

The Language Revolution
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Class #9
Finishing Strawson
On to Donnellan

Business

- Midterm - complete survey by Monday
- Tuesday
 - ▶ Hunter on Kripke and the return of 'Fido'-Fido'
 - ▶ Also, a little late Wittgenstein to set it up
 - ▶ Some of that won't make much sense, yet.
 - ▶ Hint: when LW talks about rules, in our selection, he's talking about the descriptions we associate with a name, rules for using the name.
- Today:
 - ▶ Some review
 - ▶ Cameron on Donnellan

Reference

A Brief Review

- Locke emphasized our close connection to the meanings of the words we use.
 - Cartesian introspection
 - But we are stuck behind the veil of ideas (the Locke box)
- Mill claimed that we can just hook language directly on to an external world
 - Ignores Humean skepticism
 - The semantic value of a proper name is the object to which it refers.
 - 'Fido'-Fido, naive direct reference
- Frege shows that the naive direct reference theory runs into problems
 - The three puzzles
 - Mill ignores the Lockean problem rather than solving it
 - Frege's Solution: we refer to the world via our grasp of objective senses
 - Note the balance between the subjective and the objective
- Russell
 - Frege's universe is bloated.
 - Plus, we don't really know about objects.
 - We only really know our sense data.

Russell, Logical Form and Grammatical Form

- Natural language is full of ugly bloat, shorthand and sloppiness.
 - ▶ ‘Mark came down the road’ and ‘Nothing came down the road’.
 - ▶ ‘I’ll do it for Pippa’s sake’.
 - ▶ ‘Brett has a right to life’.
 - Compare to: ‘Brett has a nose’.
- Logical form is ontologically significant.
 - ▶ The way the world really is.
- For Russell, reference is direct, as Mill says, but only when we’re talking about real names, which are logically simple.
 - ▶ ‘This’ or ‘that’, maybe
- Ordinary so-called names are just abbreviated descriptions about loose collections (e.g. atoms).
- Frege’s puzzles are solved by using a logically perfect language (LPL).
 - ▶ Logical and ontological analysis.
 - ▶ In an LPL, all assertions are true or false.

Strawson Rejects Logical Analysis

- “Ordinary language has no logic” (344).
 - ▶ Later Wittgenstein
 - ▶ Ordinary language philosophy
 - ▶ A use theory of meaning
- Frege and Russell neglect the conventions and context of the use of a sentence when analyzing it.
 - ▶ time
 - ▶ place
 - ▶ situation
 - ▶ identity of speaker
 - ▶ subjects of immediate focus of interest
 - ▶ histories of speaker and listener
- Conventions for referring are more complicated than those for ascribing and asserting.
- The differences are best seen in light of Frege’s puzzle about empty reference.

The Problem of Empty Reference

KW: The present king of France is wise.

NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- Meinong supposed that all referring expressions must refer to existent objects.
 - ▶ There must be a present king of France, in some sense.
 - ▶ Russell and Strawson agree that Meinong is crazy.
- Frege argued that 'the king of France' has a sense despite its lack of reference.
 - ▶ KW and NKW are meaningful.
 - ▶ But they lack truth values.
- Russell claims that the forms of KW and NKW are not subject-predicate.
 - ▶ They are existential assertions containing three parts.
 - R1. There is a king of France;
 - R2. There is not more than one king of France; and
 - R3. There is nothing which is the king of France and which (is/is not) wise.

Strawson on Empty Reference

KW: The present king of France is wise.

NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- ▶ In order to assert KW and NKW truly, it would be necessary that there be a present king of France.
- ▶ But the sentence does not mean that there is a present king of France.
 - Russell just gets that wrong.
- ▶ Russell is right that ‘the king of France is wise’ and ‘the king of France is not wise’ are significant.
 - If someone used one of them to make a true assertion, then there would have to be a wise king of France presently.
- ▶ Russell is wrong that anyone now uttering either of them would make a true or false assertion and that part of such an assertion would be that there is no a unique king of France.

Presuppositionalism

- Our assertions sometimes make false presuppositions about the expressions which are part of them.
- Meaning applies only to uses of a sentence type.
- Sentences are true or false only on particular uses.
 - ▶ “We cannot talk *of the sentence* being true or false, but only of its being used to make a true or false assertion, or (if this is preferred) to express a true or false proposition. And equally obviously we cannot talk *of the sentence* being *about* a particular person, for the same sentence may be used at different times to talk about quite different particular persons, but only of a *use* of the sentence to talk about a particular person” (326).

