

Descriptions

Bertrand Russell

Types of Description

1. Indefinite “a so-and-so”

i.e. “I met a man”

2. Definite “the so-and-so”

1. Entails “a so-and-so” with the addendum that there is only one “so-and-so”

- These types differ in their implication of uniqueness

Approach to Meinong

- “I met a unicorn”
- Only the *concept* enters the proposition
- “unreality” does not exist because anything that is not real is nothing
 - Pg. 67 “‘A unicorn’ is an indefinite description, which describes nothing. It is not an indefinite description, which describes something unreal.”
- Reality is vital to logic
 - I.e. zoology

Definite Descriptions

- Refers to a particular object, which occurs in the world
- A name is a simple symbol, which occurs as a subject
- By itself a name has no meaning
- There are 2 types of names:
 - Proper Names- denote objects in reality
 - Real Proper Names- denote objects, which exist in our selves, our occurent ideas, or sense data

Definite Descriptions-Names

- I.e. Scott is Scott

Scott is Sir Walter

- How is Scott being used here?

Scott is the author of *Waverly*

– Pg. 70

– Names as they are used are often descriptions in disguise

Definite Descriptions-Names

- Direct use of names
 - Real proper names, which lack ambiguity and truth value
 - I.e. this, that, it
 - Statements such as “that exists” are redundant

Definite Descriptions

- A description is a complex symbol, which consists of several words that define the meaning of the description
 - Some names are descriptions in disguise
 - Pg. 69

Abbreviated Description

- I.e. Pg. 73- Homer
 - Simple, not complex symbol
 - Homer's existence can be brought into question
 - So Homer is not a name, but a description

Frege's Puzzle

- $a=b$
- $a=a$
- Both a and b:
 - are merely denotative (Mill)
 - are names w different senses (Frege)
 - Same reference and propositional truth value
 - are shorthand for longer descriptions (Russell)
- We do not assume that a and b are names
- a and b are disguised descriptions, so $a=b$ is informative

Frege's Puzzle

- Pg. 71 “When we substitute a description for a name, propositional functions, which are “always true” may become false if the description describes nothing.”

“Scott is the author of *Waverly*”

“the author of *Waverly* was Scotch”

- Not true if:
 - *Waverly* had never been written
 - Several people wrote *Waverly*
- 1. “x wrote *Waverly*” is not always false
At least one person wrote *Waverly*
- 2. “if x and y wrote *Waverly*, x and y are identical”
is always true
At most one person wrote *Waverly*
- 3. “if x wrote *Waverly*, x was Scotch” is always true
Whoever wrote *Waverly* was Scotch

Activity

- 1. Group 1:** Barack Obama is the president of the United States. The president of the United States is the first black president.
- 2. Group 2:** Clark Kent is Superman. Superman is Clark Kent in disguise.
- 3. Group 3:** Miley Cyrus is also Hannah Montana. Hannah Montana is a terrible singer.
- 4. Group 5:** Ben Affleck is the main character in “Gone Girl.” The main character in “Gone Girl” is Nick Dunne.
- 5. Group 6:** Michael Jackson is the singer of “Thriller.” The singer of “Thriller” is dead.