



On Sense and Reference

A presentation by Ben and Casey



Introduction

- Frege's "On Sense and Reference" is refuting the idea that a proper noun's meaning is only the object it represents. Ex: Joan Hinde Stewart just means Joan Hinde Stewart, rather than meaning "the president of Hamilton College".
- Frege argues that we can separate the sense of an object from its reference.
- Frege's 3 Puzzles are his reasons why we need to be able to separate sense and reference:
 - Identity Statements
 - Failure of Presupposition
 - Opaque Contexts

Identity Statements

- How can two distinct names refer to the same thing?
- The two identity statements that Frege is concerned about are of the form $a = a$ and $a = b$.
- Ex: J.R.R. Tolkien is J.R.R. Tolkien
J.R.R. Tolkien is the author of Lord of the Rings
- The first example doesn't say anything interesting.
- In second example the two tokens have different sense, but the same reference.
- Frege's main goal in this paper is to be able to distinguish between these ideas of sense and reference.
- Each person has their own sense of different names and statements
 - If there was complete knowledge, there would not be a need for sense

Identity Statements (*Cont.*)

- “It is natural, now, to think of there being connected with a sign (name, combination of words, letter), besides that to which the sign refers, which may be called the reference of the sign, also what I should like to call the sense of the sign, wherein the mode of presentation is contained.” (37)
- “A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) *expresses* its sense, *stands for* or *designates* its reference. By means of a sign we express its sense and designate its reference.” (40)
- *Reference* is the object being referred to by a proper noun
- *Sense* is the “mode of presentation” of an object.

Failure of Presupposition

- How can we discuss objects that have no reference?
- A flaw in natural language is that there are terms that have no reference, known as empty reference.
- Example: “Odysseus was set ashore at Ithaca while sound asleep” (42)
- If words only mean the object they represent, then there is nothing that can be said about Odysseus.
- Frege argues that a name, like Odysseus, does not carry with it any reference.
- The issue arises that if a part of a statement has no meaning then the whole statement must be without meaning
- A proper noun like Odysseus can be discussed because there is a sense of Odysseus, and sense holds meaning, despite a lack of reference.

Opaque Contexts

- How can substituting one true statement for another change the truth value of the entire proposition?
- Ex: Ron Weasley believes Harry Potter goes to Hogwarts.
Ron Weasley believes the Clinton Cider Mill sells donuts
- “This shows why equal truth value cannot always be substituted for one another in such cases. The clause expresses more through its connexion with another than it does in isolation” (54).
- When substitution fails, like in our example, it is known as an opaque context
- In opaque contexts the references of phrases and words is not their normal reference, but rather their sense.