Implying and Asserting

KW: The present king of France is wise.

NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- Someone using either sentence implies that there is a king of France.
 - ▶ Different from asserting
- When we say that there is no king of France, we aren't contradicting KW or NKW.
 - ▶ Not saying those sentences are false
 - ▶ Merely pointing out that a truth value is not possible.
- Russell thus confused referring and meaning.
- Even for logically proper names, Strawson argues, their meanings are not their referents.
 - ▶ If someone asks the meaning of 'this', I don't hand him the object (or worse, the sense datum).
 - ▶ Reference is achieved in use depending on the name, context, conventions, etc., not because the name is shorthand for some other expression which refers unerringly, unambiguously, and logically properly.
 - ▶ "There are no logically proper names and there are no descriptions (in [Russell's] sense)" (324).

Strawson on Meaning

- The meaning of a name or other singular term is neither its referent nor its referent under a particular mode of presentation (a description).
- Meanings of singular terms are instructions for determining whether particular uses of it refer.
- Similarly, meanings of sentences are not the propositions they express.
 - “To give the meaning of an expression (in the sense in which I am using the word) is to give *general directions* for its use to refer to or mention particular objects or persons; to give the meaning of a sentence is to give *general directions* for its use in making true or false assertions “(327).
- Meanings are conventions, or sets of instructions, governing the use of expressions or sentences in particular assertions.

Bivalence

KW: The present king of France is wise.

NKW: The present king of France is not wise.

- Strawson thinks that KW and NKW are neither true nor false.
 - Like Frege
- But Strawson doesn't defend the distinction between sense and reference.
- Strawson argues that uses of KW and NKW fail to say anything either true or false because of the failure of presupposition.
 - Nothing has been said.
 - The utterance is neither true nor false.
 - "Now suppose some one were in fact to say to you with a perfectly serious air: "The king of France is wise". Would you say, "That's untrue"? I think it's quite certain that you wouldn't. But suppose he went on to *ask* you whether you thought that what he had just said was true, or was false; whether you agreed or disagreed with what he had just said. I think you would be inclined, with some hesitation, to say that you didn't do either; that the question of whether his statement was true or false simply *didn't arise*, because there was no such person as the king of France" (330).
- A declarative sentence may be uttered while no assertion is made.

Bearers of Truth

- Frege ascribes truth or falsity to propositions (meanings of sentences).
 - Lost bivalence for propositions
- Russell ascribes truth or falsity to sentences in their true logical form.
- Strawson: the bearer of truth value need not be the primary bearer of meaning.
 - “So the question of whether a sentence of expression *is significant or not* has nothing whatever to do with the question of whether the sentence, *uttered on a particular occasion*, is, on that occasion, being used to make a true-or-false assertion or not, or of whether the expression is, on that occasion, being used to refer to, or mention, anything at all” (327-8).
 - Meaning is a function of a sentence or expression.
 - Referring and the bearing of truth values are a function of a particular use.
- Strawson thus ascribes truth or falsity to the utterance or assertion.
 - Failure of bivalence for sentences.
 - Strawson might argue for bivalence at the utterance level.
 - Or he could abandon the desire for bivalence as a logician’s bugaboo.

Presupposition and Frege's Other Puzzles

An interesting paper topic

Descriptivism: A Summary

- Descriptivism is the view that we refer to the world mediately.
 - ▶ Balancing Locke's focus on our ideas with Mill's naive direct reference semantics
- The debates among Frege, Russell, and Strawson concern the proper form of descriptivism.
 - ▶ Frege: sense descriptivism
 - ▶ Russell: abbreviational descriptivism
 - Logically proper form
 - ▶ Strawson: conventional descriptivism
 - Rules for use
 - “It is no good using a name for a particular unless one knows who or what is referred to by the use of the name. A name is worthless without a backing of descriptions which can be produced on demand to explain the application” (*Individuals*, 20)
- Dissenting views
 - ▶ Russell's weird logically proper names
 - ▶ Donnellan and the referential uses of definite descriptions.



Cameron and Donnellan