

University of London
Birkbeck College

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

Term 1: Classes 1-5

Reference and Quantification

Handout 5 1/11/00

Theories of Names

1. Millian View of Names

According to Mill there are general terms and singular terms, and while the latter have a connotation and denotation, both of which are part of the meaning of the term, in the case of names (singular terms) these expressions have a denotation only (in the public language.) Individuals may have connotations they associate with a name but that is not part of a name's meaning. The role of names is to introduce individuals as the subject of our talk, nothing else. Names are like labels or tags attached to objects themselves and we do not depend on any attribute of the object to attach the term to it. With general terms they apply to those things which have the attributes associated with the general term: this is the term's connotation.

Famous case: 'Dartmouth' first named because it was at the mouth of the river Dart but this information is now irrelevant: if it is no longer at the mouth of the river the same place is still picked out by 'Dartmouth'.

2. Frege's view of Names

According to Frege, there must be more to the meaning of a name than just its bearer. Consider these two identity statements:

(a) Hesperus is Hesperus

(b) Hesperus is Phosphorus

The second is informative where the former is not. The informativeness of informational value of (b) differs from that of (a) due to the substitution of 'Hesperus' by a co-referring term. We haven't changed the reference of the parts of the sentence but the cognitive values of the whole is different, due to the cognitive values of 'H' and 'P' being different. So cognitive value is not a function of reference: there must be more to a name than it's reference. Call this it's sense. What is a sense? Frege says it's the way the reference is given to you, the mode of presentation of the reference. Sometimes said to be or provide the route to the reference. Not necessarily a description though that would be one way of *stating* the sense: the way the reference is thought about. Frege is also able to explain the meaningfulness of names which lack bearers, the so-called empty names. They have sense but lack reference. The Millian is unable to say why empty terms should be meaningful.

3. Russell's Descriptive Theory of Names

Russell takes genuinely referring expressions to guarantee a connection to an object: these are the logically proper names. These expressions have as their meaning the object they stand for, and to know the meaning we know the object, ie. be currently perceptually acquainted with them. Hence, few ordinary proper names are logically proper names: the former but not the latter are sometimes empty (but meaningful), enable us to talk about something we haven't encountered. Thus ordinary proper names seem to present the same difficulties definite descriptions presented for Russell. So he boldly supposes they must receive the same treatment and he concludes that ordinary proper names are just abbreviated definite descriptions. So 'Scott' is to be understood as meaning: 'the author of Waverley', and since descriptions *never* refer for Russell, neither do ordinary proper names. The descriptive theory of names suggests that names succeed in enabling us to talk about things only in the way that definite descriptions select objects (if any) that uniquely satisfy the descriptive condition. Russell can explain empty names and the Frege puzzle about informative identity statements: the names 'Hesperus' and 'Phosphorus' abbreviate different descriptions, such as 'the first star in the sky in the evening' and 'the last star in

the sky in the morning’.

4. *Searle’s Cluster Theory of Names*

According to Searle, Russell goes wrong in looking for a single description to be the one the name abbreviates. Also, we couldn’t make sense of saying, ‘Scott didn’t write *Waverley*’ if Russell was right for that would be a logical contradiction rather than a contingent falsehood. Also, Searle thinks that names *do* refer. So on Searle’s theory a name is associated with an indefinite number of descriptions of the object, not all of which must correctly apply to the object for the name to refer to it. The name refers to the object which has the properties, or most of the properties taken to uniquely identify it and associated with the name. The idea is this:

(S) ‘NN’ refers to x iff x is F \vee x is G \vee x is H...

The cluster theory allows us to say that names refer but the way a name gets to have that reference is settled by its bearer being the possessor of the properties commonly associated with it and associated with the name.

5. *Kripke’s Thesis of the Rigidity of Names*

For Kripke, there is a fundamental difference between the linguistic functioning of names and definite descriptions in the way they pick out and secure or maintain connection with an object. Kripke makes out this case to attack the descriptive theory of names (which he mistakenly calls the ‘Frege-Russell view’ of names). This is brought out by the different behaviour of names and definite descriptions in modal contexts (sentences contain modal operators, like ‘necessarily’, ‘possibly’, ‘might’, etc.) Consider the following sentences:

(1) Neil Armstrong might not have been the first man on the moon.

