

**University of London**  
*Birkbeck College*

**M.A. Seminar - Logic and Metaphysics 2000-1**

**Term 1: Classes 1-5**

**Reference and Quantification**

**Handout 4 25/10/00**

Reference and Names

(1) Let's return to some apparatus introduced early on in these classes. Intuitively, there is a difference between utterances whose truth conditions depend on how things are with a particular object we are talking about and those which don't.

Cf. (a) London is the largest city in the U.K.'  
(b) A man is helping police with their inquiries.

(2) The truth-conditions of (a) depend essentially on whether London, that particular city has the ascribed property. So 'London' is a referring expression.

Generalising:

(R) A term  $t$  in a sentence ' $P(t)$ ' in an utterance  $u$  refers to an object  $o$   
iff the truth conditions of  $u$  depend essentially on whether  $P$  is true of  $o$

Whether utterance  $u$  is true depends essentially on  $o$ : it is true iff  $o$  falls under  $P$ .

If there were no object for which *t* stood, utterance *u* would lack truth conditions (and on some views, meaning). If *t* had referred to some other object, then *u* would have had different truth conditions and expressed a different proposition concerning that object.

(3) The truth conditions (b) do not depend essentially on any particular individual,

and whether that individual alone has the property of helping police with their inquiries. The sentence would still be true if it wasn't the man they are actually questioning but some other who they are questioning instead. The sentence would even express a proposition with truth conditions if 'a man' failed to pick anyone out: it would express a false proposition. So, in the case where it is true and just one man, *x*, is helping the police with their enquiries, the identity of *x* is irrelevant to the truth conditions of the utterance and to the identity of the proposition expressed.

(4) By reference to (R) names and demonstratives count as referring expressions, indefinite descriptions do not. Nor do definite descriptions? Propositions expressed by sentences involving the latter kinds of expressions combined with a predicate are not object-dependent propositions: the identity of the proposition expressed does not depend on a particular object.

(5) What is the property of names that enables them to contribute an object to the truth conditions of the sentences they occur in (or to the propositions expressed by those sentences?) It's the property of reference. But how is reference to be explained?

(i) What's the right theory of reference?

(ii) How is it to be distinguished from the way definite descriptions help us to select items in the world?

(iii) Are there any logical criteria for distinguishing genuine referring expressions from other NPs (i.e. quantifier expressions).

(6) Remember we are testing out our hypothesis N:

(N) All NPs are either genuine referring expressions or quantifier phrases

so we want to be sure that all the linguistic expressions we consider, falling into the grammatical category of NPs, can be sorted exclusively and exhaustively into either semantic category.