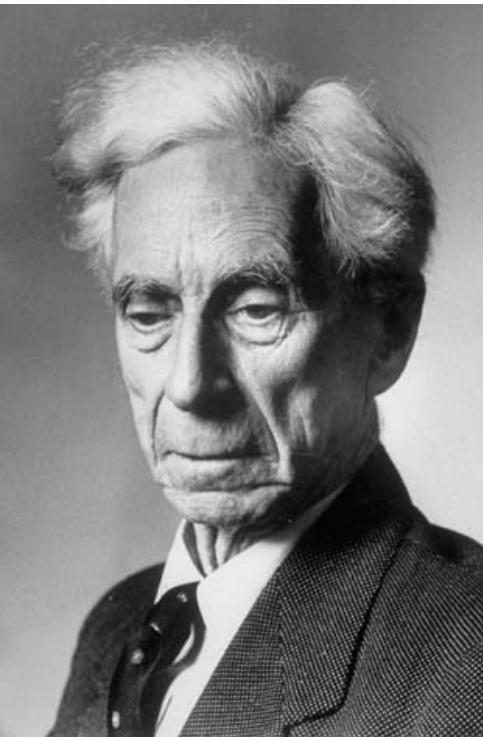


# Strawson “On Referring”

By: Jake McDougall and Siri Cosper

# Russell's Theory of Descriptions

- S: The King of France is wise.



- Russell believed that our languages' grammar, or every day use, was underpinned by these types of logical assertions and that all (most) language could be broken down to to true or false assertions about our world.
- Russell asserted that words such as “a” , “the”, “that”; words that denoted a definite (also called logical proper names) or indefinite description, implied specific logical propositions about the referent with true values. This was a way to avoid Frege's truth gaps, as in the case of empty reference having sense but not reference, sensibility but not verifiability.

# Russell's Resolution

**S: The King of France is wise.**

P1: There is a King of France that necessarily exists.

P2: The King of France refers to one and only one object or person.

P3: That single thing previously referred to, that also exists, is wise.

# In Response to Russell's Theory of Descriptions

**“Neither Aristotelian nor Russellian rules give the exact logic of any expression of ordinary language; for ordinary language has no exact logic.”**



- Strawson challenged the schism Russell had drawn between every day, or the grammatical, form of language and the logical form.
- Strawson denied that there was such a thing as a logically proper name.
- It must be noted Strawson is not offering his own comprehensive account of definite descriptions, he is only attacking the theories of Russell

# Strawson's Contentions, cont.

## S: The King of France is wise.

- If someone in the 16<sup>th</sup> century used this sentence it would have a specific referent and a truth value, currently it does not.
  - Those are different utterances, and since they refer to completely different things, they are different uses of the same expression (The King of France) within the same sentence.
- **Thus referring is not a feature of the specific expression but a function of it.**
  - Similarly the word I does not refer to one specific individual but is dependent upon the context of the use of the expression, from which it derives reference.

# Strawson's Contentions Continued

S: The King of France is wise.

- The word “the” in the above sentence does not, by necessity, require that there is a King of France, just that the speaker is implying there is one.
- There must be drawn a strong line between an expression (The King of France) being used to refer to a definite thing, and the completely separate and unrelated claim that *there is one of those things*, and only one of those things to which the expression refers.

# Strawson's Resolution

S: The King of France is wise.

**We must distinguish between:**

- 1) A sentence (or expression)
- 2) The use of a sentence (or expression)
- 3) The utterance of a sentence (or expression)

# The Problem of Cognitive content

S: Hesperus is the evening star.

Phosphorus is the morning star.

Both Hesperus and Phosphorus are Venus.

- **Frege:** Hesperus, Phosphorus and Venus have the same sense but differing modes of presentation; all refer to second planet in orbit around the sun
- **Russell:** There's no contradiction for the cognitive content; Hesperus because it has the definition of Phosphorus and Venus, doesn't matter how they're presented.
- **Strawson:** none of these contradict each other, I can say something about Phosphorus and about Hesperus; not making any existential claims about them so no conflicting claim



# Strawson on the Problem of Cognitive Content

- “Because Russell confused meaning with mentioning, he thought that if there were any expressions having a uniquely referring use, which were what they seemed (i.e. logical subjects) and not something else in disguise, their meaning must be the particular object which they were used to refer to. Hence the troublesome mythology of the logically proper name. **But if some one asks me the meaning of the expression “this” – once Russell’s favourite candidate for this status- I do not hand him the object I have just used the expression to refer to, adding at the same time that the meaning of the world changes every time it is used. Nor do I hand him all the objects it ever has been, or might be, used to refer to.** I explain and illustrate the conventions governing the use of the expression. This is giving the meaning of the expression. It is quite different from giving (in any sense of giving) the object to which it refers; for the expression itself does not refer to anything; though it can be used, on different occasions, to refer to innumerable things.” (328)

# Negative existential claims

S: There is no Santa Claus.

- **Frege:** Santa Claus has sense, some third realm Santa Claus, but it doesn't have any reference to the real world, so its irrelevant
- **Russell:** There is a Santa Claus/There exists one Santa Claus/ There is no Santa Claus
  - Any well formed grammatical sentence can have no truth gaps, but this does
- **Strawson:** This makes no logical claim that contradicts itself; presupposition of Santa, which doesn't exist. Not the sentence that is false, but the assertion.

# On the bearers of truth values

- **Frege:** in the use of propositions (abstract objects posited as the meanings of sentences) we find truth value
- **Russell:** in sentences in their true logical form we find truth value
- **Strawson:** it is not in the sentence or the proposition but in the use of the sentence where we find truth value