(2) The first man on the moon might not have been the first man on the moon.

Sentence (1) is unambiguously true. Sentence (2) is ambiguous between:

(3) There is a possible world in which the first man on the moon (in that world) is not the first man on the moon in that world

(4) The first man on the moon (in the actual world) is not the the first man on the moon in every possible world.

The first is false and contradictory while the second is true. So (1) and (2) cannot be treated in the same way. The Russellian descriptive theory of names is false.

What about the Searlian cluster theory. He doesn’t have to say that ‘Neil

Armstrong' is just associated with that one description. However, we can run through them all and apply this test. Plus, there is a difference between any description and name associated with it, which rules out the trick of making only the second reading of (2) possible by actualising the description:

(5) The first man on the moon in the actual world walked on the moon

(6) Neil Armstrong walked on the moon.

The latter is not known a priori while the former is a priori true.

What explains the difference between names and descriptions for Kripke is that the names are rigid designators while descriptions are non-rigid.

Rigidity: An expression is rigid iff it refers to the same object in every metaphysically possible world in which that object exists.

This thesis of the rigidity of ordinary proper names has far reaching consequences: We can substitute co-referring expressions inside the scope of modal operators:

(7) Necessarily, Hesperus is Hesperus

(8) Necessarily, Hesperus is Phosphorus

So there are empirically discoverable necessities. Identity statements involving rigid designators are necessarily true.

6. *Dummett on the Descriptive Theory of Names: scope versus rigidity*

Dummett has resisted Kripke's line suggesting that anything we explain with rigidity can also be explained with scope distinctions. Definite descriptions which always took wide scope would behave like names and therefore we can explain their behaviour this way without invoking an unexplained notion of rigidity - a metaphysically loaded notion. But Kripke counters:

(9) Aristotle was fond of dogs.

(10) The last great philosopher of antiquity was fond of dogs.

There are no modal operators in these sentences and yet we feel the truth conditions of (9) depend on Aristotle, even when we consider counterfactual cases. The latter do not counterfactually have to involve Aristotle. Dummett counters by questioning talk of counterfactuals and pointing out temporal operators give rise to scope distinctions too.

7. *Direct Reference Theory of Names*

According to direct reference theorists, notably David Kaplan, names refer

directly to their objects: they do not pick out their objects indirectly via some other device like a description. Only the object named gets into the proposition expressed by a sentence containing a referring expression. There may be devices used to get us to the referent but these are not part of the meaning of the name or the proposition expressed by sentences containing the name. It's as if the object was presented to us itself. This is essentially the Millian view of names returned. It denounces Fregean senses and any other intermediaries between a name and its referent. But it is faced still with the problem of informative identity statements, alleged substitution failures in belief reports, empty names, negative existentials, etc. There have been attempts to face these problems but most require the direct reference theorist to insist on something counter-intuitive and then explain away the apparent difficulty. So, informative identity statements say the same things as trivial statements, all appearances to the contrary.

Perhaps explanations of the appearance can be due to the causal pathways to the uses of those names diverging although originating with the same object: this is not part of the meaning of a name but a story about how reference is secured.

8. Causal Theory of Reference

It's unclear what this theory is. There is supposed to be an encounter (causal) with the object which then leads to using a name to dub that object. Uses are passed on from one speaker to another preserving the original causal link. This causal chain is said to preserve reference. Can it work? Kripke is careful not to call this a theory. The details are far from clear and as Kripke acknowledges the key thing about a historical chain is that speakers intend to use the word with the same reference as those from whom they acquired the name intend it to refer to. This is far from a purely causal story.

9. Evans Theory of Names

According to Evans causal connections are just too crude and do not get the cases right. Cf Madagascar. Jack. For Evans it is important to have an originating source but this must be a source of information the speaker associates with the name; there may be more than one source of information and so the reference is dependent on what the speaker takes to be the way of identifying the object named. The speaker must have some means of knowing which object he is thinking about. Evans regards names as Russellian in the sense of genuinely referential (like

lpns) and rigid but this does not rule out that there is a sense as well as a reference for the term, so he denies the Millian view of names.

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