning that has the core advantages of traditional descriptivism, while avoiding the counterexamples produced by semantic externalists (Saul Kripke, Hilary Putnam, Tyler Burge). They seek to show how competent speakers have apriori access to conditional facts that specify how the reference of a term depends on contingent facts about one’s environment. This apriori access to the conditions for reference and co-reference, they argue, is important to explaining linguistic communication and rational thought. I’ll outline how the 2D framework is interpreted in order to meet these explanatory purposes, and sketch some of the philosophical objections to this approach.