

Topics in Philosophy of Language: Reference (6AANA048)

1. Module Description

How do terms refer? And which terms do so? These questions are central to philosophy of language, since reference is typically conceived of as the relation that links our words to the world around us. If we manage to talk about the world, we do so by referring to it. Yet the reference relation plausibly obtains between a remarkably diverse class of terms—names, pronouns, indexicals, property terms—and things in the world, leading one to wonder whether there is really just one relation we have in view when we talk about ‘reference’. This course will examine the nature of linguistic reference and how it is established. More specifically, we will examine: (i) whether definite descriptions (i.e. ‘the’-phrases) refer, (ii) how names refer, and (iii) whether there is any sort of interesting correlation between these two types of (purportedly) linguistic reference. Throughout, we will engage with a broader methodological question: what, if any, empirical facts ought a theory of reference attempt to explain, and why those facts in particular?

2. Secondary Texts

- Michael Devitt and Richard Hanley (eds.), 2006. *The Blackwell Guide to the Philosophy of Language*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- William Lycan, 2008. *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, 2nd edn., London: Routledge.
- A.P. Martinich and David Sosa (eds.), 2012. *The Philosophy of Language*, 6th edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Alexander Miller, 2007. *Philosophy of Language*, 2nd edn., London: Routledge.
- N.B. I will also make available an as-yet-unpublished revision to the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy article on reference, co-written by myself and Marga Reimer.

3. Outline of Seminar Topics and Readings

N.B. This course will be taught entirely in the seminar style. Please come prepared to discuss the relevant texts.

N.B. This schedule is tentative and is likely to be adjusted to accommodate class visits by philosophers working in the relevant areas.

- Week 1: Descriptions I
 - Bertrand Russell, “On Denoting”
 - David Kaplan, “Reading ‘On Denoting’ at its Centenary,” §§1.1.1–1.1.3

- Week 2: Descriptions II
 - P. F. Strawson, “On Referring”
 - Bertrand Russell, “Mr. Strawson on Referring”
- Week 3: Descriptions III
 - Keith Donnellan, “Reference and Definite Descriptions”
 - Saul Kripke, “Speaker Reference and Semantic Reference”
- Week 4: Descriptions IV
 - Stephen Neale, *Descriptions*, Chapter 3
 - Michael Devitt, “Meanings and Psychology”
- Week 5: Descriptions V
 - Marga Reimer, “Incomplete Descriptions”
 - Ray Buchanan, “A Puzzle About Meaning and Communication”
- Week 6: Names I
 - Gottlob Frege, “On Sense and Reference”
 - Gottlob Frege, “The Thought”
- Week 7: Names II
 - Keith Donnellan, “Proper Names and Identifying Descriptions”
 - Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity*, Lectures 1 & 2
- Week 8: Names III
 - Gareth Evans, “The Causal Theory of Names”
 - Louis DeRossett, “Bad Dubbings and Reference Switch”
- Week 9: Names IV
 - Jessica Pepp, “The Perceptual Model of Reference”
 - Class visit by Jessica Pepp
- Week 10: Names V
 - Robin Jeshion, “Names not Predicates”
 - Delia Graff Fara, “‘Literal’ Uses of Proper Names”

3. Sample Essay Topics

- What is the main issue under dispute between Russell and Strawson? Which theory provides a more satisfactory account of that issue and why?
- What is Kripke's justification for rejecting the referential/attribution distinction? Does he make a good case for rejecting this distinction?
- What problems do incomplete definite descriptions present for Russell's theory of descriptions? What do you find to be the most compelling way of dealing with these?
- What might incomplete definite descriptions teach us about the method of semantic inquiry?
- What role should communicated content play in determining the meanings of expressions?
- Explain one of the arguments that Kripke or Donnellan offers against the descriptive theory of names.
- What is the Madagascar problem? What is Evans' solution to it? Alternatively, offer a more conservative Kripkean response to the problem.
- What is at stake in debates about the 'being called'-condition? How does this notion relate to the notion of reference?